

CARHAM PARISH WALK 15TH June 2019

Thank you to those who attended our walk (14, including 'locals' and others from neighbouring parishes), which focussed on so-called common land and the wide verges bordering the lanes south of Wark village.

Starting out from the village our route took us up a short footpath past 'Goat Common', a grassy triangle of common land, to meet the lane south to Sunilaws. Further on the lanes circuted a large field which is still on the OS Map as 'Wark Common', but has been cultivated since the second world war. A public footpath crossing from the north east to the south west corner was not available to us as it currently has a crop of potatoes – this path is usually open, and will be reinstated after harvesting.

Until the enclosure act of 1797, the 'common moor, or tract of waste ground... within the manor of Wark' was used by people in the village to graze livestock. When the land was hedged and divided up the cottagers of Wark were allotted an area to continue grazing their cattle which also included the wide verges – this became known as the 'Cow Club'. Apparently the cows were housed in the village at night and walked up to graze during the day. During the 1939-45 war the field, one assumes, was given up to cultivation; the members of the Cow Club being paid rent.

In a Hearing of 1975 it was disputed whether the members, as they claimed, actually owned equal portions of the land given to them and assumed by them 'to be forever after held and enjoyed' – I think this was overruled and so was registered as common land. The wide verges were still used for grazing sheep up to the 1980's, but the practice of common grazing gradually died out, and Wark common is now under permanent cultivation.

The verges, however, are still registered as common land – the enclosed map shows the areas as seen on a map held by the parish. They cover 3.5 miles in length, and are up to 50 feet wide! Also enclosed is a list of the plants and other wildlife recorded on a recent survey of just a short stretch of verge!

I feel that these verges are an ideal wildlife habitat, and as such could be a valuable asset to the parish. Local councils elsewhere in the country have shown an enlightened approach in maintaining their verges as wildflower havens, benefitting wildlife and local people alike.

What about it, Carham parish?