



1 DAWN TO DOMESDAY

... Stainforth may have remained part of Lancashire ...

Discoveries made locally can trace the history of the area in which we live to a time before there was even human life. Remains have been found of strange animals, possibly belonging to the period before the Ice Age, later remains from the Ice Age and finally of more familiar animals (bear, deer, wolf and small mammals) which would have inhabited the area when the first men made their way northward in the summer months to hunt and fish, between 11,000 and 12,000 years ago. These were the hunter-gatherers of the Palaeolithic age and they used bone and flint to make their hunting weapons. The animal remains and relics of the huntsmen's tools from this period have all been found in caves in and around the North Craven area, most famously at Victoria Cave near Langcliffe.

The first settlers

There is some evidence to suggest that people from the Mesolithic age inhabited the Dales from around 8000BC. A warming of the climate heralded the coming of the new Stone Age and relics, from flint arrows, pottery and polished stone axes to the massive burial mound at the foot of Pen-y-ghent known as Giant's Grave, have left us evidence of Neolithic people in this area. They were the first Dales' farmers, carrying out much of the early forest clearance, and most of the stone circles and standing stones in the area date from this period.

The Bronze Age followed, introduced by invaders coming from Europe by way of the East Yorkshire coast. In the Dales, the influence of this period has been dated to between 3000 and 700BC, when the Iron Age began with the arrival of the Celtic people, largely from Eastern Europe. These were fierce warriors who brought with them the power of iron in weapons and tools. The Celts who settled in the North of England were known as the Brigantes. The westernmost boundary of their territory is believed to have been the Three Peaks district and the best-known Celtic name we have left today in the area is that of Pen-y-ghent, which can be translated as Hill of the Border, although it is also translated as Hill of Winds. The Celtic Wall between Knight Stainforth and Feizor is further evidence of settlement. No one is sure of the purpose or function of this wall: it may be a burial mound or a shelter built by Saxon shepherds for their flocks. Alternatively, it could be of more modern origin; so, it cannot be assumed to be a relic of the Brigantes.

Invaders

By the dawning of the first millennium, a settled way of native life had existed for a couple of centuries. The conquest of England by the Romans had little impact on this far-flung corner of the new Empire. In the middle of the 1st century, a war broke out between the native queen, Cartimandua, and her husband, Venutius, which divided the Brigantes. Venutius made his rebel base on Ingleborough.

Three more centuries of Roman occupation left Brigantia virtually annexed by a system of military roads built to isolate the troublesome natives. Locally, there is evidence of a small camp at the foot of Smearsett (between the footpath and the minor road between Knight Stainforth and Helwith Bridge), which was once considered to have Roman origins. There may have been a wooden bridge built to span the Ribble just above Stainforth Force, but like so much from this period it has not been convincingly attributed to Roman builders.

As the Roman Empire receded, so did the Brigantian people although the area remained under Celtic Lordships until around 600AD, when the Angles arrived and the remaining Celts fled to either Scotland or Wales. These latest invaders had come from the Baltic to the eastern shores of Britain and their settlers came into this area, either fleeing the continuing battles that were waged for years in the Yorkshire lowlands, between Northumbria and Mercia, or, as the Anglian population was dispersed, through growth. They came to the area via the rivers and old Roman roads, though they never built their settlements too near, preferring to clear new areas of the very dense woodlands, a little above the swampy areas around rivers' edges. This work was very labour intensive and so they worked in groups (usually family) under the leadership of an elder. They built dwellings together around a central area of common land that, many centuries later, would be tidied up to become that familiar focal point, the village green. In the 7th and 8th centuries there was large-scale settlement of the Craven area by such groups.

Farming

The Angles brought to the area a tradition of arable farming using methods which were employed throughout the medieval period, traces of which can still be seen in today's landscape in the outline of lynchets found in the limestone valleys. Whether these terraces were created to make ploughing possible, or occurred as a result of ploughing the slopes, is currently a matter for contention amongst historians, but two areas of these terraces (lynchets) can be seen around the present day village of Stainforth—one in the steep field on the left as the main road to Halton Gill exits the village, the other in the field to the left just outside the village, travelling south on the main road to Settle and traversed by the footpath to Langcliffe. Steeper slopes were cleared, then used for grazing sheep and cattle, thus preventing the regeneration of trees.

Local settlers

These settlements grew throughout the 9th and 10th centuries whilst the rest of the country was in turmoil. Waves of invaders entered the south and east and feudal wars were fought between Angles, Saxons, Danes and Vikings: King Alfred fought for and held Wessex: Christianity, which had been introduced during Roman times, had risen, been destroyed by heathen warriors, then had risen to great power again. But during all this time, the geographical isolation of North Craven, a feature which was to remain unchanged until the 18th century, had enabled these settlements to become established and protected them from the worst of the conflicts, although the Danes had infiltrated the area and made their settlements between those of the Angles.

And finally, Norsemen came to the area, not from the East, where the Viking invaders were fighting their way up the Humber, but from the Lake District and from western shores, arriving possibly via the Isle of Man, fleeing from conflicts in Ireland around 980 where the King, Brian Boru, was evicting all Norse settlers. These men were shepherds, used to living on rough mountainous terrain, war-weary and looking to settle on familiar land. The Anglo-Saxons had established settlements in the lowlands, so it was most likely the Norsemen would have made for the higher limestone country, siting their farmsteads in isolated upper dale regions in single family units. They were possibly the first true Dales folk!

Stainforde

And so, the first millennium drew to a close against a patchwork of races, languages, cultures and beliefs of which much is known but little is understood. Somewhere throughout these times a village called Stainforde was established, but its exact boundaries are uncertain. Ancient tongues blur even the origins of the name. That it was populated by Anglo-Saxons cannot be disputed because of the presence of the lynchets, but the word Stain(stony)forde could have been derived either from the Old English they would have spoken, or from Old Norse which neighbours up the hill at Wynscale (definitely an Old Norse word) would have spoken.

The village would have been populated by a few family groups, fair-haired and fair-skinned, speaking a language we would not have understood, having early Christian beliefs, wearing simple hand-woven woollen tunics, bound leggings and cloaks for protection against a climate much colder and wetter than it is today. Their homes would have been built of timber and wattle and they would probably have been subjects of an overlord in these feudal times.

At this time, Ethelred ruled England and the country was falling into ruin. The unstable king was organising the devastation of Cumbria and the Isle of Man, whilst Northumbria relapsed into civil war, and the Welsh and Scottish frontiers began to crumble. Yet Stainforde grew throughout the

reigns of Canute, Edward and Harold, surviving the massive movement of peasant people taken from the uplands and Dales of Yorkshire to populate the Vale of York when the battle at Stamford Bridge and subsequent bloodbaths led to genocide in the lowlands during the 1060s—a period known as the Harrying of the North.

We know the village survived because when the Domesday Book was completed in 1086, it included two entries; one showing that Ulf in Long Preston had three carucates taxable at Stainforde and the other that Fech (or Feig) in Giggleswick also had three carucates taxable at Stranforde. The term 'carucate' derives from the word for a plough, 'caruca', and relates to the unit of land cultivated by one plough. Although by no means definitive, this would be around 100 acres, but on hilly land would probably be more. This meant that the two settlements, and it can be assumed the two are Knight Stainforth and Great Stainforth, were larger in size than the likes of Hellifield, Horton and Wigglesworth, smaller than Giggleswick and Litton, and equal in size to Settle and Langcliffe. No more information is given, unlike the records for areas in the south of England, because the sparse population of this area and distances involved resulted in a less detailed survey by the compilers; spellings also were often corrupted in their haste.

No more of Ulf, but it has been suggested that the cross situated on the roadside at Dale Head—marking the boundary later between the lands of Fountains Abbey and Sawley—may have borne his name.



*Ulfkil's Cross is recorded in the Fountains Abbey Chartulary in 1206 as a parish boundary marker. The cross is lost but the base survives
- photo courtesy David S Johnson*

The lands of Craven

Fech and his successors, however, had a role to play in the division of lands following the Norman invasion, instigated by their Duke, William. All the Craven lands became the property of the third son of Roger of Montgomery, an adviser to the Conqueror, also called Roger, who became Roger of Poitou on his marriage, in 1091, to the heiress of the Count of La Marche in Poitou, France. He was granted lands around Lancaster and Bowland, and the title, Earl of Lancaster, but he wanted to consolidate his lands around the main castle rather than having them scattered. He had neither liking for the north of England nor could attract Norman underlings to maintain his lands, and as he allowed it to be maintained by Anglo-Saxon lords, much of the ancient parish of Giggleswick, which included the township of Stainforth, effectively remained under the control of the de Giggleswick family, descendants of Fech.

When the fickle knight switched his support to Robert against Henry I in 1102, he was banished and his Craven lands were transferred to the heirs of William de Percy, who had accompanied the Conqueror on his return to England on 1067, and who subsequently died in the Crusades in 1096. His grandson, also William, was the founder of Sawley Abbey in the mid-12th century.

It is, perhaps, a sobering reflection that had it not been for Roger of Poitou's preference for a less harsh environment, Craven and therefore Stainforth may have remained part of Lancashire!