

HISTORY NOTES FOR SILSDEN STROLL 3

BACKGROUND - This walk is through pastoral fields and along quiet lanes on the higher slopes of Silsden Moor, which can be quite inhospitable in winter. It is an open landscape, mainly farmland, intersected by a maze of old twisting roads and footpaths. The name "moor" is today a misnomer. In the mediaeval period, this area was, indeed, open, unimproved moorland used for communal grazing and peat extraction. At that time the farmsteads were located together in the village and men walked out to work the land. However, encroachment onto the moorland grew apace as the Middle Ages came to an end and by 1620 most of the present day farmsteads had been carved out of the moor and their fields enclosed. With increasing prosperity, many of the farm buildings were rebuilt and enlarged in the 18th and 19th centuries. Quite a number of them today have listed status, because of their historic origins and retained architectural features.

By the time of the enclosure acts of the 18th century, which were designed to enclose remaining common land in parishes across the country, most of the common land of Silsden had already been enclosed. Silsden's public enclosure act of 1773 was concerned with only fragments of poor grazing located on the edges of the township. So you are walking in farmland that has been farmed for hundreds of years.

The tithe survey of 1845, gives a snapshot of what the fields were used for in the middle of the nineteenth century. Close inspection of the entries for the farms of Silsden Moor shows that nearly all fields were classed as either pasture or meadow. All the farms, however, had at least one arable field, which would have been used to grow vegetables.

There are several interesting farm names including:

SNOW HILL – this evocative farm name conjures up wintry scenes in keeping with its elevated position. However, the name probably dates back to 1650 when George Snow enclosed the open waste there to create a farm.

SCHOOLMASTER PLACE – In the 19th century this was, for a time, the home of John Wade, who was the much respected master of the first Church School in Silsden, known as the National School. He also lived at **EDGE** farm, which is a little higher up the hillside and is, indeed, on the edge of the moor.

WOOFA BANK - describes the steep, natural southern slope of Counter Hill, which has several prehistoric earthworks.

The name Counter or 'Contre' refers to the hill above Woofa Bank. 'Contre' is Latin for 'boundary'. Today the Silsden/Addingham boundary passes over the hill.

The name 'Woofa' is earlier in date, possibly Scandinavian in origin, although it might be pre-Roman. The earthworks on Counter Hill could be Iron Age in date, but need further investigation. There are some associated Bronze Age Ring Barrows on the Addingham side of the hill. The West Yorkshire Archaeological Survey of 1981 classifies the linear earthworks on Counter Hill as yet to be dated.