
Hellifield – What's in a name?

Hellifield has had many variations to its spelling over the centuries. Medieval times recorded it as 'Helgeflet'. Generally accepted to mean 'The field of Helga' or 'Holy Field'. Note that 'Hel' was the Saxon Goddess of the underworld and 'Helga' or 'Helgi' is old Norse for the 'Farm of Helgi'. In 1790 the village is named as 'Hellifield Cockins' or 'Cochins'. Possibly indicating a connection to Cock-Fighting - popular at the time. (A Cockin or Cockpit was a pit where the fights took place). Or, less dramatic but still interesting is the connection to the coaching days of the Black Horse. 'Cochins' i.e. Coaching Inn. Whether Cockfighting was significant enough in Hellifield to identify the fact as part of its place name on maps is debatable. But on the Coach and Horses front, the site of the stables can still be identified at the Black Horse, forming what has become the restaurant and storage etc, in the direction of Aherne's.

On the 19th Century maps the area known as Dunbars and Gallaber, (Hellifield

Flashes locality) is named 'Marl Pit Pasture'. Marl was a mixture of clay and lime. Added to sand it was used to line ponds, or used for building or in agriculture as fertilizer. Used predominately up to the 18th century, its removal was labour intensive. Its uses were numerous and Marl Pits were common in many areas.

A tale relayed to me at school, was that 'Sneer Hill' (obsolete spelling of Sneer) which overlooks the Peel, and one of the highest points around Hellifield, was connected to events during the Civil War. Oliver Cromwell supposedly rode from the direction of Skipton and sneered at the opposition facing him down at the fortified Manor House below. Cromwell seemed to be everywhere during the Civil War! But he or his troops were in the area on the 14th August 1648 when his army reached Skipton from Otley and looked into the Ribble Valley debating the best course to confront an opposing Scottish army coming from the north.

The route he took was towards Preston where the Scots were confronted in battle. That's not to say he didn't send troops into our area to gloat or sneer down at us from the hill above Hellifield Peel. Anyway, it's a nice story!

Tom Merrall's original History of Hellifield gives some interesting explanations of local names, and a study of old Ordnance Survey Maps will certainly wet the appetite when it comes to the names of our local hills and fields.

Ken Leak,
2019



June