

Brough Hill Fair: Summary

Although Brough Hill Fair is seven centuries years old, its history remains to be written, other than three descriptive pages in *Cumbria Magazine* (November 1974). But in the course of writing the history of Appleby Fair, I came across several references, which are indexed; I have also seen a translation of the 1330 charter, courtesy of Kendal Archive Service, as well as a photo-copy the 1947 conveyance of land at Warcop from Veteripont Estates (effectively representing the second Baron Hothfield) and the War Department (nowadays known as the Ministry of Defence). I think the relevant points are as follows.

1. Brough Hill Fair was established, along with a weekly market, by charter of Edward III as a favour to the Clifford family. The caveat that this was so long as there was 'no harm to neighbouring markets and fairs' perhaps offered scope for future revocation, but there is no evidence that the situation ever arose. The Cliffords were empowered to charge fair traders tolls, but documentary evidence – as is the case with most English fairs - is minimal. The principal participants would have been local farmers and other residents, most of whom would be Clifford tenants; if they traded profitably, they could better afford to pay their rents.
2. Following the death of Lady Anne Clifford in 1675 without a male heir, Brough Hill Fair became the property of the Tuftons, earls of Thanet. At some stage, probably in the 18th Century, they moved its location from Brough-under-Stainmore to land in Warcop that they also owned, but the name of the fair was unchanged. The timing was also changed by a week and its duration halved. Instead of four days centred on St Matthew's Day (21 September) it was held on St Michael's Day (29 September) and the day after. We can only speculate on the reasons for these changes. By the 1700s fairs were no longer being established by royal charter; we can safely assume that the Crown was untroubled by deviation from the terms laid down in 1330. The Tuftons had evidently mislaid their copy of the charter, anyway; it was rediscovered in 1916.
3. It is evident from both Press reports and literary references that in the 19th Century, Brough Hill Fair was not only an important commercial occasion but also a focal point for Gypsy/Romani/Travellers (GRT), increasingly associated with horse trading. By the beginning of the 20th Century, the June fair in Appleby, which had begun in 1775, was of comparable status; members of GRT communities customarily attended both. There is a vivid description of the annual impact of Brough Hill Fair on life in 1920s Warcop in Edward Short's memoir, *I Knew My Place*.
4. That Brough Hill Fair remained of importance to local farmers is evident from the Westmorland NFU's expressed annoyance at its short notice cancellation in 1939 – ostensibly because of the outbreak of War – C.E. Fordyce, agent of the estate of Lord Hothfield (Tufton). From 1940-45 it took place as normal, as did Appleby Fair, which had no acknowledged owner or precise geographical location.

5. Land east of Warcop stretching up to the Pennines had been used for military exercises since Victorian times. In 1947 Fordyce negotiated the sale of 139 acres, including the location of Brough Hill Fair, to the War Department (subsequently the Ministry of Defence), 'subject to the ancient right of holding Brough Hill Fair annually and to all liberties and customs as heretofore enjoyed in connection therewith'. The 'right' probably meant in effect, responsibility; the 'liberties and customs' were not defined, but may probably be interpreted as fairgoers continuing to do what they had previously done. Anecdotal, written and photographic evidence indicates trade in livestock, vehicles, horse-riding accessories, fodder and services, as well as clothing, cooking appliances. Along with traditional fairground entertainments, there were vendors of food and alcohol. For campers in tents and wagons, most with campfires, basic sanitary facilities were provided.

6. Until at least 1960 Brough Hill and Appleby Fairs were regarded as occasions of comparable importance. 'Thousands' – campers and sight-seers – were reported as attending, although these numbers were not accurately computed. By 1974, however, the historian J.D. Marshall depicted Brough Hill as a shadow of its former self, kept alive by the attendance of a handful of GRT families. Legislation had made a nomadic lifestyle increasingly difficult to sustain, and in the restricted time they had for taking to the road with their horses, fairgoers evidently preferred Appleby to Brough Hill. This may be explained partly by the greater appeal of early June to late September, partly by much-publicised but empty threats of abolition that in 1964 attracted to Appleby Fair media attention intermittently sustained ever since. But Brough Hill Fair has sustained a twilight existence at least; its 700th anniversary is not far away.

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