
Hellifield placenames re-visited

Someone recently asked me. “Haw Hill – why is it called that?” This put me in mind of an article I wrote for the June 2019 issue of the Herald, about some local placenames. Because I was asked the question about the Haw – which I’m sure most people know, is the large hill overlooking the village, I thought it might be nice to look at a few more common, or not so common placenames, which relate to the village and the local area.



Firstly the Haw. The hill itself is 217 metres high and overlooks the village. On the summit a panoramic view can be enjoyed. The Ribble Valley and the borders of the Forest of Bowland and its nearby hills can be seen in the distance. On a clear day the view is impressive, and on a clear night the starry skies stretch endlessly above, and on all sides.

There are some signs of earthworks on the hill, but information is scant as to whether any settlements from the Bronze Age period or later, may exist, or have existed. There is no record of any archaeological investigations, and no historical Barrows or Burial Mounds marked on local maps. The hill itself

would have made an ideal lookout point, albeit a bit of a climb for ancient (and modern) feet!

Over the years, bonfires have been lit at the summit, to mark Coronations, and past historical events.

The meaning of the name? Haw – In Old English there are some options: Haw - a lookout; How – a hill or mound; Haugh - lookout or prospect. From the Germanic/Saxon.

It would seem reasonable to assume that back in the mists of time the hill would have been the common sense place to overlook your lands and territory, and keep an eye out for

trouble! It would also seem logical that some evidence of earthworks in connection with any past habitation or defences might still be visible on the ground.

Thorndale Street and Thornview Road are named after the long hedgerow that faces the houses on Thornview Road. The houses were built as part of a council estate in the 1920's. However, it is evident that the existing road entering and leaving the village was notable for its hedgerow back in Victorian times.



Edwardian view of Thornview Road with the Church on the left. The hedges on the right are on the land where the Council Houses would be built in the 1920's.



The same view of Thornview Road today.

Other Street names – such as Brook Street, are a little more obvious in their

origins. Brook Street is located near Hellifield Beck. Brook being the more universal term for 'Beck', which is a northern English term for brook or stream.

Some of the outlying lanes, buildings, fields and hills, have interesting names. Some names have no known origin. Back Lane for instance. This lane runs from the main car park, under the railway bridge, and terminates at the Gisburn – Long Preston Road. The actual name on old maps is 'Boggart Lane'. A dictionary explanation of the word tells us that 'A Boggart is a creature in English Folklore – either a household spirit, or malevolent genius loci (geographically defined spirit) which inhabits fields, marshes, or other topographical features'. So we are talking ghosts and spooks etc here! Just don't go wandering down there at night!

Scotch Ones Laithe (Laithe – Old English for Barn) is an old barn located just over the railway bridge on the road to Otterburn on the left hand side of the road. The barn has been named as such on documents and maps for over 150 years. The name may derive from 'Scottions' a Scottish term or family name. The building may have connections with the Scottish raids which were predominant in Yorkshire in the 14th Century. The building however is not likely to date back to that period, and is more likely to be situated in an area where such raids by the Scotch took place. Coniston Moor, where a battle took place in 1341 between the Scottish raiders and a local force from Gargrave lies roughly a mile to the West.

Other interesting names given to local features include Skell Holmes Top,

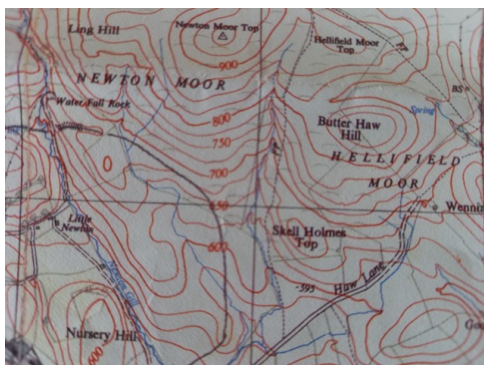


Scotch Ones Laithe. On the road to Otterburn and on the left after crossing the railway bridge outside Hellifield.

which is a distinctive outcrop or hill in the fields below Hellifield Moor.

Looking across from Haw Lane, the Hill graduates in length and seems to come to an abrupt end. It looks as though it could have been the site for an encampment or burial mound. There doesn't, however, seem to be any evidence of this but the name Holme is thought to derive from the Anglo-Saxon, holme (a settlement on a slightly raised islet or piece of land near a stream or at the confluence of two streams).

Skell Holmes Top does seem to fall into that category. The sides of this hill are graduated or layered and are in an area of 'Lynchetts' – mediaeval farming strips, where the land was ploughed, backed up and banked to form the next strip. It is likely that Skell Holmes Top was connected with this method of agriculture, which can be seen in many places in North Yorkshire and elsewhere. The name Skell (Old Norse – To tip or spill) may also be an old name relating to the beck (Hellifield Beck) which runs nearby on its



The location of Skell Holmes Top from Haw Lane

downward course from its source between Newton and Hellifield Moor.

As mentioned in a previous article on placenames around Hellifield, there are examples in the original 'A History of Hellifield' by Tom Merrall (1949). I'm sure in future articles that other placenames and their meanings will be covered.

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