

Marchers Archaeology

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The Murrows: Newsletter 1

Test pit transect 11 August 2013

The Murrows (or Morowes and other historic spellings) was a tenement or leased smallholding in the grounds of what is today Kiln Hill Farm. It appears on the 1603 William Howard map of the Barony of Gilsland and also on Donald's map published around 1774. Entries in Lanercost parish records show baptisms and funerals of people from the Murrows throughout the second half of the 18th century but the last is in 1804. It doesn't feature in the 1841 census.

The site indicated on the 1603 map is at or near NY62156665. It was decided to dig a 50m transect across the area, which has some interesting lumps, with 1m square test pits at 5m intervals. The ground proved very stony and despite sterling efforts we were only able to excavate five, starting at the western end. The western pits showed no sign of a building, but thanks to Ann Freer's inspired overlay of the 1603 map onto Google Earth it seemed that, if the old map was accurate, we should be digging the other end.

And so it proved, pits nos. 9 & 10 producing large quantities of lime mortar and internal wall plaster, some of which is painted. There was, in fact, a 30cm layer of lime fragments immediately below the turf. Pieces of 19th century pottery were also found down to 30cm in these pits, suggesting that occupation may have continued into this period. The plaster also appears fairly modern, providing further evidence that the house may have been occupied into the 19th century. Four sheep metapodial bones, plus other bones, were found in the surface layers of pit 10. No walls have yet been traced and further excavation will hopefully reveal the building plan(s).

Acknowledgements are due to all who expended so much effort on the stony soil, despite busy schedules, but especially to the Freer family who turned out in force and provided the key overlay. Also to Roger Ashman who loaned the strimmer used to clear the long grass, Jenny Pandrich for the loan of a spade and to Michael Baxter who gave permission for the excavation.



Painted wall plaster from pit 9.



Edge of plaster fragment, showing it was applied in two layers of different composition.



Google Earth image of the transect. The red line shows the 50m transect on a bearing of 108 degrees from the slight bend in the fence. The numbers show positions of excavated test pits. In each the soil was found to be very stony, with many angular stones (e.g. not rounded) with a reddish subsoil at 30-35cm.

Trench 2: Drainage trench with fragments of earthenware pipe.

Trench 3: Traces of lime mortar in the SW corner.

Trench 4: Large stones at 30cm depth with a suggestion of an alignment.

Trench 9: Abundant lime mortar and wall plaster.

Trench 10: Abundant lime mortar and plaster down to 35cm. C19 pottery at 35cm., 4 sheep metapodial bones just below the surface.