



YORKSHIRE DALES
National Park Authority

DALES COUNTRYSIDE MUSEUM GALLERY DISPLAYS TEXT

TIME TUNNEL

FIRST LIFE

Tropical Dales. Before the last Ice-Age, there must have been much warmer periods in the Dales. The bones of animals like hyaena and rhinoceros, today only found in very hot countries, have been found in several caves in the Dales.

THE BIG THAW

Following the last Ice-Age (13,000 years ago) a tundra landscape similar to modern arctic regions developed. About 10,000 years ago the weather became warmer and grassland, heath and woodland developed. The Dales were inhabited by a variety of wild animals. The picture on the graphic panel shows Victoria Cave near Settle, as it may have appeared after the end of the last Ice-Age. The case here holds the horn of an Aurochs, a type of wild cattle which was probably hunted to extinction in Britain during the Bronze Age. This was found at Woodhall in Wensleydale.

People first came to the Dales around 10,000 years ago. The first groups of people were wandering (nomadic) hunters. These people simply passed through the area and did not establish permanent settlements.

NEWCOMERS

Stone Age - Palaeolithic c.10,000 - c.8000 BC
Mesolithic c.8000 - 5000 BC
Neolithic c.5000 -2500 BC
Bronze Age - c.2500 - 600 BC
Iron Age - 600 BC

Encouraged by an improving climate, the first true settlers arrived in the Dales around 5000 BC. The Dales were covered with trees, which sheltered a wide variety of animals. The landscape was dotted with fish filled lakes, left behind when the ice began to melt and people began clearing trees to farm. Over time other immigrants arrived and a society of farmers ruled by a warrior class, developed.

The pictures on the graphics show Maiden Castle, Swaledale and Castle Dykes Henge, Wensleydale. Despite its chief function, Maiden Castle may not have been military as it occupies a poor defensive position. The remains of 2 circular huts can be traced inside the structure. Castle Dykes Henge was built during the late Stone Age period. It may have been a religious site, but its precise purpose is unknown.

The first arrivals used stone and flint for tools and weapons. Around 2500 BC metal came into use, first bronze, then around 600 BC, iron. Human population increased dramatically and trees became increasingly isolated features in a landscape of small settlements surrounded by fields.

In the case you can see a late Bronze Age spearhead found at Lake Semerwater, Wensleydale, a Bronze Age arrowhead and axehead from Hawes, a late palaeolithic or early mesolithic blade, the only example so far found in Wensleydale, 2 neolithic polished stone axes, a Bronze Age cup found at Crayke Cliff Farm near Hawes and 2 Neolithic polished stone axes found at Preston, Wensleydale.

BRIGANTES

Around 100 BC, Celtic invaders came from Europe. They established themselves as rulers of the existing population over a large area of northern England. They created a tribal grouping known as the Brigantes and are the first Dales people for whom there is a written record.

The Brigantes society developed as the weather was becoming wetter and colder. Woodland had already died out on the high ground to be replaced by peat and heather moorland. People lived mainly in small farms and settlements on the slopes of the hills. By now little, if any land was left in its natural state.

An artist's impression shows an iron age settlement of around 50 AD. Ingleborough summit (2373' / 723m) has the remains of the highest Iron-Age hill-fort in Britain. Hut circles of the settlement are visible on the surface.

ROMANS

The Romans defeated the Brigantes in 74 AD. They built a network of roads and forts, controlling the Dales for 300 years. This area seems to have been relatively prosperous, with a variety of crops and animals being farmed. Malham is estimated to have been supporting double its modern population! Roman rule collapsed in the early 400's.

Roman items have been found in many areas of the Dales including Wensleydale, Swaledale, Teesdale and Wharfedale. Here you can see a hoard of Roman coins found in Grinton in Swaledale. Probably buried c.170 AD, they are around one third of a Roman soldier's annual pay and were probably part of someone's savings, buried for safekeeping and never collected. The reason for non-collection may be the death of the owner or disturbance caused by an uprising.

The two Roman milestones are from the road through Stainmore Gap, which crosses the Pennines above Swaledale and was an important part of the road network by which the Romans controlled the Dales.

The Romans stayed in Marching Camps when on the move, which were built simply as temporary accommodation. You can see an aerial photo of the one on Mastiles Lane between Grassington and Malham.

All or most of the natural woodland had been cleared before the Romans arrived. The Pennines were occupied by small settlements in an open landscape throughout the Roman period. On the Pennine fringes, Roman ways had more influence and villas have been found near Gargrave and Middleham.

Bainbridge Roman Fort

The model gives an idea of how the fort may have appeared around 205 AD. The first fort was built of wood around 80 AD, but by 200 AD had been rebuilt of stone. The Garrison was the 500 strong VI cohort of Nervians, an infantry unit originally raised in Belgium. The fort underwent a number of alterations during its 300 year occupation and was abandoned for a period on at least one occasion. As Roman rule became established, a small settlement grew outside the fort and increasingly, the soldiers were recruited from the local population. At the side of the model you can see pottery fragments found on the site.

ENGLISHMAN'S HOME

The English (Anglo-Saxons) took advantage of the collapse of Roman Rule to settle in Britain. The Britons or 'Welsh' as the English called them, resisted maintaining independent kingdoms in the Dales for 200 years. They were defeated around 600 AD and the Dales became part of the English Kingdom

of Northumbria. The English probably took over the top positions in society without any mass slaughter or eviction. However between 400 and 600 AD, the population fell dramatically, perhaps due to a combination of war and disease, and some land reverted to woodland.

In the case, the coin of King Offa of Mercia c.780 AD, found on the eastern fringes of the Dales at Bedale, provides interesting evidence of contact between the early English Kingdoms. Other items of a slightly earlier, 7th century date which can be seen here are a 7th century iron knife blade found with a skeleton at a quarry near Leyburn, a shield boss and brooch found at East Witton and a bronze strap end and buckle, found at Wensley Park.

VIKINGS

In 865 AD a massive Danish army invaded Britain, conquering Northumbria in 876 AD. Its leader, Halfdan, handed out land to his soldiers in the Dales. They settled and were absorbed into the existing population in the lower Dales. Yorkshire was subject to much stronger Scandinavian influences than other parts of the defeated Northumbria Kingdom and evidence of these roots can still be found today in words such as 'fell', 'gill', 'moss', and 'heath', and place names like Arkengarthdale, Gunnerside and Yockenthwaite.

Around 900 AD, Norse invaders from Ireland came to the Dales, establishing a kingdom based on York and Dublin. The last King, Eric Bloodaxe was killed in the Dales in 954 AD. The Norse settlers however had come to stay. Mainly cattle and sheep farmers, they lived in small isolated settlements in the more remote parts of the Dales.

NORMANS

Harrying of the North

After the Norman Invasion of 1066, the Dales became a rebel stronghold. In 1069, William the Conqueror punished the rebels and devastated Yorkshire during a campaign called the Harrying of the North. The scale of destruction shocked even some of William's supporters. It is not known for certain how widespread the destruction was, some parts of the Dales appear to have escaped lightly, whereas others were still described as "waste" in Domesday Book twenty years later.

"Nowhere had William shown such cruelty..... In his anger he commanded all crops and herds, chattels and food be burned to ashes..... a famine fell upon the humble and defenceless populace.....more than 100,000 people perished of hunger"

Ordericus Vitalis c.1100

MEDIEVAL

The Normans developed four distinctive things; castles, forests, monasteries and market towns. For nearly 500 years these formed the basis of the social organisation, supported by a large peasant population. The feudal system, by which everyone owed service to a superior, and ultimately to the King, had existed before invasion, but was imposed more strictly. Peasants lost many of the freedoms they had previously enjoyed.

At Bolton Castle, the remains of a medieval landscape can be seen. Crops were grown in the cultivation terraces (lynchets) in the fields, by peasants living in the village on the other side of the castle.

Castles

After the Norman conquest, the Dales were divided between a few French nobles, Count Alan of Brittany was given one of the largest estates in the country, the Honour of Richmond, which included all of Wensleydale and Swaledale. Norman Lords built castles to defend against Scottish attacks and

to maintain order. They granted parts of their estates to relations and supporters who built their own castles. In this way a network of castles grew in and around the Dales. By the 15th century military need for castles had almost gone and they were abandoned in favour of country homes.

Monasteries

In the 1100's, vast areas of the Dales were given to religious communities by powerful landowners, in return for prayers for their souls. Although the monasteries themselves were then sited outside the Dales, they developed huge upland sheep ranches on their Dales estates. These were managed from farms called Granges.

The monasteries became crucial to the economy and well being of the Dales. They were active in leadmining, metal working, horse breeding, bee keeping, cheese making and many other activities as well as wool production, but the latter was the most profitable. Fountains Abbey became enormously wealthy by exporting Dales wool to Flanders and Italy.

Peasants

The feudal system depended on the large peasant population. In the 14th century, this fell dramatically after a string of bad harvests, the Black Death and the war with Scotland. The reduced number of peasants could demand better rewards and conditions for their labour. The feudal system declined and finally collapsed in the 16th century.

Forests

Vast areas were designated 'forests' by the Normans. The forests were not necessarily covered by trees. They were areas legally reserved for hunting, mainly in the higher Dales. Forest tenants were subject to harsh conservation laws and were required to perform forest services. Many remote settlements were forcibly converted into hunting lodges. Almost as soon as created, forest lands were given away to religious orders and sold to private buyers until by the 1600's, there was little left.

Markets

Market towns developed beneath the security of Norman Castles. They became vital points of contact between the Dales and the wider world. Smaller market towns and villages were created elsewhere, often on the borders of official 'forest'. Many Dales towns and villages are believed to date from the Middle Ages and to be the planned creations of powerful landowners, who charged the market traders a fee in return for providing a secure place to conduct business.

GOLD, INFLATION & PRIVATISATION

The 16th century saw major religious and political upheavals and high inflation caused by Spain bringing gold from its American colonies. Henry VIII responded by abolishing the monasteries and selling their vast lands to private owners to raise money. This had a major impact on the lives of people in the Dales.

Inflation prompted landowners to sell land and raise rents. This sudden availability of land caused dramatic social change. Tenant or private farmers with wage labourers replaced Lords and peasants as the normal working arrangement. Current methods of land ownership were established and new field patterns began appearing in the landscape. A society of small independent farmers emerged, who specialised in animal produce for market. Earlier crop fields were enclosed as pasture.

During the Middle Ages, peasants lived in simple one room dwellings, the smoke from the fire in the centre escaping through the thatch. Better off tenants and private farmers lived in long houses, where people and cows occupied different ends of the same building. Houses were often made from wood or clay, with heather or thatched roofs. After the 16th century, stone houses began to replace these buildings.

You can see examples of houses from the 17th, 19th and 20th centuries. The 17th century house has

been modified in the 18th and 19th century, note the larger windows in the central section.

DALES FARMHOUSE KITCHEN

You can see a room typical of a Dales kitchen of the 1900's. Most of the basic equipment was made locally. The work was labour intensive, the range needed black leading, the floor had to be scrubbed and there were the daily duties of cooking washing and cleaning. The work, together with dairying and farmwork, was hard and took a lot of time, but was a source of pride. Until World War 2, employment of live in maids and other domestic workers, to assist in the home was quite common. Since this time, social and technological developments have eased the burden of domestic work.

Oatcake

Oatcake was for centuries a basic part of the diet of many people in the Dales. Oats were one of the few crops able to grow successfully in the higher part of the Dales. Oatcake making declined as transport improvements made possible the better distribution of commercially produced bread.