

## **Forum Report for Historic Environment Group, August 2023.**

In July no fewer than 25 members enjoyed the second part of Rob Pearson's guided walk across Cockfield Fell. This complemented the first walk last year which covered the lower lying area of the fell including the two main railways in the area. About half the assembled group had taken part in the earlier walk so Rob helpfully began by sketching out the main points previously covered.

This time we started off by crossing the higher fell just below Cockfield village. Our first stop was to view one of the 400 or so bell pits which permeate the fell. Happily the weather was warm and sunny as Rob filled us in on the history of the mining that had been going on in this area for nearly a thousand years. These bell pits each resulted from the digging of a hole some thirty or forty feet deep in search of a seam of coal or iron ore. Many of these remain in a collapsed state, often, as with this example, filled with all manner of spoil.

We continued over this 'lunar landscape' towards Cockfield village where we viewed the long medieval tofts, narrow gardens separated then as now by stone walls and once providing most the families' food for daily living. Most are now used as more conventional gardens although a few have sheep grazing on them. Moving down the hill away from the village we paused to see one of the best surviving sections of the giant quarry which split the lower fell but much of which has been infilled in recent times. We paused to consider the depth and width of the remaining section. As so often on the fell it is hard to gain any real impression of what it must have been like in the days of heavy industrial activity, but luckily for us Peter Harding had brought some pictures along of the area just below the quarry. The photos attached below illustrate much better than words the colossal changes which have taken place. Believe it or not they feature views taken from the same viewpoint: the modern version I took this July, the earlier black and white view is undated, but is probably post WW1.

It just remained to see the 13<sup>th</sup> century St Mary the Virgin Church which Rob had fixed in advance to be open for us. This fine building was extended several times but retained original features as well as memorials to the local Dixon brothers. Time was pressing so I noted it down as worthy of a further visit before returning to the car park. Thanks to Rob for another fascinating visit.

Tim Meacham July 2023

