

# Flass Vale, Durham City



## Woodland Archaeological Survey.

March 2024



## **Summary**

*Durham Woodland Revival (DWR), is a project run by Durham County Council and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund between 2019-2024. DWR seeks to restore neglected woodlands and bring them back into good management for the benefit of both wildlife and people. A key part of good management is understanding, not only the trees and ecology, but also the history and archaeology of woodlands. To achieve this volunteers were invited to join a woodland archaeology project and were provided with training sessions, field days, learning materials and guidance on methods of archaeological survey, historical records and map sources and the legislation, policy and best practice covering archaeology in England.*

*Volunteers have been guided and mentored to produce their own surveys of selected Durham woodlands helping to find and record features and remains that were previously unknown or have received little or no investigation in the past. This information will provide a better understanding of local history, heritage and environment for volunteers and communities. The survey reports will also be used in woodland management plans to ensure important heritage features are protected and managed during operations in the future. The final outputs of the project will be to add this information to the Durham Historic Environment Record (<https://keystothepast.info/>), with an article in the annual Archaeology in County Durham publication and a presentation at County Durham Archaeology Day*

*This report looks at Flass Vale wood. A geophysical survey was carried out at Maiden's Bower which provided training for volunteers by Durham University Archaeology Services as part of the Belief in the North East project. This provided evidence that the burial mound was built of turf and soil, not stone.*

*Next, desk based material such as the Historic Environment Record, historic mapping, historic newspaper accounts and aerial photography was examined, much of which was sourced and shared by the Friends of Flass Vale.*

*This was followed up by a site visit with volunteers from the Friends of Flass Vale. The site visit identified a number of old enclosure boundaries and some relic features such as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ice rink, the old piggery and cottage, old fruit trees from former garden uses, two sites of former dumping areas identified by pottery and glass sherds, Maiden's Bower burial mound and Gibbet Knowle where bodies were displayed after execution. Significant viewpoints were also recorded from Gibbet's Knowle and Maiden's Bower. Those features not already recorded on the Historic Environment Record have been passed to Durham County Council for inclusion.*

*With the exception of the nationally important Maiden's Bower, the heritage features noted were all of local interest. However it is the combination of interests that makes Flass Vale special. The combination of surviving remains and the stories of competitions and afternoon teas that flesh out our understanding of the vale's people in the past that creates significance. At Flass House it is the combination of architectural interest through surviving Victorian features combined with historic evidence of the Proctor family who once lived there and their dog breeding, bird fancying, political and curling activities that turn Flass House from a house into a home. And it is Wheatley's painting of Flass Cottage and Old Ned that provides an insight into the past and helps to interpret the very ruinous remains. Finally, it is the location of the wood on the edge of a densely populated urban area of considerable architectural character that creates a welcome green backdrop and a place to appreciate the countryside and wildlife without leaving the city.*

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## **APPENDIX A**

Flass House by James Hunt of Flass Bungalow /Flass House December 2023

## **Acknowledgements.**

This report was written by Caroline Hardie with support from Niall Hammond, both of Archaeo-Environment. The DWR Archaeology Project was supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The fieldwork team consisted of Val Standen, Nicola Duckworth, Stephen and Pam Allen, Louis Standen, Lorna Bembow and Caroline and Niall. We are indebted to the Friends of Flass Vale and Val Standen in particular for sharing their archive and knowledge of the woodland. Additional contributions on the document came from the Flass Vale Taskforce.

All photographs were taken in March 2024 unless otherwise stated.

## **Flass Vale, Durham Woodland Archaeology Survey.**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

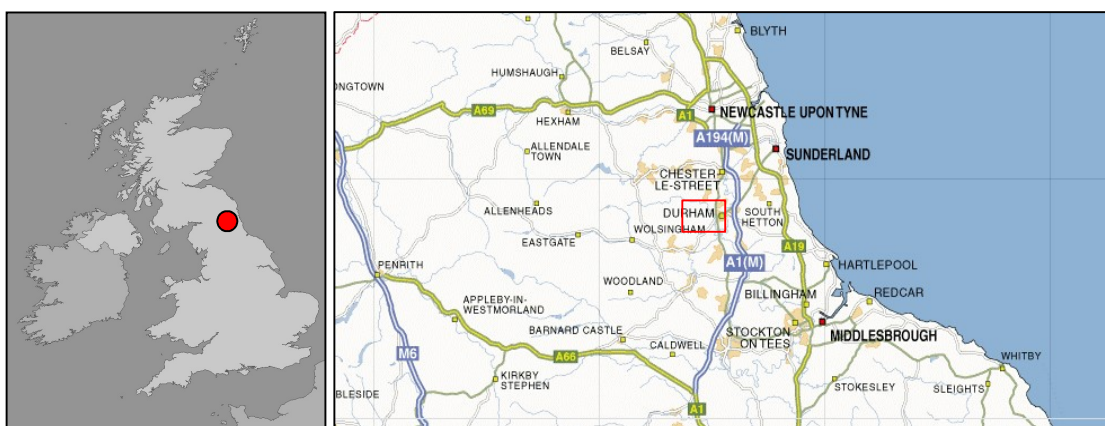
- 1.1 Durham Woodland Revival is a project run by Durham County Council and supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, it seeks to restore neglected woodlands and bring them back into good management for the benefit of both wildlife and people. A key part of good management is understanding, not only the trees and ecology, but also the history and archaeology of our woodlands. To achieve this volunteers were trained and inspired to research and survey their own woodland across County Durham and produce reports to inform future management. Woodlands in County Durham have a variety of origins and historic development from modern plantations to semi-natural woods many hundreds of years old. Woodlands can contain rich and extensive historic remains from all periods of human history and their expansion and contraction over time can tell us much about how the landscape has changed over the centuries. Within these woodlands are the physical remains of human activity, some of this relates directly to the “living archaeology of woodland management,” such as coppice stools, pollards, ancient and veteran trees. In other cases, woodland may contain the sites of industry or occupation.
- 1.2 Volunteers joining the woodland archaeology project were provided with training sessions, learning materials and guidance on methods of archaeological survey, historical records and map sources and the legislation, policy and best practice covering archaeology in England. Volunteers were then supported to produce their own surveys of selected Durham woodlands helping to find and record features and remains. The information provides volunteers with a better understanding of their local history, heritage and environment and can also be used in woodland management plans to ensure these important heritage features are protected and managed during operations in the future. The final outputs of the project will add this information to the Durham Historic Environment Record (<https://keystothepast.info/>), with an article in the annual Archaeology in County Durham publication and a presentation at County Durham Archaeology Day.
- 1.3 This archaeology survey has gathered together information from a wide variety of published and unpublished literature together with information accessible on a number of heritage databases and websites (see bibliography). This informed a site visit to Flass Vale wood to locate and confirm known sites as well as to identify and describe new sites. Basic survey and photographic records were made of the wood and identified archaeological sites to help inform future management and identify where more detailed work using specialist techniques might be needed or usefully applied later. Observations and suggestions for the future care, conservation and management of identified archaeological sites have also been made. A copy of the report and a list of all sites surveyed has been deposited with the County Durham Historic Environment Record as well as with the owners and managers of the woodland.
- 1.4 This report has been prepared by Caroline Hardie and incorporates information provided by the Friends of Flass Vale.



## 2.0 SITE LOCATION

- 2.1 Flass Vale Wood is situated at the edge of Durham City and extends out to Durham Johnston School and the A167. The wood is centred on the following grid reference NZ26234282 (Figure 1). It lies between a ridge running north/south from Neville's Cross to Sniperly (route of A167) and the area known as Western Hill. The south end of the vale is occupied by the Bowers housing development (formerly a bus garage) and a hotel/restaurant – the King's Lodge, (formerly the Rose Tree or The Rose). Flass bungalow (built 1930's) and two large houses (built 2004) are situated in the south west corner of the Vale.
- 2.2 Geology: Flass Vale lies within the central Durham coalfield over coal measure shales. It was part of the course of the River Browney pre the ice age. It is a moderately steep sided valley formed at the end of the ice age. The soil is mostly sand and clay glacial drift. Flass burn, formerly known as Mill burn, runs from north to south and is culverted beneath the Bowers. The water flow is now low but was used to drive a mill on North Road before entering the River Wear at Milburngate.
- 2.3 Most of the land east of the footpath leading from Flass House to the top end of the Vale is owned by Durham County Council. The land to the west of the footpath is in multiple ownership. The Friends of Flass Vale is a local community group who share a passion for the protection and enhancement of the vale. Their mission statement is:

*'In co-operation with local authorities, landowners and other organisations, to protect, preserve, maintain, restore and improve the natural beauty of Flass Vale, while respecting its wildness.'*<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <http://fofv.org.uk/>

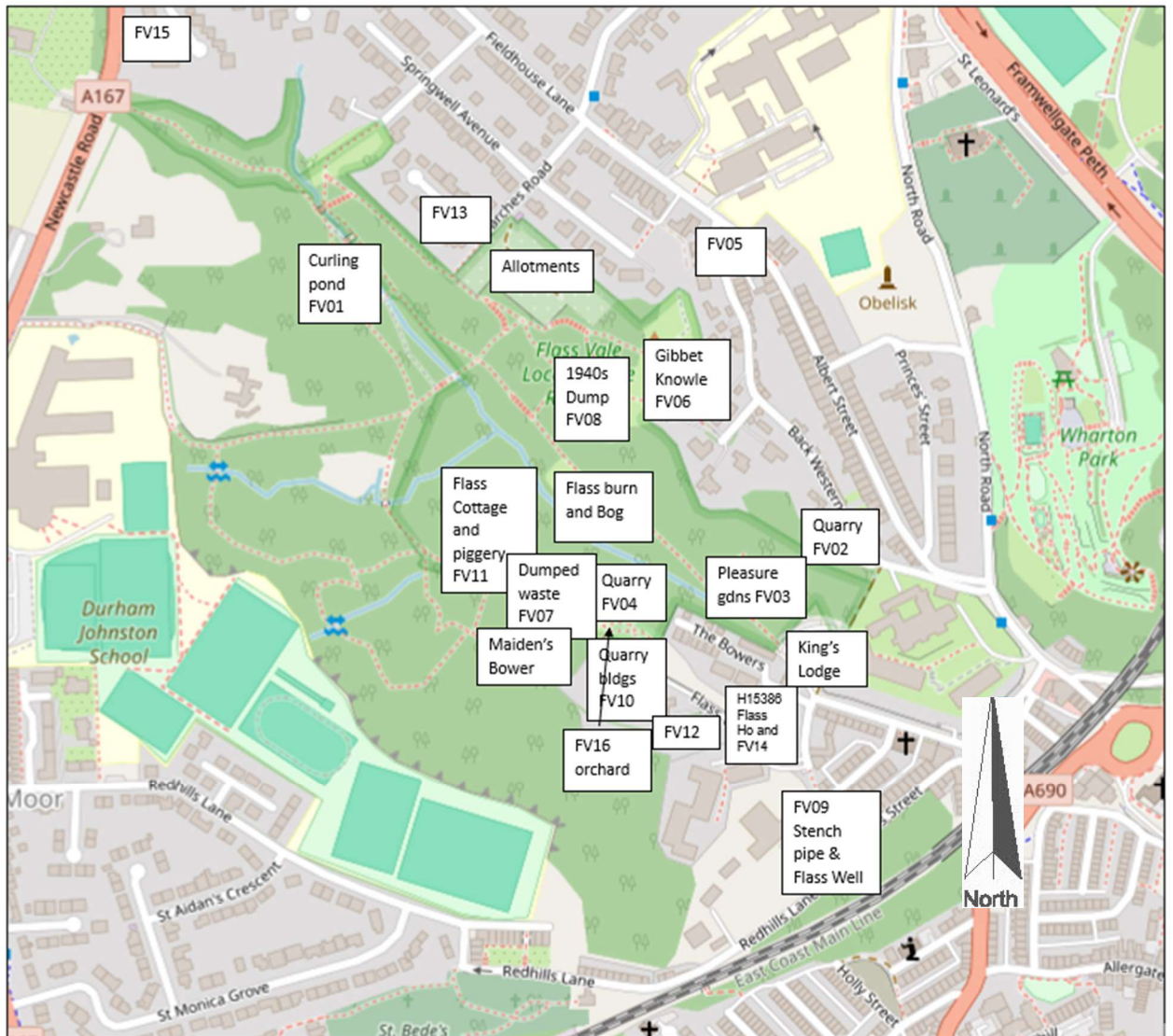


Figure 1. Plan showing the location of Flass Vale Nature Reserve (with dark green boundary) in Durham City. A selection of sites referred to in the report are shown approximately for orientation purposes. © Crown copyright 2024. All rights reserved. (Not to scale)

### **3.0 DESIGNATIONS**

3.1 Most of the land to the west of the Flass House footpath is Common land (CL86, ID 29748).

3.2 There is a network of footpaths that run through Flass Vale, many of them are Rights of Way. The Vale forms part of Durham City's Emerald Network which is a network of green spaces consisting of designated wildlife sites, key green sites (such as parks and gardens), and the River Wear and the riverbanks. The sites are connected by public rights of way or pavements. The purpose of the Emerald Network is to encourage people (residents, visitors and tourists) to visit key wildlife sites for the leisure and health benefits they provide. In addition, there are a number of Pilgrimage Trails and walks that pass through the Vale, The Way of Light, one of the Northern Saints Trails, Small Pilgrim Places and The Battle of Neville's Cross Circular Walk.

#### 3.3 Historic Environment

There is only one designated heritage asset within the woodland, but outside Council ownership, and that is Maiden's Bower burial mound dating to about 3,000 years ago (H544). It is designated as a scheduled monument (1008843).

The woodland also sits with Durham's Conservation Area. Flass Vale's contribution to the special interest of the Conservation Area includes:

- The topography of the area which contributes to the interesting and varied townscape;
- The long linear finger of open space extending towards the urban areas;
- Its open elevated spaces and views towards the Peninsula and World Heritage Site

#### 3.4 Natural Environment

Flass Vale was designated as a County Wildlife Site in 1982 and a Local Nature Reserve in 2007. There is an extensive Tree Preservation Order covering groups of trees issued by the City of Durham Council in 1973, covering individual, trees specified by an area, groups of trees and woodland groupings.

#### 4.0 HISTORIC BACKGROUND OF FLASS VALE WOOD.

- 4.1 The name 'Flass' is derived from the Middle English (after 1066 but before the 16<sup>th</sup> century) word *Flaskes*, *Flassh* or *Flash* (the spelling changed over time) which was a word used to describe wet areas such as swamps or pools.<sup>2</sup> The area is still referred to as Flass Bog and in parts this wetland character survives today.
- 4.2 The woodland has also traditionally been called Shaw Wood. This name is used on the tithe map of 1838 and subsequent Ordnance Survey maps. The name 'shaw' is derived from the Middle English for a small wood. Together both place names capture the mixture of wetland or bog and small woodland for this area.
- 4.3 Flass Vale's southern bank is said to be one of the Red Hills associated with the Battle of Neville's Cross, but could equally be derived from Reedy Hills named from reeds that grew on the banks of the boggy Flass Vale.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.4 The broad shape of Flass Vale was laid down when ice age glaciers melted leaving sand, clay and gravel behind as water flooded towards the valley of what is now the river Wear. Flass burn was part of the diverted River Browney. The Wear valley was gradually colonised by vegetation and eventually developed into woodland.
- 4.5 Prehistory
- 4.6 About 3,000 years ago people settled and gradually cleared much of this forest for pasture. Maiden's Bower in Flass Vale (NGR NZ 26437 42715) is a burial mound dating from this time. Such burial mounds covered single or multiple human burials. These burials could be placed within the mound in stone-lined cists. In some cases the cairn was surrounded by a ditch. Often occupying prominent locations (as this one does), mounds can be a major visual element in the modern landscape, but views to and from them can be obscured by later tree growth. Some modest tree clearance has taken place at the behest of Historic England by the Friends of Flass Vale ensuring that the mound and its ridge can be appreciated from nearby.
- 4.7 Maiden's Bower is situated on the NE end of a ridge overlooking the River Wear Valley. This location suggests that it was designed to be seen from some distance away. The mound is flat topped with a hollow suggesting earlier excavations, a robber trench, or the foundations for a later medieval cross (see below).
- 4.8 The mound measures 8.5m in diameter and stands to a maximum height of 1.5m. It is rather unusual in being surrounded by a level berm 3.5m wide, and there are traces of a surrounding ditch, 0.3m deep and 2m wide, visible on the SW side. Elsewhere this is thought to survive as a buried feature (confirmed by geophysical survey, see below).
- 4.9 Roman/Iron-Age  
There is no evidence of land use or occupation here during this period.
- 4.10 Anglo-Saxon-Early Medieval AD410- 1066  
There is no evidence of land use or occupation here during this period.
- 4.11 Medieval 1066-1540
- 4.12 The place name Flass Vale appears to originate at this time. There are few other connections to the vale dating to medieval times, suggesting it was 'waste', largely due to being boggy. In medieval times the Vale was incorporated into Crossgate Moor and Framwellgate Moor parishes – and presumably most of Flass Vale was rough grazing land (a fragment of heather moor was present until the 1980's) with marshy ground in the valley bottom.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Watts 2002, 45 and Ekwall 1987, 181

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/10734/Durham-City-Conservation-Area-Crossgate/pdf/DurhamCityConservationAreaCrossgate1.pdf?m=636736391275870000> [accessed 130324]

<sup>4</sup> <http://fofv.org.uk/history-of-flass-vale/>





*Figure 2. The Maiden's Bower seen from the south-west on a spur of higher ground overlooking Flass Vale.*

- 4.13 Maiden's Bower lies below the plateau of ground where the Battle of Neville's Cross was fought in 1346. It is said that the Durham monks raised the 'corporax cloth' (a small piece of white linen for covering the chalice during mass) of St Cuthbert here during the battle. A wooden cross is reported to have stood on the monument until 1569 (DCC PRN H544 and SM 1008843).<sup>5</sup> This later use may have given the mound its unusual flat-topped appearance.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.14 Just outside the vale where St. Leonard's school is today, was the location of Gibbet Knowle which is in a prominent position overlooking the vale with views towards the cathedral (see below). It was referred to as Jebet Knoll in a lease dated 1398.<sup>7</sup> Despite repeated variations of this name over the subsequent centuries, there is little direct evidence that hangings took place at this location or that corpses were left hanging from a gibbet here.
- 4.15 One tale associated with this site goes back to 1591 when four seminary priests were put to death there on one day; the sad tale recounted long after. The young bride of Mr. Robert Maire of Hardwick was present with her husband, and the pair were so

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<sup>5</sup> DCC PRN H544 and SM 1008843.

<sup>6</sup> DUAS 2023, 2 citing Young 1984, p248

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/durham/vol3/pp16-28> but also various other names including Gibbet Knowl Close (1809 enclosure plan in Framwellgate township, Chester manor), and an abstract of title recites a 1735 purchase transaction in the manorial court where it is spelled Gibbet Knowle Close, in 1740 Gibbet Knowles, 1755 Gibbett Knowle, 1797 Gibbet Knowle, 1805 auction Gibbet Knowle, 1806 enclosure award Gibbet Knowl Close, 1914 Gibbett Knowle. The County History cites a source in 1397 calling it Gibbet-Knowle (Parishes: St Oswald's - Introduction | British History Online ([british-history.ac.uk](https://www.british-history.ac.uk))).

much moved by the constancy of the dying priests that they both went over to the Roman Church, to which their descendants have belonged ever since.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.16 Map Evidence.

The earliest map evidence found which uses the name 'Flass' dates to c.1722 (see figure 3), but this 'Flass' is much further to the west. The place name Flass is used intermittently after that on maps, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. These maps are not especially detailed and do not show natural features and land uses are limited to significant places such as hunting grounds and settlements. None of them show Maiden's Bower and none use the name Shaw Wood, possibly because it was too small.



Figure 3. (above) *Episcopatus Dunelmensis vulgo the bishoprick of Durham* by Robert Morden c1722. The first reference on an early map to 'Flasse', but further west than the current location. Note also the administrative boundary running through the site, along the river. This remained as the township boundary until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. (DUL SC++ 00939-40)

#### 4.17 Post Medieval

There is some archaeological evidence that part of what is now woodland, was used for ploughing in this period. Based on modern aerial photography (Google Earth), some limited ridge and furrow survives in unwooded areas mostly at the north end of the site and to a lesser extent to the west near Red Hills. By the time the more detailed tithe maps and OS maps were surveyed, much of the land was enclosed, not wooded.

#### 4.18 Tithe and Enclosure Plan Evidence

4.19 The first detailed maps of Flass Vale are the plans associated with the enclosure awards. There are two maps covering the two townships separated by the water

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/durham/vol3/pp29-53>  
Durham Woodland Revival





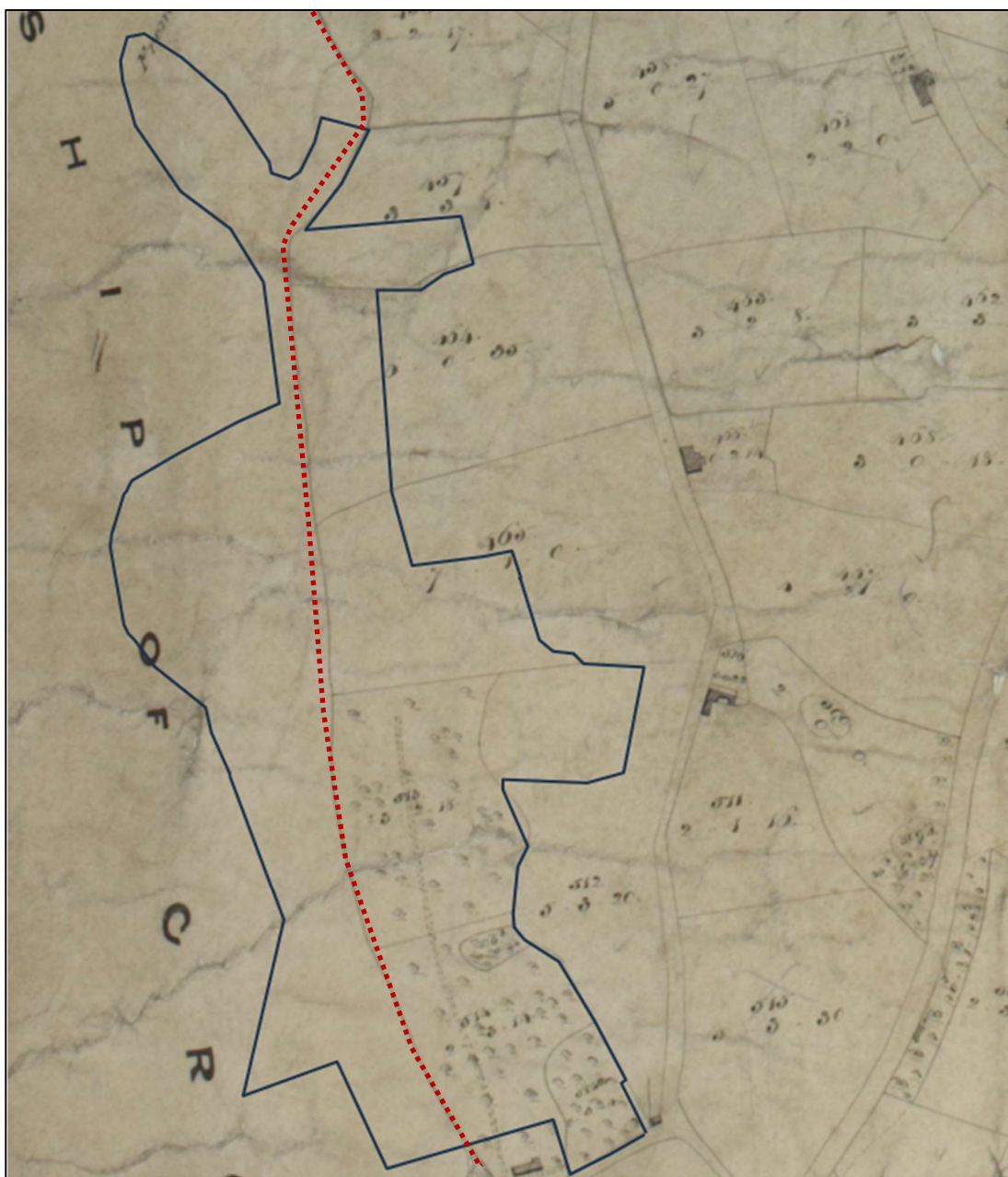


Figure 5. The Tithe Plan of Framwellgate in the Chapelry of St. Margaret's, County Durham 1838 (only right hand side (east) of the red dashed line). This shows a largely enclosed landscape with the main uses being grass, arable and garden, although the name Shaw Wood implies woodland too (DDR/EA/TTH/1/101 25 June 1839 apportionment). The red dashed line marks the boundary with Crossgate township – no survey has therefore taken place left of the line. The blue line is approximately Durham County Council ownership.

- 4.23 The woodland falls within two separate townships so there are two separate tithe maps, both surveyed in 1838. Both depict an enclosed landscape with some woodland. Some of the woodland enclosures have irregular shapes suggesting earlier or natural features dictating irregular boundaries. One of the woodland enclosures can still be discerned on modern aerial photographs as a narrow gap between the trees on both sides of the old boundary. The apportionment produced a year later for Framwellgate outlined the land uses and owners as follows:

516 West Sheriff meadow - grass Wilkinson, Thomas owner; Redshaw, Joseph



514 Shaw Wood – garden and arable (although named as a wood and depicted as such on the map) – Susan Stoker owner and occupier

513 as above

512 Gilbert Knowles – grass - Hoult, Thomas owner and occupier. Gilbert is a misprint for 'gibbet' which it was named on the earlier enclosure award suggesting the location of a gibbet where hanged bodies from Gallows Field (now St Leonards School) were left to decompose in medieval times.<sup>11</sup>

511 Field House Close – grass - Wharton, Thomas owner; Steadman, Thomas occupier

- 4.24 This suggests that the area was only partially wooded in enclosures and the southern end of Flass Vale, known as Shaw Wood was more wooded than the north. However its land use was recorded as garden and arable. It is also interesting to note that one of the owner occupiers of Shaw Wood was a woman, Susan Stoker, at a time when land ownership amongst women was less common.
- 4.25 The building in the fork of the roads was later (on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS map of 1857) labelled as The Rose public house (now Kingslodge public house) (H36773). This may have been built as an inn in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Another building was located just off Flass Lane, Flass House (H15386) and this appears to have been built as a house, although possibly rebuilt at a later date. Flass Lane where both properties are located was an historic north-south route reduced to a modest track by 1857.<sup>12</sup>
- 4.26 The Crossgate tithe map also depicts an enclosed landscape used for grass and arable but with a row of enclosures in the SE corner forming gardens called Flass Boggs belonging to William Darling and rented by John Dixon. The southern part of Flass Vale is shown as woodland with regular rows of tree planting within enclosures, but the land use is described as 'garden'. Only two parcels of land were identified as being a plantation. The largest plantation belonged to William Darlington who was one of the main landowners of the Flass Vale area along with the Reverend William Passide and Hannah Smith. Wilkinson's Field had a shelter belt, recorded as a plantation and this still forms the boundary between private and Council ownership. This map also records the location of Flass Well for the first time, although it is not annotated as such.<sup>13</sup> It first appears annotated on the 1<sup>st</sup> ed OS map surveyed in 1857 but at that date it had no formal structure and was presumably a simple spring in the ground.
- 4.27 Land uses, placenames and ownership/occupier detail on the Crossgate tithe map are as follows:

13 High Flass Bog- grass - William Darling owner, John Dixon occupier

18 South Field – grass ownership etc as above

19 Flass Boggs garden - ownership etc as above

Outside current council ownership:

6 Wilkinson's Field – grass – Thomas Hoult owner and occupier

7 Wilkinson's Field – plantation – ownership as above – (borders council ownership)

8 Marie Land Close – grass – George Griffith owner and William Toward occupier.

9 High Barn Field – arable – Hannah Smith owner and Robert Balckburn occupier.

10 Barnfield – grass – ownership as above

<sup>11</sup> <https://durhamcity.org/tag/flass-vale/> [accessed 130324] and David Simpson in The Northern Echo 1<sup>st</sup> August 2008 available at <https://www.thenorthernecho.co.uk/news/2415334.the-noose-that-cast-a-shadow-over-city-jail/> [accessed 200324]

<sup>12</sup> )S 6 inch Durham Sheet XXVII. Surveyed: 1857, Published: 1861

<sup>13</sup> H70465

11	Spice Pudding Hill – grass – owner Rev. William Passide, occupier James Lumsden
14	Un-named wooded enclosure – plantation - William Darling owner
15	Long Bank – grass – William Darling owner and John Dixon occupier
17	Hollow Field – grass – ownership etc as above. This field contains Maiden's Bower.
20	Red Hill Field – grass – owner Rev William Passide and occupier John Dixon



*Figure 6. The tithe map of 1838 for Crossgate Township. DDR/EA/TTH/1/68. The blue line marks current Durham County Council ownership. The red dashed line is the township boundary with Framwellgate Township.*

- 4.28 The distribution of land uses in 1838 suggest that the appearance of Flass Vale was quite different then from today with enclosed fields used for grass or arable and only two small areas of woodland, plus Shaw Wood which was also used as an orchard and pleasure grounds. These formal terraced gardens have since been abandoned, but roses, lilac and fruit trees can still be seen on parts of the eastern undulating slope today.

#### 4.29 Historic Ordnance Survey Maps

4.30 The 1<sup>st</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map was published in 1861 (but surveyed in 1857). At this time the area was known as Flass Bog and Shaw Wood. The regular planting pattern of trees in Shaw Wood suggests the continuing use here as pleasure grounds and/or orchards, accessed along a path from Shaw Wood Gardens to the rear of The Rose inn. A path on the other side of the valley led through the orchard to a small enclosure.

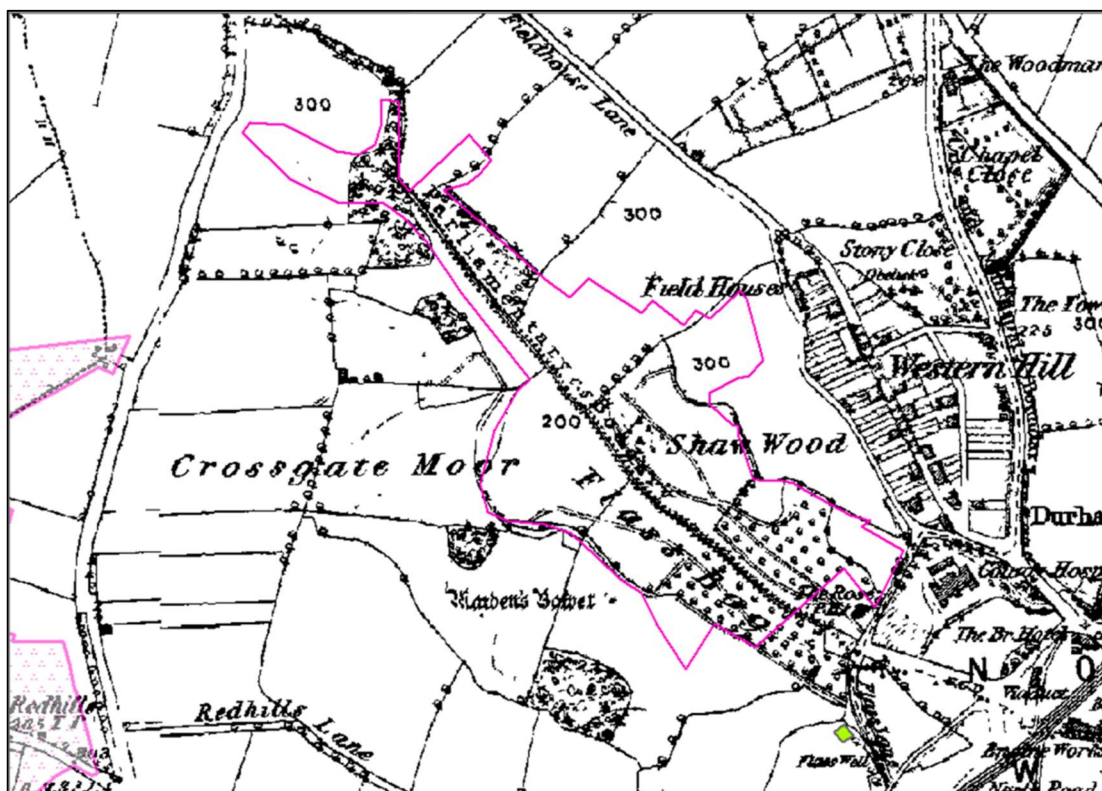


Figure 7. First edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1856 (published 1861). Here, unlike today Flass Vale is shown as unwooded enclosures, only the regularly mapped trees of an orchard show established tree cover. 'Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland' <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

4.31 The amount of tree cover to the north was also gradually increasing along the township boundary and in Barnfield a new plantation was set out to square off an irregular shaped field. In the corner of two field boundaries a small cottage, Flass Cottage FV07), with outbuildings had been built; this was enlarged by the late 19th century and later became a piggery owned by Norman Williamson. There are recollections locally of young boys being chased away by a man with a shotgun.<sup>14</sup> The buildings were demolished in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, but the lower courses of stone and brick survive and demolition rubble is spread over some distance. Trees have colonised the site.

4.32 It is likely that the area was now increasingly drained to enable more development, partly for the railway viaduct of 1857, but also for further housing development. The water from Flass Vale was piped through a culvert which followed the course of Waddington Street and then towards the river at Milburngate. The country lanes, such as Flass Lane, soon became streets lined with terraced houses. The New County Hospital opened on prominent ground east of the vale and Shaw Wood in 1853, quickly

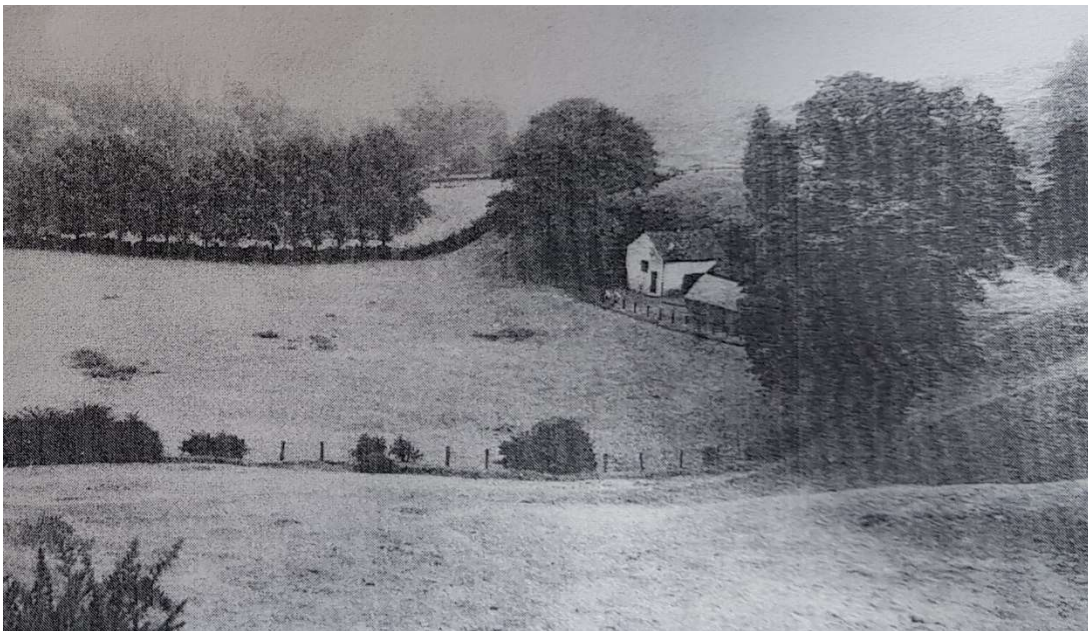
<sup>14</sup> FoFV 2010



followed by the railway viaduct in 1857 which created a visual separation between the vale and the historic town of Durham.<sup>15</sup>



*Figure 8. A tree grows out of the remains of the old cottage*



*Figure 9. Flass Cottage in the 1950s (Photo cited as by Dr Gibby but not found in the Gibby Collection at Durham University)*

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<sup>15</sup> Fordyce 1857, 334





*Figure 10. A similar view today looking back towards Flass Cottage*



*Figure 11. Later piggery remains associated with the cottage*

- 4.33 Historic Ordnance Survey Maps 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. 1891.
- 4.34 Towards the late 19<sup>th</sup> century Shaw Wood was no longer depicted as woodland, but the plantations elsewhere at Flass Vale remained.
- 4.35 Immediately outside Flass Wood, a sandpit (FV 02) had been opened up north of Shaw Wood and adjacent to the terraced houses being laid out along Albert Street and perhaps the destination for much of the sand. This quarry would go on to provide environmental problems.
- 4.36 On the 4<sup>th</sup> January 1901, the Durham County Advertiser reported on the Durham Highways Committee meeting of Durham Rural Council on problems of soil and sand being washed from the quarry behind Back Western. This issue had been raised by Durham Urban District Council who complained of large quantities of soil being washed into the city's drains from the lane at the back of Western Hill from the Shaw Wood Hotel (possibly the Rose Tree Public House as that was in Shaw Wood and no other possible hotel buildings were shown on the 2<sup>nd</sup> ed OS map of 1895-6) and gardens and from the quarry or 'sand hole' at the back of Western Hill after heavy rain. From here it was washed down to Flass Lane and then into Waddington Street, which fell under the urban council remit. The Highways Committee wrote to the hotel and the quarry owners to ask them to remedy it at a likely cost of £7 for two gullies to draw the water and mud away. However it was agreed to do nothing as the Durham Corporation were interested in buying the land and this was a disincentive for anyone else to invest in it.<sup>16</sup>
- 4.37 Flass Well (H70465) on Flass Lane was fitted out with a new structure, possibly in 1863 when a nearby drinking fountain, fed by the well, was added beneath the railway viaduct. Archaeological excavations undertaken in July 2023 confirmed the absence of a well-shaft or any pre-mid-19th century structures at the site of Flass Well. It was described in 1867 as 'a cavity cased with brick and looking much like a tomb...the spring which once ranked amongst the most eminent of Durham fountains ...reduced to a mere dribble..<sup>17</sup> The well fell out of use in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but was excavated in 2023 and its structure better revealed.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Durham County Advertiser 4<sup>th</sup> January 1901, p7

<sup>17</sup> Durham County Advertiser 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1867

<sup>18</sup> Excavations by Archaeological Services, University of Durham.

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/departments/academic/archaeology/archaeology-news/flass-well-excavations/>





*Figure 12. Flass Well a year after excavations in 2023 better revealed its structure*



*Figure 13. The stink pipe with its decorative top*

4.38 The iron stench or stink pipe (FV09) on Ainsley Street (previously Flass Lane) next to Flass Well, is a modest Victorian relic. These pipes were installed once sewage systems were put in place and were designed to carry powerful pongs and dangerous gasses skywards away from Victorian noses. The design of these stink pipes is reminiscent of an early locomotive funnel. The Stink Pipe had to be tall enough to allow the wind to disperse the noxious fumes before they sank to the ground. They also had to be made of cast iron because the sewer gases were capable of rotting even quite robust materials.



*Figure 14. Volunteers' feet at the base of the stink pipe*



- 4.39 An exciting new development at the north end of the wood was the introduction of a curling pond (FV01) abutting the township boundary, possibly in 1886.<sup>19</sup> This was created by building a dam to collect the water from Flass Burn (formerly Mill Burn or Flass Bog) which would freeze in winter. The water into the pond area was controlled with a sluice. Remains of the dam and sluice can still be seen, but the curling rink went out of use at the start of the First World War (OS maps revised in 1915 and published in 1919 refer to it as 'Old Curling Pond'. Tennis and cricket were played here in summer.
- 4.40 Curling was played on frozen ponds and lakes and in this case the pond was artificially created. The ancient Scottish game was popularised by Queen Victoria in the 1840s after being shown the game in Scotland. Consequently the rules and competitions spread in the mid to late 19th century between villages and towns throughout Scotland and the north of England where winters were sufficiently cold to create the necessary conditions. International competitions were also held throughout Europe and North America. The results of these competitions were published in the local press.



Figure 15. The remains of the curling pond, now a flat area of grass and rushes

### ***A curling rink in Flass Vale***

*A roar of granite while cheers condense in fog.  
Cloth caps thrown, scarves embrace while scores are scratched in ice.  
Frozen games brushed aside,  
when breaths entrench and lives are choked by war  
until only shades of rush and rink remain.  
A skeletal sentinel of trees spectate a long lost game.*

CH

- 4.41 It was the Durham City Curling Club that used this pond which was referred to as being located in Shaw Wood (Durham County Advertiser (DCA) - Friday 05 February 1897)

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<sup>19</sup> Northern Echo 6 May 2015



or Shaw Wood Gardens (DCA - Friday 22 January 1886) which was the headquarters of the club (DCA - Friday 22 February 1895). Newspaper reports from 1897 suggest that there were three 'rinks' here (DCA - Friday 05 February 1897) and another three on the Wear near Farmwellgate (DCA - Friday 22 February 1895).

- 4.42 Mrs George H. Procter of Flass House was recorded as providing afternoon tea for a match held on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February 1897 designed to raise funds for the Durham Mendicity Society who supplied soup and bread to the poor (DCA - Friday 05 February 1897). Her husband was the club secretary. (Many years later, several curling stones were found having been thrown out from Flass House when it was vacated by the Red Cross in 1990 (FV14.)



*Figure 16. The remains of the dam which trapped water and created the curling pond*

- 4.43 The club held its AGM at the Rose and Crown Hotel (this might be a misprint for the Rose Tree public house, now King's Lodge) (DCA - Friday 21 October 1898).

Several members of the Durham Curling Club met at their rink at the far end of Shaw Wood Gardens, Durham, on Monday morning, for the purpose of a few hours enjoyment of the "roaring game". It was at first intended to play for a gold medal, but as a sufficiency of members did not assemble to form the orthodox "set," a couple of friendly games were indulged in, both of which were "skipped" by Mr J. Imrie and Mr J. Carrick. After a three hours' game the score stood – Mr Imrie, 19; and Mr Carrick, 15. The other players were the Rev. A. L. Henderson, Mr W. Macfarlane, Mr M. Cooke, Colonel Monks, Mr W. Wilson, and Mr J. Wilson. During the opening game the ice was very strong, and though a trifle rough was suitable for curling. During the progress of the second game, the water oozed through the crevices, and when the game stood Mr Carrick, 6; and Mr Imrie, 5; the game was abandoned. The games were witnessed by several non-players.  
*Durham County Advertiser - Friday 22 January 1886*



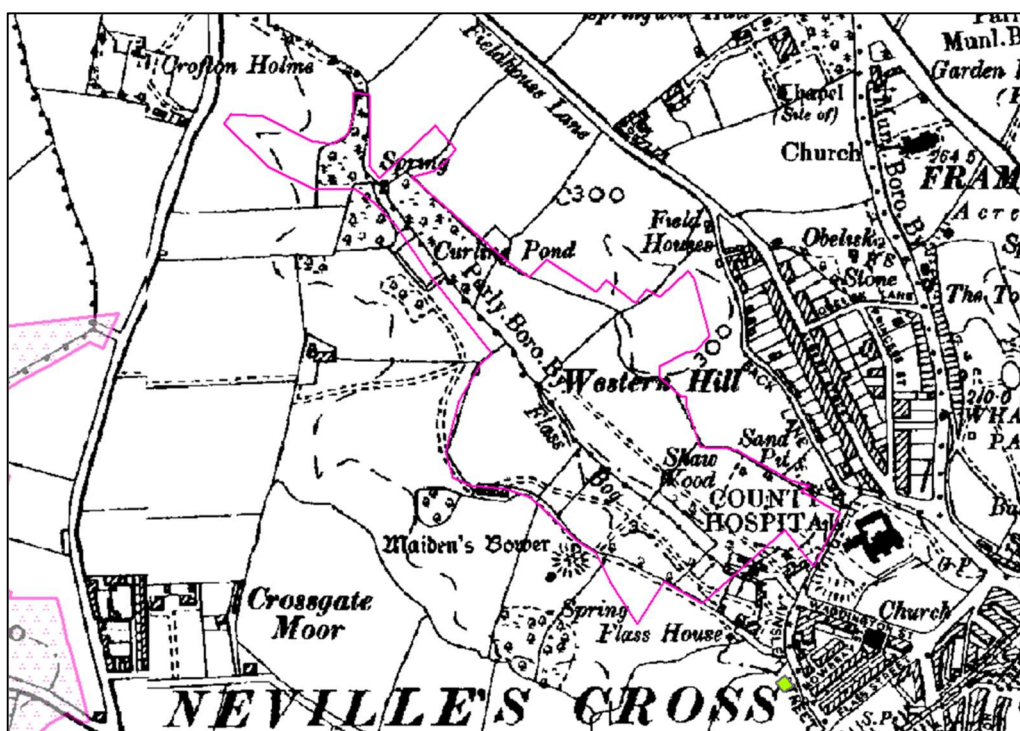


Figure 17. OS 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1891 (published 1893)



Figure 18. Part of the sluice at Mill Burn/Flass Bog which controlled water into the curling pond so that it froze in winter

- 4.44 Mr George Henderson Procter (189-1925) of Flass House was a notable individual. He was a Justice of the Peace and twice Mayor of Durham and one of the most eminent breeders of livestock in his time. He was awarded an O.B.E. for services to the police in the First World War. He ran a quarrying business in the vale which has left its mark.



His son Robert Sydney Procter became managing director of the 'Flass Quarrying Company' and the road haulage business 'George Henderson Procter Ltd.' Despite being paralysed from the waist down with poliomyelitis, he ran both companies from his office attached to Flass bungalow. The lorries ran from the former stables next to Flass bungalow. He died in the early 1950's and his wife remarried to Mr Christopher Stonehouse who acted as manager for both businesses for some time. He died in about 1957.<sup>20</sup> Flass House was also the location of George's poultry farm which adjoined the house; this was a place where Mr Procter bred prize winning birds for show and where he bred terriers in smart kennels at the back of the house. The Durham County Advertiser of Friday 28 April 1905, described the location as an:

'...ideal situation, in dene and on gentle grassy slopes. Running at the lowest level of his ninety odd acres of land, flows a rivulet of fresh water, which after the recent rains is just now in full flood affording excellent watering for the stock. Adjoining Flass House at the rear are the kennels' [home to award winning terriers since 1867 all with two FFs to their names]...'Nearby are the poultry pens ...along the shaded lower end of the grounds are the show birds' pens, each with a neat strip of green sward at the front, affording excellent running. In each, as in all the runs, tall trees afford capital shade and the grass is cut to carpet closeness for the sake of the foot feathers...A range of breeding pens adjoin those of the show birds...A few wild ducks are swimming in the little stream at the foot of the of the extreme run...In the distance, nestling in the shelter of the hillside, another breeding house and run is visible. Several of these...are dotted about the land at convenient spots, and one is not surprised to learn that in such excellent open and healthy surroundings the birds thrive so well and come out strong, vigorous, and clean.'<sup>21</sup>

- 4.45 The vale was also used for other sporting activities. In 1866 Mr Carr's 'Shawwood Gardens' was the location of a dinner party for 60 people from Newcastle Printers followed by a cricket match between Newcastle and Durham.<sup>22</sup>
- 4.46 Historic Ordnance Survey Maps 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition 1914-15 to 1945
- 4.47 Profound changes to the Vale were made in the 20th century with the extraction of sand in another quarry near Flass House. Flass House itself was used for convalescing soldiers during the First World War.<sup>23</sup> Buildings (FV10) near Flass House may have been quarry buildings or offices built at this time, but now much extended. Flass bungalow in particular was used as living accommodation/office buildings to the quarry. Other more modest brick out buildings were probably also part of the quarry and were shown on the 1939 OS map revision,<sup>24</sup> but demolished in the 1990s.
- 4.48 There was a sewage works at the top of the Vale, which was abandoned and later used as an allotment; in 2009 it was planted as a wild flower glade.

<sup>20</sup> Information from James Hunt dictated to Elizabeth Parham (see Appendix A for the transcript)

<sup>21</sup> Durham County Advertiser Friday 28 April 1905, p8; 16<sup>th</sup> June 1905

<sup>22</sup> Newcastle Journal 16<sup>th</sup> July 1866

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix A

<sup>24</sup> Not published until 1947 due to the war



- 4.49 The curling pond had lost its players to war and fell out of use. A large house – the Larches – was built at the end of a path leading from Fieldhouse Lane and Fieldhouse Terrace and allotments were laid out by 1939. Before 1939, a Bus Garage (Omnibus Depot) was built next to the Rose Tree Public House on land which had previously had a few small buildings located on it. There were also traces of allotments in Shaw Wood Garden, close to the Omnibus Depot and later four plots at the Flassburn Road entrance – all shown on the OS 1939 revision.



*Figure 19. Possible former quarry buildings (Flass Bungalow), now extended and modernised (FV10)*



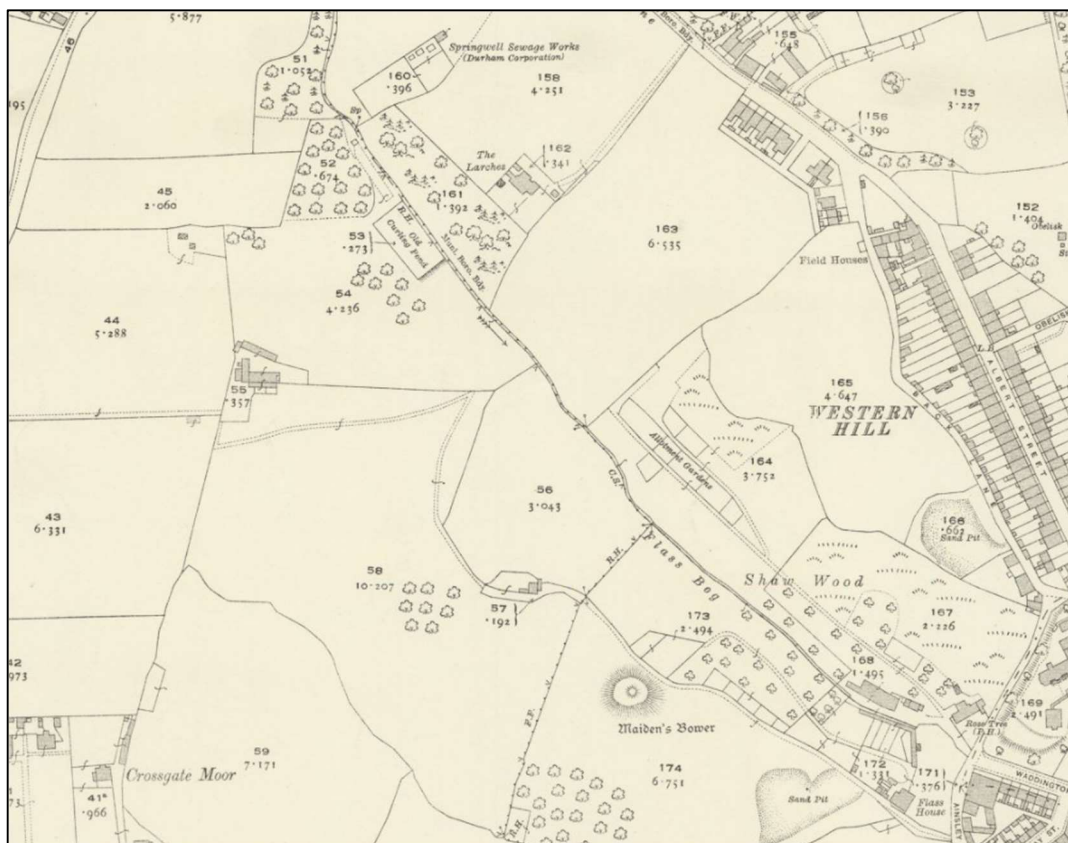


Figure 20. OS 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Durham XXVII.1. Revised: 1915, Published: 1919

4.50 Aerial photographs 1945 Onwards.

4.51 After the second world war much of the land on the edge of the Vale was developed for housing in North End to the east and St Monica Grove to the west. Parts of the vale were used to dump waste, now evidenced by broken pots and glass eroding from the banks below Back Western Hill. Building debris and slag from a nearby iron foundry, Hauxwell and Sons on North Road (FV11) was also spread across the vale near Flass Cottage and this is still evident as large mounds.



Figure 21. A drain cover (FV12) made by Hauxwell and Sons of North Road located near the old quarry offices NW of Flass House.



Figure 22. The continuing exploitation of sand had resulted in a substantial Flass Quarry (FV04) getting perilously close to Maiden's Bower by 1939 when this OS map was published. The bus depot had doubled in size.

- 4.52 Twenty additional allotments were laid out in 1946-7 on land previously used as gardens and allotments to the rear of Springwell Avenue, known as North End Allotments. These earlier allotments had grown produce as part of the war effort, assisted with stable manure from collieries and free seeds from Australia and America.<sup>25</sup> In 1944 the North End Allotment Association agreed to support the National Allotment Association fund to 'provide seeds and tools for the people of occupied Europe when released from their bondage'.<sup>26</sup> The number of allotment holders declined after the war, in part due to the withdrawal of free seeds when hostilities ended. It was also felt that the name 'Allotment Association' might put people off who didn't feel able to manage an allotment, and so the allotments were renamed The North End Gardens Association in 1946. The City Council leased land from the Lishman Estate in order to create 20 new allotments at the North End of Flass Vale for seven years starting on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1948. The council set out posts defining the perimeter of the allotments, but holders had to acquire and fix netting at their own expense to keep rabbits out.<sup>27</sup> There were traces of allotments at Shaw Wood near the former Omnibus depot and there were four plots at the Flassburn Road entrance.

<sup>25</sup> AGM Minutes 1941 and 1944, North End Archive. Potato varieties grown in 1944 include Arran pilot, Great Scot, Duke of York, Sharpe's express, Kerr's pink, King Edward and Majestic.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 1944.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 1949





*Figure 23. Pottery and glass from the 1940s dumped downhill from Back Western Hill*

- 4.53 The greatest change was the loss of its enclosures and agricultural uses and the sale of land for housing. A proposal to use it for residential development in 1968/9 was met with objections and a petition signed by 575 people. Proposals were resubmitted in the 1970s and this time the City Council approved the plans leading to a huge public outcry, triggering local groups and individuals to set up the 'Save Flass Vale' campaign. One of the election pledges of the Labour Party for the election in 1973 of a new City of Durham District Council (embracing the Municipal Borough and Durham Rural District Council and Brandon & Byshottles Urban District Council) was to do a land swap with the developer, i.e. to give them a development site somewhere else. Labour won the election and the new District Council's first Leader – Cllr Ramshaw – swiftly announced that the deal had been done.
- 4.54 The Council promised that the Vale would remain open land, however further actions were still required to protect it. The City of Durham Trust submitted evidence to a Commons Commissioner in July 1980 to make Flass Vale common land. Unfortunately, the Council objected and only two thirds of the space was made Common Land. In 1981 the Trust submitted evidence to an Inquiry on the County Council's Draft Revision of Public Rights of Way for the entrance to the Vale past the former Rose Tree Public House to be made a Public Right of Way, and this was agreed.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://durhamcity.org/tag/flass-vale/> [accessed 130324]



28



Figure 25. An aerial photograph dating to 1945 showing Flass with considerably less tree cover than today. Enclosures set out in 1769 are reverting to scrub at this time.





Figure 26. A contemporary aerial photograph taken from Google Earth. The extent of woodland is greater than on any earlier mapping evidence, but tree groupings may well reflect some of the earlier small plantations seen in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

- 4.55 Being located so close to Durham city centre, Flass Vale has seen further development including student housing at the former County Hospital (Rushyford Court), the former Fred Henderson garage site; and the private housing at the former bus depot site, the Bowers.
- 4.56 Flass Vale Wood Today.
- 4.57 The woodland today is a semi-natural broadleaved woodland covering about five hectares. The mature woodland is dominated by oak with holly understory and a ground flora of bluebells occupies most of the slopes. The abandoned quarry areas are dominated by young sycamore and hybrid poplar line the paths to the rear of the King's Lodge. Over 1500 trees have been planted in different locations since 2008.
- 4.58 A few areas of the former pasture grassland remain, the best being on Spice Pudding Hill with a variety of grass species, tormentil, sorrel and heath bedstraw. Some grassland has been colonised by bracken, rosebay willowherb, bramble and/or Himalayan balsam and while two small areas have been left to natural succession, the majority is being managed to restore herb-rich meadow.
- 4.59 Flass Burn has a low water flow in summer, but in winter small pools develop in the boggy areas which are used by amphibians.
- 4.60 The former curling pond area supports tall herb vegetation with some marsh species. Much of the valley bottom – (the old Flass Bog) is reverting to willow and alder woodland with a few patches of herb rich grassland remaining. Flass burn runs from north to south and is culverted beneath the former bus depot which is now private housing.
- 4.61 Access to the vale is good with designated public footpaths providing a circular walk around the rim of the bog. Here the countryside and wildlife can be enjoyed only minutes from the bustle of city life. The steep sides of the woodland are cut with paths and steps offering a variety of routes and distant views towards the cathedral from



Gibbet Knowle, widely known as Hangman's Hill. There are no bridleways but cyclists still use the paths and it is frequented by cross country runners from the local school. A few relic trees survive from the 19<sup>th</sup> century along historic pathways, some with initials carved on the trunks, now stretched beyond legibility by widening girths.



*Figure 27. Small pools provide a habitat for amphibians*

- 4.62 There are six access points into the vale at Flass House, Kings Lodge, Valeside, Larches Road, Flassburn Road and Johnson School. A non-designated overgrown footpath thought to be part of the route taken by monks between Durham and Beaurepaire in medieval time leads to the A167 from the top of the Vale. The former Flass Lane skirts around the edge of the site and the short cut through to the Kings Lodge. This was an important route from Durham city centre towards Chester-le-Street. It originally led from Framwellgate Bridge, up Crossgate, to Flass Vale (now via a small tunnel beneath the railway), past the Kingslodge hotel and then continued along Back Western Hill and Fieldhouse Lane to Newcastle Lane (now the A167).
- 4.63 Throughout the woodland there is evidence of ongoing management by the Friends of Flass Vale, a group founded in 2002. The Flass Vale Taskforce group meets twice a week to carry out maintenance of the Vale. Well maintained paths with steps create interesting routes through the woodland and hedgerows are being restored using traditional hedge-laying techniques. Attempts are also being made to re-wet the curling pond with temporary sluices diverting some water from the burn back on to the former pond.



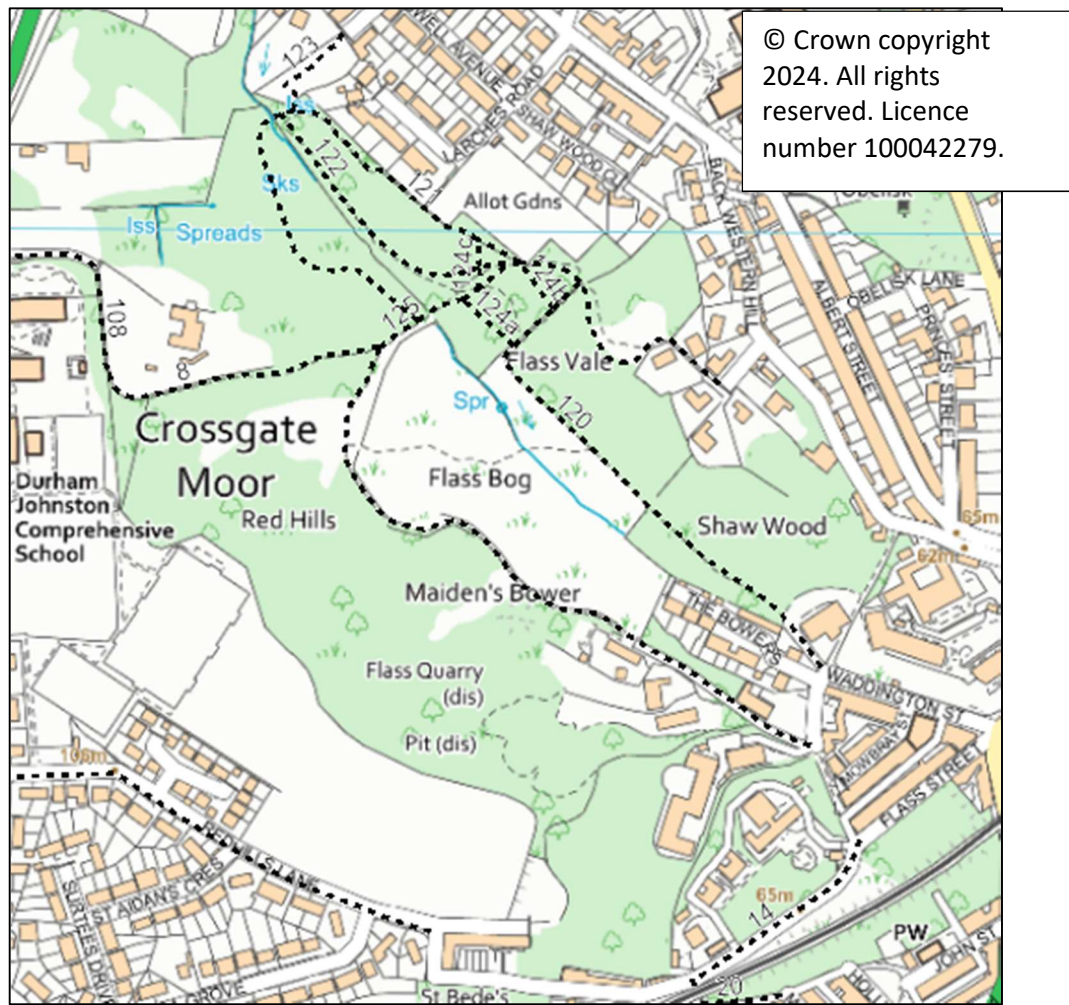


Figure 28. The rights of way around Flass Vale



*Figure 29. Historic hedgerows have been relaid by the Friends of Flass Vale Taskforce using traditional methods.*





*Figure 30. Rewetting the curling pond area with a temporary sluice*



## **5.0 SURVEY RESULTS AND SIGNIFICANCE.**

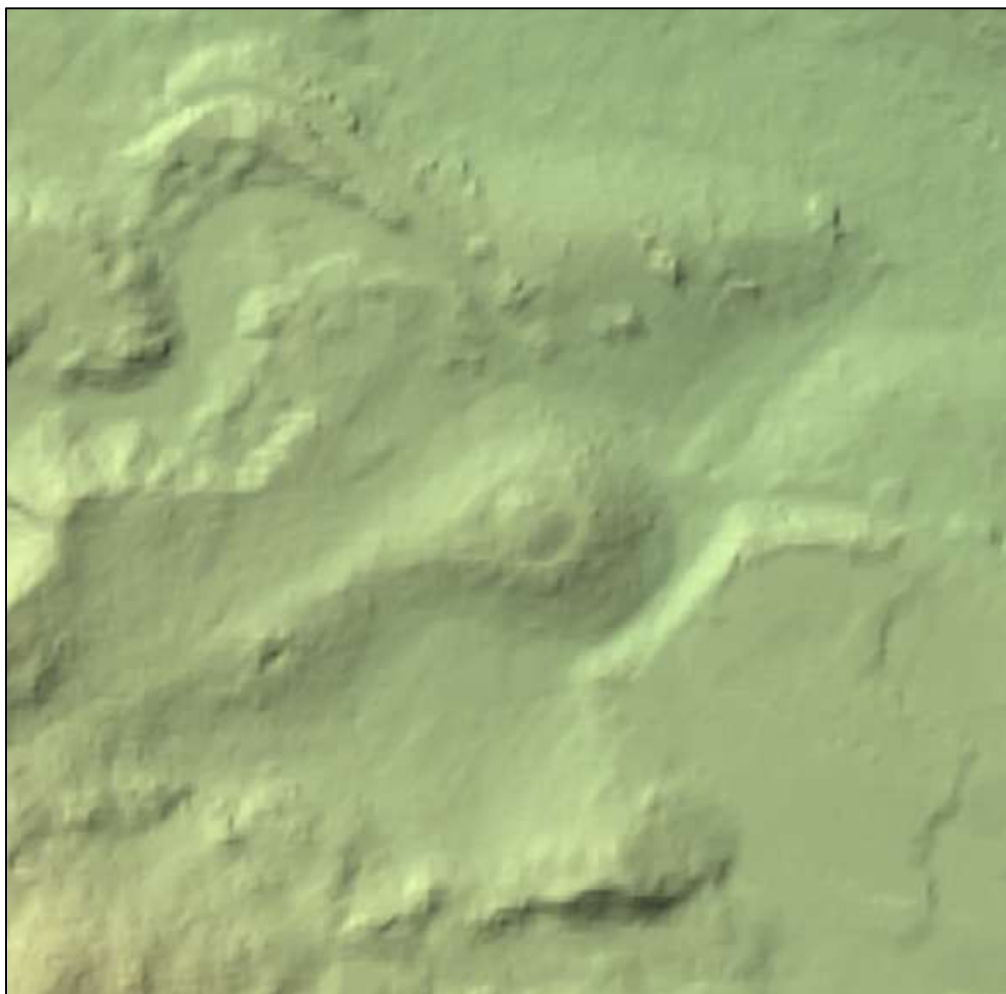
- 5.1 Two separate survey events were carried out as part of this project. The first was a day school to carry out geophysical survey of Maiden's Bower and the second a site visit in March 2024 to photograph and record the location and of heritage assets.
- 5.2 *The geophysical survey*
- 5.3 The day school was jointly organised with Belief in the North East and Durham Woodland Revival. It created an opportunity for Archaeological Services Durham University to provide training in geophysical survey techniques on the burial mound.
- 5.4 The results suggested the mound and berm were constructed of turf and topsoil, which now retain more moisture than the surrounding sand and gravel deposits, giving rise to anomalies identified in the geophysical survey.



*Figure 31. Geophysical survey work underway at Maiden's Bower with volunteers supervised by Durham University Archaeology Services (July 2023)*



- 5.5 The extent of the low resistance area corresponded well with the outer edge of the berm, as measured by the total station survey. Similarly, high resistance values recorded at the south-western corner of the survey area corresponded to a slight bank noted there and recorded in the topographic survey.
- 5.6 The magnetometer data contain a relatively high concentration of small, discrete, dipolar and positive magnetic anomalies. These anomalies typically reflect near surface ferrous and/or fired objects, usually general debris in the near-surface, however, there is a possibility that some of them could be associated with small items of archaeological ironwork, fired cremation pots or small soil-filled features, such as small pits or postholes.<sup>29</sup>



*Figure 32. Lidar coverage of the Maidens Bower showing it's circular, concentric stepped structure and the long spine of higher ground connecting it to the edge of Flass Vale. © Open Government Licence, Environment Agency National LIDAR Programme 2023.*

5.7 *The site visit*

- 5.8 The survey of Flass Vale woodland identified the following sites from desk-based research and fieldwork, much of which had already been carried out by the Friends of Flass Vale, supplemented with additional desk based research as part of this project.

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<sup>29</sup> DUAS 2023

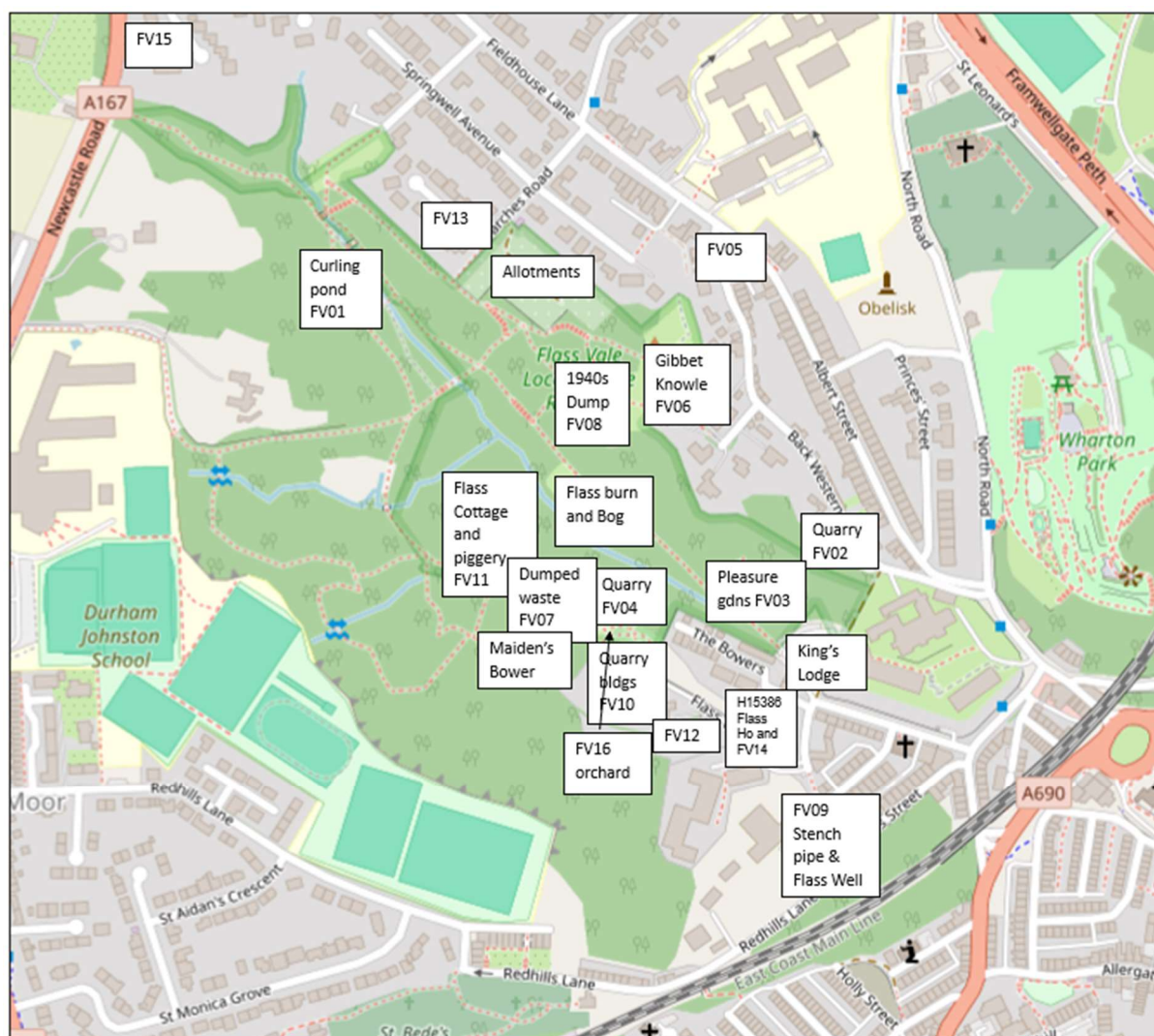


Figure 33. Approximate locations of sites referred to below: to be added to the HER (Numbers beginning with FV are sites to be added) or new information added to existing records (HER number already allocated)

Site Survey No.	Site Name	HER No. (if any)	Short Description	Grid reference	Source
Known HER site	Flass House gardens	H15386	Enclosures extending the rear of Flass House on historic mapping were the gardens, kennels and poultry cages belonging to Mr Proctor of Flass House, at one time mayor of Durham.	NZ26603 42689	Durham County Advertiser Friday 28 April 1905, p8 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed OS
Known HER site	King's Lodge, aka Rose Tree or Rose public house	H36773	Archway leading into the car park is modelled on an earlier archway into the pleasure grounds to the rear	NZ26659 42683	Site visit 15.3.2024
FV01	Curling Pond		Built c.1885 by damming the beck	NZ 26286 4305	OS 2 <sup>nd</sup> edition 1891 (published 1893)



			and used until the First World War by the Durham City Curling Club		Site visit 15.3.2024
FV02	Sand pit		Presumably opened to provide sand for building works and iron casting, located at Back Western Hill. Now planted with trees.	NZ26675 42803	OS 2nd edition 1891 (published 1893) DCA January 4 <sup>th</sup> 1901 Site visit 15.3.2024
FV03	Shaw Wood Pleasure Gardens		Shown on the tithe map of 1838 when it was known as Flass Bog and owned by William Darling and rented by John Dixon. Consisted of small enclosures and planted with ornamental bushes and orchards.	NZ26609 42781	The tithe map of 1838 for Crossgate Township. DDR/EA/TTH/1/68
FV04	Flass (sand) Quarry		Early 20 <sup>th</sup> century sand pit presumably providing building materials for a growing Durham. The quarry reached close to Maiden's Bower and Flass bungalow was built on its edge by 1939.	NZ26674 42804	OS 3rd edition. Durham Sheet XXVII Revised: 1914 to 1915, Published: 1923  OS 6 inch 1939
FV05	Field House		Shown on the enclosure award plan of 1809	NZ26578 43043	DHC/6/III/7
FV06	Gibbet Knowle (Hangman's Hill)		Referred to this on enclosure plan of 1809, later mistakenly recorded as Gilbert's Knowe on the tithe map of 1838. Reputedly the location where bodies were displayed after hanging. Hill top location which still has views towards the city.	NZ26497 43021	DHC/6/III/7
FV07	Flass Cottage and piggery		19 <sup>th</sup> century cottage with 20 <sup>th</sup> century piggery and butchers	NZ26372 42791 and NZ26371 42793	FoFV 2010
FV08	1940s dump		Sherds seen eroding from the soil	NZ26414 42770	FoFV 2010
FV09	Stench pipe close to Flass Well		Tall cast iron pipe with decorative top and base designed to take foul stench	NZ26673 42578	Site visit 15.3. 2024

			away from sewage pipes below ground		
FV10	Quarry buildings, now Flass Bungalow		Shown on early 20 <sup>th</sup> century maps next to Flass Quarry, now residential, and much altered.	NZ26530 42691	Site visit 15.3.2024 and 3 <sup>rd</sup> ed OS map
FV11	Forge (G. Hauxwell and Sons, North Road) debris/dumped materials		Area of mounds of dumped building materials and slag allegedly from the foundry on North Road	NZ26505 42964	Site visit 15.3.2024
FV12	Drain cover made by G. Hauxwell and Sons, North Road.			NZ26518 42733	Site visit 15.3.2024
FV13	Bodymaker's Close		Referred to this on enclosure plan of 1809. Presumably named after the execution spot for criminals and associated with Gibbet Knowle.	NZ26298 43174	DHC/6/III/7
FV14	Curling stones		Broken curling stones found at Flass House	NZ26603 42689	Val Standen pers comm
FV15	Stone trough		Stone trough adjacent to the A167. This was an important route in the past to Beaurepaire. It is not a Right Of Way.	NZ26094 43219	FoFV, not seen on OS map or fieldwork, so not confirmed
FV16	Orchard		Historic orchard opposite and slightly to north of Flass Bungalow. Some fruit trees still survive.	NZ26518 42733	1 <sup>st</sup> ed OS





Figure 34. Some of the volunteers from the Friends of Flass Vale carrying out the site visit

#### 5.9 Heritage Significance of Flass Vale Wood

Both the protection offered to archaeological sites in the planning system and the criteria Historic England use for designation (listed buildings, scheduled monuments etc), are based on what is called 'significance'. This is a way of understanding why something is important and for each site or group of sites (or indeed the whole wood), it can be divided up into four 'interests'. These are Archaeological, Historic, Architectural and Artistic. The significance of Flass Vale Wood is as follows:

#### 5.10 Archaeological Interest.

The contribution of archaeological interest to the heritage significance of Flass Vale wood resides in the physical evidence of its former land use and in the fabric of the remaining structures.

At first appearance the vale is a natural environment. But only on closer inspection can older features be discerned.

**Maiden's Bower** is clearly of the **highest level of significance**, its status as a scheduled monument marking it as nationally important. This special interest is not limited to its structure, but also its carefully selected position on a promontory mound designed to be seen from a distance and to view over its surroundings. The geophysical survey suggests that buried deposits do survive, although a dip in the top suggests that at least one attempt has already been made to rob it, or it may relate to the cross that was positioned here at least until the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The other visible features in the woodland are of more local or limited interest, but they still add interest to the woodland and can enhance the experience of woodland users.

**Gibbet Knowle** is not unique – many settlements had such gruesome displays on the edge of town, but it is an important part of Durham's history. Again, it is not just the

hilltop itself that is of significance, but also its setting. It was designed to be seen from afar but especially on the approach into and out of Durham. It is not clear to what extent buried deposits might survive from its use as a gibbet. Possibly a series or reused post holes and possibly discarded remains of various corpses, probably spread over a wide area due to animal activity. However its archaeological potential overall is **limited**.

The **curling pond is of local interest** and was relatively short lived. However through this, we can glimpse into past lives and it is an insight into just how much the vale has changed since the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Buried remains are likely to relate to the construction of the rink and it is possible that the edges might have scatters of discarded curling stones or lost objects from spectators. Broken curling stones were found at Flass House in recent years where the curling society secretary once lived.

**Flass Cottage and piggery** are now in very poor condition and were only of **local interest**. Their potential to reveal archaeological remains are now limited by tree growth, but bricks, channels and troughs are still discernible from the piggeries.

The former **sand quarries** are unlikely to contain much of archaeological interest and the recent tree planting further reduces that. However they do create a varied undulating terrain which adds to the interest of the woodland walks.

There is little left of the **pleasure gardens and orchards**. Few of these survive nationally and so they have some rarity value. Their interest is mainly in the surviving fruit trees and garden plants. The historic orchard (shown on the 1<sup>st</sup> ed OS) next to Flass Bungalow is significant and apple and pear trees of heritage value survive, (maybe related to Flass House and gardens (H15386)). The Friends of Flass Vale have continued to develop the orchard with new fruit trees also of heritage value where possible; apple, pears, cherry, greengages, hazel, vines and fruit bushes including black currant, redcurrant, raspberries, blueberries, loganberries etc and a small herb garden. A wassailing event is held annually in January in the Orchard. The orchards clearly have considerable value to the local community.

The use of the woodland to **dump domestic waste** in the 1940s ( and later) does create some limited archaeological potential but this is largely without context and broken glass and pottery sherds are a hazard to dogs and young children. So while the individual finds can be of interest (such as bricks) and are worth monitoring, the debris is generally of **little archaeological interest**.





Figure 35. Scraping a brick clean from the waste near Flass Cottage to see the maker's name. It was a Durham made brick.

Few **enclosures** survive from 1769-1802 because they were created from hedgerows. Where they do survive they are of interest as the last surviving remnants of a landscape now much altered and where possible their revival through hedge-laying is to be welcomed not just for their archaeological interest, but as an additional wildlife habitat.

#### 5.11 Architectural Interest

The architectural interest of Flass Vale wood is found in the design and materials of any upstanding buildings or structures and any contribution this brings to the setting of the wider landscape and neighbouring listed buildings. The woodland itself has very little in the way of architectural remains.

**Flass Cottage** is reduced to archaeology and of no architectural interest.

The former **Rose Public House (also Rose Tree Inn, and King's Lodge)**, is now wholly rebuilt after an arson attack, using some reused carvings to add interest, but no longer appears to be of architectural interest. It had been a listed building but was delisted after the fire. The King's Lodge arch has allegedly been designed to reflect an earlier archway that welcomed people to the pleasure gardens.

On the edge of the woodland is **Flass House** (H15386), a good example of a Victorian house with many features surviving (externally at least). It is increasingly unusual to see traditional sash windows and so they should be valued. The architectural interest of Flass House is enhanced by the historic interest arising from information about people who have lived there in the past (see below) and some archaeological interest as the location where broken curling stones were found (this was the home of the curling club's secretary Mr Procter) and so links in with the curling rink further up the vale.

The main architectural interest lies outside the woodland along the terraced streets nearby. The rows of terraced housing at Western Hill, Albert Street, Ainsley Street, Mowbray and Waddington Streets leading to the County Hospital and the listed Railway Viaduct all add considerable architectural interest and serve to emphasise the Victorian growth of Durham but also enhance the natural topography of the vale. Collectively, they make a positive contribution to the Durham City Conservation Area.

Most other buildings that skirt the woodland are interwar period. Flass Bungalow and outbuildings appear on the third addition 1914-15, the bungalow /possibly former office/accommodation retains much of its character but the outbuildings were demolished in 1990s replaced by Highgate House and Durham House. Interwar buildings at Fieldhouse Lane, North Crescent and Springwell Road area retain many of their design features. Development from the 1950s to 1970s at Flassburn Road, the Larches, Springfield Park and Valeside are relatively unobtrusive but are of no particular architectural interest.

**Stink or stench pipes**, as found on Ainsley Street (named after the mustard manufacturers) next to Flass Well are under-appreciated heritage assets of **some significance**. With the frilly tops being located only at giraffe eye level, they are often dismissed as an iron pipe of no interest. They might also be disguised as signposts, lampposts or telegraph poles. However with no modern uses, they are under threat and it would be sad to lose this example as it makes a modest contribution to historic character in the conservation area.

**Flass Well** is located next to the stink pipe. Architecturally it is of little interest and is easily outdone by more ornate Victorian wells elsewhere in Durham, but the recent excavations and interpretations do suggest a value to the local community. However such modest heritage assets (including the stench pipe) add to the overall interest and significance of the wider area.

#### 5.12 Artistic Interest

The artistic interest of the wood and any historic/archaeological features within it relates to things such as designed views, places that appear in works of art, folklore, historic photos or in song, poetry or prose. Associations with any famous or significant people in history (national or local), will also add to artistic significance.



*Figure 36. No artist or date noted (not in Palace Green)*





*Figure 37. Gibby photographic prints collection at Durham University: Flass Vale looking South East showing Presbyterian church Waddington Street and the new Redhills c.1925 CITY/B/9 and B/47 <sup>30</sup>*

Flass Vale wood has surprisingly featured in artistic works, largely because prior to becoming well-wooded, it afforded views across the vale from the north west towards that most artistic of views the cathedral and castle on the peninsula (and after 1857, the railway viaduct). Consequently the same view appears in historic paintings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in photography from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and so the vale was, prior to being wooded, an important artistic station suitable for appreciating the picturesque. The vale was therefore of **considerable artistic interest**. However such views are no longer possible, largely due to tree growth, although limited views can be obtained from Maiden's Bower and Gibbet Knowle, but these have considerable encroachment from recent development. The overall artistic interest of the vale is therefore currently limited but could be restored through further tree thinning.

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<sup>30</sup> **CITY/B/47** Flass Vale looking South East showing Presbyterian church Waddington Street and the new Redhills NUM c1925 by W.A. Bramwell CITY/B/9 and **CITY/B/9** c.1925 Flass Vale looking South East showing Presbyterian church Waddington Street and the new Redhills NUM F9a CITY/B/47

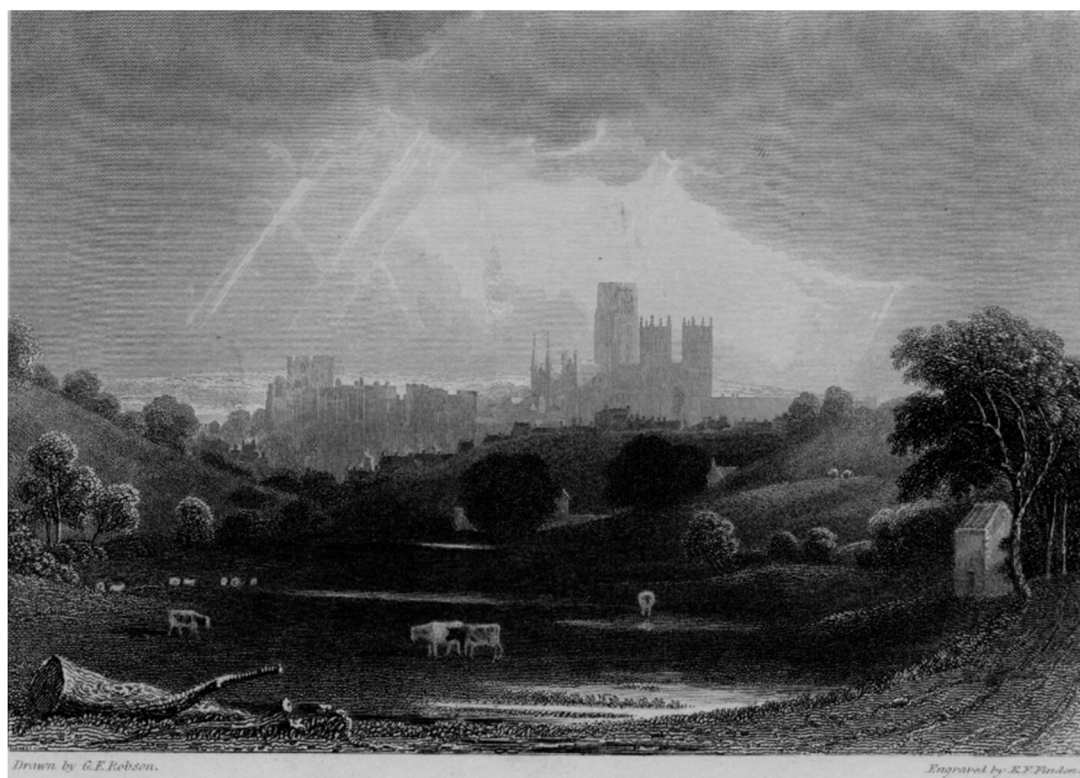


Figure 38. Durham in 1830. Drawn by G.F. Robson. Engraved by E.F. Finden (DUL SD++ 00370/35a)

Perhaps more surprisingly is that Flass Cottage has also been the subject of a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century watercolour by **C.R.Wheatley**. This painting shows the cottage while it was still being whitewashed (and a pantile roof?) with 'Old Ned' walking along the adjacent path. The painting was once hung in the Rose Tree public house.<sup>31</sup> Nothing is known about the artist and to what extent his painting was speculative or based on what was still visible at the time. However the lower courses of the cottage survive and it was orientated as shown in the painting with the gable end towards the path. The scatter of building debris also suggests that the outbuilding abutted it as shown in the painting.

The painting adds to the interest of the remains of the cottage by helping us see back into the past in a way that can be difficult when only faced with vegetation covered foundations.

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<sup>31</sup> FoFV 2010



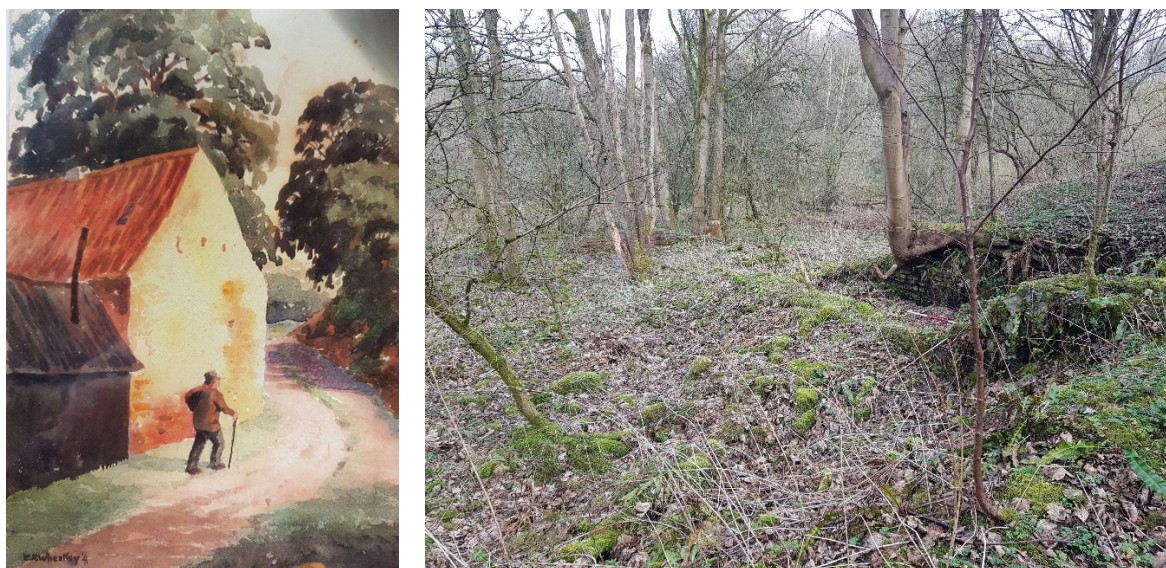


Figure 39. Left: Flass Cottage watercolour by C.R. Wheatley 1941? Right: the cottage remains today visible as a rectangular shape with a tree growing out of it (the ranging pole is lying inside the cottage). The photo is taken from the path that Old Ned was walking along.

Outside the woodland, Flass Well is associated with the ghost story of Janet Ramshaw from Western Hill where she lived with her mother and pet parrot. She regularly visited the well with her fiancé and was stabbed to death there by a jealous lover named (curiously hinting at his violent behaviour) Jabez Trickett, who then enlisted. The murder was witnessed by the parrot who informed the authorities (somehow). Trickett was found guilty of Janet's murder and Jabez went mad while awaiting execution. A subsequent spate of ghostly sightings starting in 1789 described 'a spectral form gliding along with noiseless step...uttering a strange unearthly shriek.' Nobody suggested it might be the parrot.<sup>32</sup> Presumably if he had been hung as planned his body would have been displayed at Gibbet Knowe.

Such ghostly goings on provide a little local colour to the vale environs, but possibly not as much as the parrot did. Until the ghost story is proven to be true, it will be of local interest rather than national.

#### 5.13 Historic Interest

Historic interest allows an understanding of how historic events both ancient and recent have contributed to the form and landscape of the woodland and informs the understanding of how it has evolved.

**Flass Vale is of some historic interest** because it has good surviving evidence of its uses and the people who lived there from at least the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In particular the surviving enclosure wards, plus the tithe maps give an insight into an earlier less wooded landscape and the people who made a living from it. Local newspaper reports of curling competitions and local residents also add considerable interest.

#### 5.14 Setting

Whilst not a specific 'interest' setting is also key to heritage significance and is relevant both to the site itself and the impact care, conservation and development of the woodland. Some archaeological sites have an intentionally designed setting (see above re Maiden's Bower and Gibbet Knowle) or a fortuitous one where people enjoy

<sup>32</sup> Ainsley's Almanac 1887. Palace Green library Special Collections ; XL 059.4281 AIN/15

and appreciate a specific view (the north west of the vale looking towards the peninsula in the 19<sup>th</sup> century).



*Figure 40. View from Gibbet Knowle towards the cathedral*

The main setting interest for the woodland as a whole is the contribution it makes towards the wider Conservation Area. Shaw Wood or Flass Vale creates an impressive green backdrop to the terraced streets of Waddington Street and Ainsley Street whilst also terminating the urban character. The wooded steep banks of the former sand quarry to the rear of Kings Lodge also have very high amenity value.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore important to keep the setting free from unsympathetic development.

- 5.15 However it is the combination of interests that makes Flass Vale special. The combination of surviving remains and the stories of competitions and afternoon teas that flesh out our understanding of the vale's people in the past that creates significance. At Flass House it is the combination of architectural interest through surviving Victorian features combined with historic evidence of the Proctor family who once lived there and their dog breeding, bird fancying, political and curling activities that turn Flass House from a house into a home. And it is Wheatley's painting of Flass Cottage and Old Ned that provides an insight into the past and helps to interpret the very ruinous remains. Finally, it is the location of the wood on the edge of a densely populated urban area of considerable architectural character that creates a welcome green backdrop and a place to appreciate the countryside and wildlife without leaving the city.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.durham.gov.uk/media/10734/Durham-City-Conservation-Area-Crossgate/pdf/DurhamCityConservationAreaCrossgate1.pdf?m=636736391275870000>



## **6.0 SUGGESTED FURTHER WORK.**

The Friends of Flass Vale have an existing work programme based on their mission statement: “In co-operation with local authorities, landowners and other organisations, to protect, preserve, maintain, restore and improve the natural beauty of Flass Vale, while respecting its wildness.”

This mission statement concentrates on the wildlife interest rather than the heritage interest and could perhaps be slightly altered to include the heritage interest. However, with the exception of Maiden’s Bower which is of national importance, much of the woodland can be managed with its wildlife interest as the priority largely because the heritage interest is at a local level rather than a high level and our wildlife needs our protection. It may be that in doing so it can have an increasingly important role in linking green spaces in the city, but also by contribution to the Durham Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) which could help to resource new planting and habitat creation.

### **6.14 Further Archaeological Survey/Investigation Suggestions**

There is no record of Maiden’s Bower being excavated; the renowned 19<sup>th</sup> century Durham barrow excavator, Canon Greenwell, preferred to excavate beyond the North East as part of his summer expeditions. The dip in the top of the barrow is likely to be where a wooden cross was erected commemorating the raising of the Corporal of St. Cuthbert, but could be a robber trench (or both). The barrow is not under threat; trees having been removed from the site by the Friends of Flass Vale, therefore there is no need to carry out expensive and potentially damaging excavations (as all excavation ultimately damages or destroys a site). However limited trial trenching could be carried out to test the results of the geophysical survey and to drum up additional community support if required. Scheduled Monument Consent would be required for any invasive works.

### **6.15 Ideas for interpretation**

The site is already interpreted via the Friends’ web site and the advantage of this is that it can easily be updated and it avoids cluttering the natural character of the woodland with interpretation boards. A board is currently located along the path behind the Kingslodge near a timber bench, but once inside the woodland the green spaces are devoid of panels – this seems an appropriate approach which avoids introducing intrusive elements into the woodland. There is a board near the Flassburn Road entrance with information about wildlife in the Vale A panel was recently (2023) placed at Flass Well. The Friends of Flass Vale are also looking at new signage throughout the woodland.

QR codes mounted on posts offer a cheap and unobtrusive way to link back to the information on the web site. QR codes are free to produce, the web site is already being curated and hosted, the information can be updated or added to at no cost by volunteers and if QR codes get damaged, they are easily replaced. Temporary QR codes can also be made for special occasions (Easter egg hunt/outdoor classrooms?) and then removed.

However there is scope to combine artistic or creative small scale interpretation such as seating made from fallen trees, carved with inscriptions, low level wooden signs for field names, or the broken curling stones secured to the perimeter of the curling rink, along with perhaps a new large scale curling stone, inscribed with text and a seat where spectators can gather to watch the grass grow.

#### 6.16 Conservation and Protection needs for Archaeological Sites

Maintenance should be carried out to prevent trees self-seeding on Maiden's Bower so that disturbance to buried archaeological deposits is avoided through root action.

Views should also be maintained from Maiden's Bower and Gibbet Knowle as these form part of their significance.

The curling pond will only be recognisable as a heritage asset if trees are prevented from growing here.

The planting of legacy fruit trees in the site of the old orchards should be continued.

Otherwise, management can be led by the natural environment and amenity interests.

The Friends of Flass Vale should be recognised as a consultee by Durham County Council, to comment on planning applications next to the Vale that would have an impact on its setting. This should be carried out as part of the normal planning consultation process and would give the council access to expert local knowledge.



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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Flass House, by James Hunt of Flass Bungalow /Flass House December 2023**

Account dictated by James Hunt to Elizabeth Parham

The family name was Procter rather than the more usual Proctor. George Henderson Procter (O.B.E. awarded for services to the police in WW 1) was Mayor of Durham in the late 1800's. He started and ran a quarrying business. His son Robert Sydney Procter (James' uncle Bob) was MD of the quarrying company "Flass Quarrying Company" and the road haulage business "George Henderson Procter Ltd". Despite being paralysed from the waist down with poliomyelitis, he ran both companies from his office attached to Flass bungalow. The lorries ran from the former stables next to Flass bungalow. He died in the early 1950's.

James' aunt (Mrs Robert Procter) remarried Mr Christopher Stonehouse who acted as manager for both businesses for some time. He died in 1957 and is buried at Castle Eden. The business had been sold before he died but to whom is unknown. Another road haulage business called "Geoffrey Dickson Ltd" was next door. James mother "Mrs Olive Hunt" worked as Uncle Bob's secretary and married Mr James Hunt who acted as manager of the company. Sadly he died in January 1939 leaving Mrs Olive Hunt to run the business and bring up James (named after his father) who was born later the same year ! During WW2 Mrs Olive Hunt ran both businesses .

Moulding sand (ground up sandstone or local fluvioglacial sand) was for Dorman Long Iron and Steel Works in Middlesbrough for making castings for parts for military vehicles and huge propellers for ships. Sand was used for sandbags to protect buildings from explosions. After 1945 the building industry almost stopped so little use for sand and gravel for roads. The delivery drivers employed reduced from 25 to 8 or 9! The business declined 1945-50 and the building industry recovery was too late to save the business so it was sold. One of the last contracts had been materials to build Durham Comprehensive School.

James attended Bows School from 8-14 (as a boarder for the last 18 months) and Durham School from 14-18 as a day boy. He attended Durham University 1959-62 when he graduated in Botany and Zoology.

Flass House was converted into a nursing home for wounded soldiers after WW1. During WW2 Mr Meritt (Durham County Surveyor) lived in the house from where he drew up plans for new roads in County Durham. After he left , Flass House was taken over as the Red Cross Headquarters for County Durham and was lived in by a colonel.

I find this all very interesting and hope you do too. James was wondering who Gordon Pearson was and what was his wife's family name ? James was actually born in a hospital/ nursing home in Newcastle rather than in Flass bungalow.