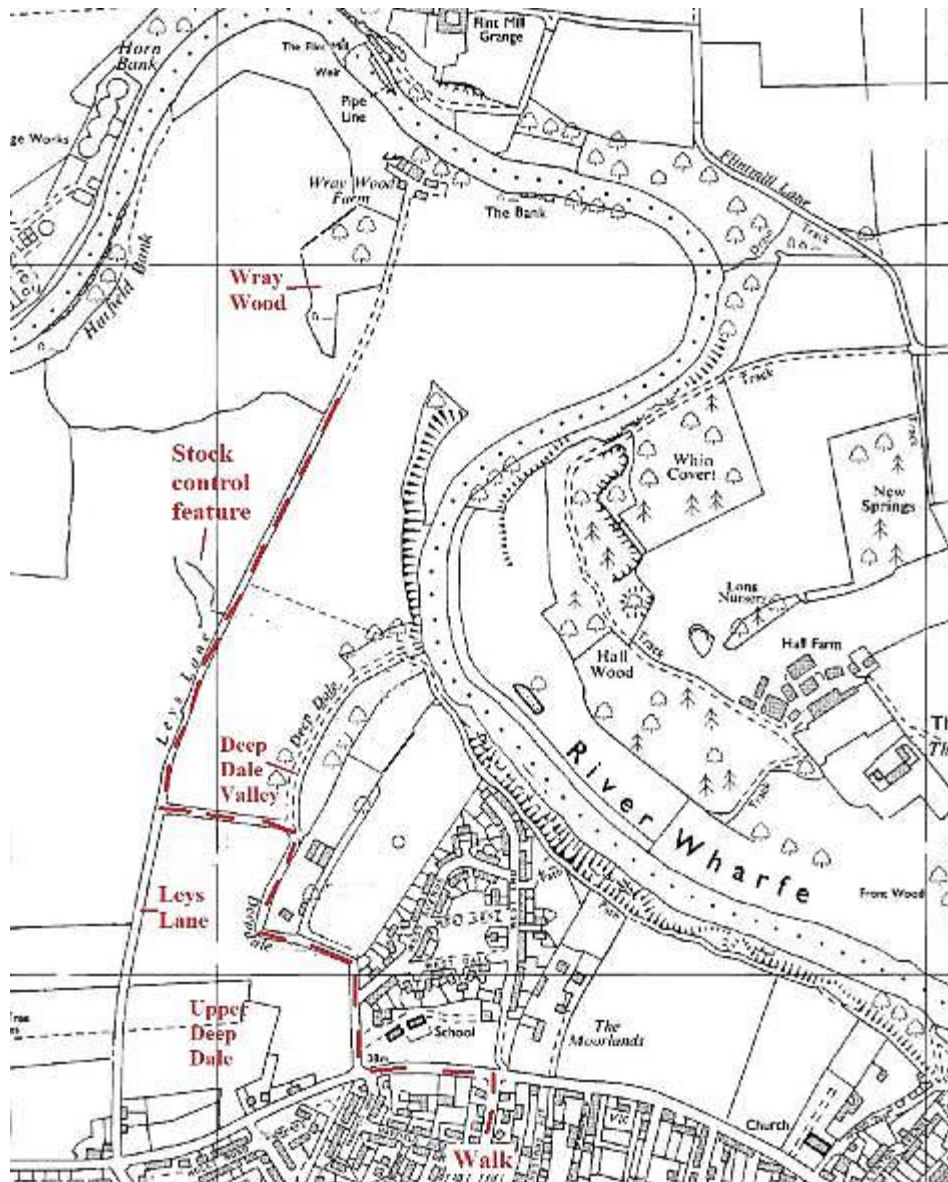


# TIME UNLOCKED

## No 1: Leys Lane Walk

April Lockdown, 2020. We've taken several short walks to Leys Lane and Deep Dale this month, a large area of fields and woodland on the edge of **Boston Spa**, where the houses end and the fields start, about 1 kilometre from home. A number of us in the Archaeology Group worked there for ten years or more and came to know it well. There's plenty to find there in terms of archaeology, ecology, history and geology. There's always something of interest each time we visit...



The area was the north east section of the medieval Township of Clifford before the spa village of Boston Spa was 'invented' in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the Middle Ages the area contained a large portion of Clifford's woodland, some ridge and furrow and sheep pasture.

The most striking thing as we turned down Deep Dale Lane was the large field of yellow rape flowers filling Upper Deep Dale, a dry glacial valley sloping gently down to the start of the narrow stream-bed that now drains it. Deep Dale itself is a deeper valley with steeply sloping wooded sides, cut by glacial meltwater thousands of years ago. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the field would have been divided into narrow east west strips and enclosed with stock-proof hedges. Some of the old field divisions can still be seen on this 1909 OS Map.



We passed two pairs of stone gateposts (marked in red on above map), made of local magnesian limestone, that used to open onto Deep Dale Lane and are now half hidden in the hedge. They are relics from that period. You can still see the pattern of horizontally-laid hedging preserved in the existing plants. It appears odd that there are only about 6 metres between the two former field entrances. However, it wasn't an entrance and exit arrangement. They were in adjacent corners of two separate fields, which makes sense as siting the gate near a field corner makes it easier to herd sheep towards it.



Field of rape in Upper Deep Dale.



Gatepost and remnants of laid stems in the old hedge

We followed the lane left up towards Leys Lane with the idea of coming back down into Deep Dale valley later. Half way up the incline we spotted a few flowers of yellow archangel



just beginning to open in the hedge bottom. We'd first seen one clump in 2002 when we were looking at old hedgerows with our archaeobotanist, Barry Wright. But now more had spread along a 20 metre stretch. Quite rare this far north, they are not only a lovely sight, but also an indicator of ancient woodland. Like other indicator plants they can survive in the semi-shade of hedgerows, which Barry sometimes refers to as 'linear woodland'. The nearest remaining pieces of woodland are back down the lane to Deep Dale valley and there's more at the end of Leys Lane, called Wray Wood, a remnant of ancient woodland lying inside a loop of the River Wharfe. The yellow archangel and the sprinkling of other indicator plants like ramsons, dog's mercury and bluebells sheltering in hedgerows on Leys Lane suggest that Wray Wood extended much further down the river loop towards the village and in the distant past Deep Dale Lane may have marked its southerly edge.



Yellow archangel in hedge.



Wray Wood far left. Map of the wood before C20th felling

As we turned into Leys Lane and continued northwards, we spotted small clumps of native bluebells hiding in the hedge bottoms. There was also a clump of the invasive non-native species at a spot where soil or rubble is occasionally dumped. As we strolled along just a casual count of the species in the hedgerow has reached the mid teens.

People often associate yellow with Spring. Many birds are in breeding plumage. Walking on, Julie spotted a pair of Yellowhammers on the hedge top ahead. The yellow head and neck of the male stood out in the sunshine as bright as the rape flowers we saw earlier. Dunnocks sang from the hedge. A pair of Long Tailed Tits were back and forth with nest material. A flock of Linnets flew across from an oak tree. Two Buzzards soared above calling to each other and the kestrel we'd seen recently flew over and perched on an ash tree. A peacock butterfly settled on a dandelion by the hedge and orange-tips zigzagged across the lane. Then the spring picture was complete when we saw our first swallow of the year.



Yellowhammer



Long Tailed Tit



Linnet

Leys Lane runs straight for 1 kilometre from Boston Spa High Street to the river, with large modern arable fields on each side. Half way along in the field to the west is an unusual funnel-shaped hedged enclosure, open at both ends. Its hedges are old with a mixture of species that suggests it has been there for hundreds of years. Luckily it has been preserved even though it is redundant in the large open field. Leys Lane leads not only from the Boston Spa High Street but also in a direct line from the village of Clifford, a mile or so further south, which had a medieval 'sheephouse'.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century some of the sheep pastures around Deep Dale were bequeathed to the monks of Kirkstall Abbey by local landowners. The enclosure may have been a stock control funnel. Temporary wicker hurdles could have been installed at either end to control the movement of sheep from the fields on each side of the lane in either direction. It can be seen from different angles as you walk along the lane, but its unusual shape stands out better from the air. To the north west are crop marks of an ancient trackway heading towards an area called Molewell in medieval times, where there are springs for watering stock, another of the parcels of Clifford land mentioned in those abbey bequests.



Laid hedge with stock control feature in the field behind, seen from Leys Lane and aerial photograph

We turned around before we reached Wray Wood. It was sold a few years ago and is now surrounded by a high fence, through which you can still see a carpet of bluebells. We headed back the way we came and down to the start of Deep Dale valley, a good walk for another day.

On the way back the recently drilled crops in the fields stood only inches above the shallow soil, which had been baked hard by the hottest April weather for some time. It seemed like a shell hiding the layers of prehistory we found lying below it, etched into the 250 million year old magnesian limestone bedrock.

#### **Leys Lane Bird List for April 2020**

Yellowhammer, Skylark, Linnet, Common Whitethroat, Blue Tit, Dunnock, Long Tailed Tit, Buzzard, Red Kite, Blackbird, Carrion Crow, Goldfinch, Woodpigeon, Green Woodpecker, Curlew, Black-headed Gull, Oystercatcher, Swallow.

Malcolm Barnes, April 2020.