



# Between the Lines

Land of Oak & Iron Mapping Project Newsletter

January 2019

This edition of Between the Lines contains a report on our January volunteer meetings, a List of Principal data sources and an article entitled "Drawing Lines"; explaining the origins of township boundaries and their importance through history.

## Volunteer meetings January 2019

*Space reserved for January meeting reports.*

*Potential insert visit to Beamish Resource Centre if organised in time*

online: <http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/vch/durham.shtml>

Vol 1 (1905): Early Man, Anglo-Saxon Remains, St Cuthbert's Shrine, Boldon Book, Ancient Earthworks, History of Schools

Vol 2 (1907): Religious Houses, Political History, Social and Economic History, Industries, Agriculture, Forestry, Sport .

No VCH was compiled for Northumberland. However, John Hodgson compiled a History of Northumberland in 3 volumes (1820-1840) and John Hodgson Hinde began the compilation of a County History by parish in 1858, completed in 1940. The volumes are available online at: <http://www.medievalgenealogy.org.uk/och/northumberland.shtml>. The relevant local volume is to be found [here](#) and is downloadable. It covers the area between Derwent and Tyne:

Historic Environment Record. Held by Durham County Council and partially accessible through *Keys to the Past*: <http://www.keystothepast.info/>. A guide to the Council's records can be found [here](#):

Ancient woodland. The Ancient Woodland Inventory is maintained by English Nature. It is by no means complete. Those woods designated as 'Ancient' in the LOI area (presumed to have been present before 1600 and over 2ha in size) are mapped on *Magic*: <http://magic.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>

Boldon book: the 1183 register of the Bishop of Durham and the renders, rents and services due to him. Parts of our area are covered. Available in print form and there is a copy for the group to view.

## List of principal data sources:

Greenwood County maps(1820s)

Ordnance Survey [First Series 1:25000](#) maps and Ordnance Survey [1<sup>st</sup> Edition 6" maps](#) (c.1850s) Online at National Library of Scotland.

Victoria County History (William Page) Detailed Ward volumes have never been compiled or published for County Durham. They can be found

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## Drawing lines

Why do we see lines drawn on maps when they have no meaning on the ground? If we see a road or fence line on a map we expect to be able to find it in real life; but parish and township boundaries exist only in the minds of planners, councils and governments. What are they for, and how old are they?

Way back in the Bronze Age (4,500 years ago to about 3,000 years ago) farmers and herders began to divide up the landscape: this is mine, that's yours! How do we know this? In the hills where their dykes and burial mounds still survive, you can see that these monuments were being used to confirm – or assert – rights to parcels of land; and quite a few of these markers are still followed by parish or township boundaries. By the time the Romans arrived in AD43 the landscape of Britain was already parcelled up. They had no maps like ours, so the edges of territories or large farming estates were described as routes through the land, remembered and passed on through rituals like the 'beating of the bounds'. The earliest written descriptions of them survive from the late 7<sup>th</sup> century, when they already follow a pattern that would be familiar to a squire or vicar of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Often, such boundaries lie along small streams and rivers – easy to remember, more or less permanent and unarguable. Sometimes old trees were used as markers (though not the trees that you might expect – hawthorn is the most frequently mentioned). What you don't find in the descriptions is settlements: that's because they tend to occur in the middle of these territories.

After the Roman period tax was collected in kind, since there were no coins circulating. A landlord would collect 'renders' – such as ale, honey, eggs, cattle, sheep and services to a central place, and those ancient boundaries kept on working as the bounds of lands – known as vills or townships – from which the lord could collect his render. These, roughly speaking, became church parishes and later manors. The old church tithes are a distant memory of renders first demanded by lords more than a thousand years ago. Later, they acted as handy lines to draw on maps to divide groups of electors; so they are often also constituency – and sometimes county – boundaries.

In the North-east of England, we have an almost unique survival of a system in which townships were grouped together to form 'shires' – like Hexhamshire or Bedlingtonshire. With some very careful detective work we can use some of the surviving boundaries – messed about as they were by 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century government reforms – to reconstruct those very ancient shires – and one of these may have comprised the lands between Tyne and Wear, mentioned in documents during the Viking Age (c.800-950). In the south of England townships became the familiar parishes; up here they are smaller, and parishes tend to consist of small groups of them collected together for

ecclesiastical purposes.

When we look at those faint lines of dots on the First Series maps, we are looking at lines drawn onto the landscape that may be two or more thousand year-old statements of ownership and belonging: patient witnesses to many generations of conflict and co-operation.

Talk of townships brings us to that other great enigma of the North-east landscape: Hadrian's wall. It was originally conceived and built in the first decades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by a Big Man (Emperor Hadrian) who wanted to BUILD A BIG WALL (sound familiar?). Perhaps surprisingly, the wall did get built, from Wallsend (clue in the name) all the way across to the Solway Firth. It survived, on and off, and partially remodelled, until the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when the last pay wagon from Rome didn't arrive... ever. The wall was never intended as a frontier (in the sense that the River Rhine WAS the frontier of the Empire). It was a core line of operations in a militarised zone that ran from York all the way up to the Clyde-Forth isthmus, where another Emperor (Antoninus) had a short lived experiment with a turf wall. Hadrian's wall protected an east-west military road – the Stanegate – that ran from Tyne to Solway; and it handily brought imperial control of the lead mines of the north Pennines. It acted as a northern base for troops patrolling and controlling 'friendly' tribes to the north; and it also made a very handy place to collect tax from anyone who wanted to pass from one side to the other (the natives: lots of them). It was always more of a gate than a barrier.

When the army stopped being paid, they had to find ways, and fast, of supporting themselves. They probably already found many of their needs met by local farmers, traders and craftspeople – originally paid for in cash; eventually these zones from which they could render goods and services in return for military protection gradually became formalised as townships, so that now, when we see the township boundaries along the Wall, we find that the old Roman forts are smack in the middle of them – when you might have expected the Wall itself to be the boundary.

Our landscape is a deceptive beast – and all the more fascinating because of it.

### Coming up in February:

Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2019, [The Lodge](#), Laburnum Avenue, Blackhill, Consett, DH8 5TA

Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2019, [The Winlaton Centre](#), North Street NE21 6BY (in Winlaton village, not Winlaton Mill)

**Please register to attend using the links above.**



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

