

Peaky Wallers - Walling In the Midst of History

For the last few monthly walling sessions we have been working on the North Lees Estate near Hathersage and below Stanage Edge.

We have completed a number of wall repairs around North Lees Hall, best known for its association with Charlotte Bronte (it became immortalised as 'Thornfield Hall' in *Jane Eyre*). The Eyre family were actually only resident in the area for two generations, but their name has become the principal one associated with the hall.



We have not only repaired walls bordering the popular footpath which passes the hall, but also stock retaining walls on the North Lees Hall Farm, which is tenanted.

In doing so, we have been walling in an area which has been settled for centuries. One of our members picked up a large stone to use as a 'Through Stone' - a stone that is laid through to bind both sides of the wall - and realised it had been 'worked'. It showed evidence of being shaped for a particular purpose, and not for use in a wall.

This proved to be a stone from a Romano - British Settlement which was extremely close to the wall we were repairing. (below). Of course, the original dry stone wallers would have just seen these stones as useful in the wall, not thinking of any historical significance.



The worked stone had a depression that could have been used for bread making. It was strangely affecting handling stone which had been worked so long ago.



The site comprises a series of 21 small sub-rectangular platforms and terraces cut into a stony slope. These are probably a combination of house stances and yards. The site is covered with bracken (above), so the layout not very obvious.

A small excavation was made in 1968, with finds including pottery sherds. Further north-west on another of the platforms, a beehive quern and a flat quern were found in 1981 and are in the Buxton Museum.



During our lunch break in the February session, **Tom Lewis** (Engagement Ranger) who works with us took us to the above site which looks pretty unprepossessing. It is, however, a white coal pit. (above)

White coal is a form of fuel produced by drying chopped wood over a fire. It differs from charcoal which is carbonised wood. White coal was used in England to melt lead ore from the mid-sixteenth to the late seventeenth centuries.

The picture shows a circular depression lined with gritstone. The wood would have been stacked in this depression for drying.

In the February session we were working on a wall repair just above and in sight of the remains of Holy Trinity Chapel. The ruin comprises a rectangular building with a door central to the west end wall. It is hard to date but was in ruins by 1830.

The most likely date for the chapel is in the period between 1580 and 1591 when North Lees was occupied by Robert Fenton, a well-known catholic supporter who was imprisoned on more than one occasion for his anti-Protestant stance.



Holy Trinity Chapel

Close to the white coal pit is **Green House Paper Mill**, which features on many local walks (our Friday walkers have stopped for a refreshment break on several occasions).

The remains are of an old paper mill which was worked in the 1840s by Charles Ibbotson to make paper (presumably to wrap the pins manufactured in Hathersage). In 1857 it was occupied by Charles Marsden "manufacturer of coarse brown paper". Production ceased before the end of the century.



We finished our wall repair (above) and look forward to our March meeting. Thanks to Tom Lewis for showing us these sites and providing much of the information in this article.

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