

ANCIENT HISTORY OF GDF FOCUS SITE HAVERIGG/KIRKSANTON, Jan Bridget

The area where the Nuclear Waste Services (NWS) may site the world's largest Geological Disposal Facility (nuclear dump) has a history going back to at least Mesolithic times. The following are extracts from *Millom and District Prehistoric Past*, 2023, Jan Bridget

SUNKEN FOREST OFF HAVERIGG POINT



Part of sunken 'forest' off Haverigg Point (Stephe Cove)

Having learnt that a submerged forest had been sighted at low tide **off Haverigg Point** in 2018, the Duddon Valley Local History Group decided to conduct research; they identified oak and willow trees dating to c.6,500 BC.ⁱ

FLINTS

A flint scatter was found west of Silecroft golf course, and possibly represents the remains of a Bronze Age raised beach habitation.

We are told at Kirksanton Hawes *“a small quantity of flints with Mesolithic affinities were picked up by ...[Mr. D. Nickson] on the coastal strip between Silecroft and Haverigg, although no microliths were found.”*

HUMAN REMAINS

In February 2009, a fossil hunter found human bones at Hodbarrow Point; the bones were sticking out on a 50 feet high ledge between two beaches near Port Haverigg holiday village. It is thought the bones had been redeposited from elsewhere; perhaps they were found during mining operations and reburied? Upon carbon dating, archaeologists at the University of Glasgow found there were several individuals who lived between 2210-2010 BC and 1620-1440 BC. So a burial ground was possibly disturbed. The bones are at Millom Heritage and Arts Centre.ⁱⁱ



Hodbarrow Point Bones (Millom Heritage and Arts Centre)

STONE AXES

A polished stone axe head was found at Hodbarrow Iron Ore Mine in the topsoil removed when mining began in 1870 and is now in the Liverpool Museum.

A roughout stone axe found in a potato field at Hodbarrow, by Charles Bailey (1925-2007).ⁱⁱⁱ



Roughout Stone Axe found at Hodbarrow (Duane Farren)

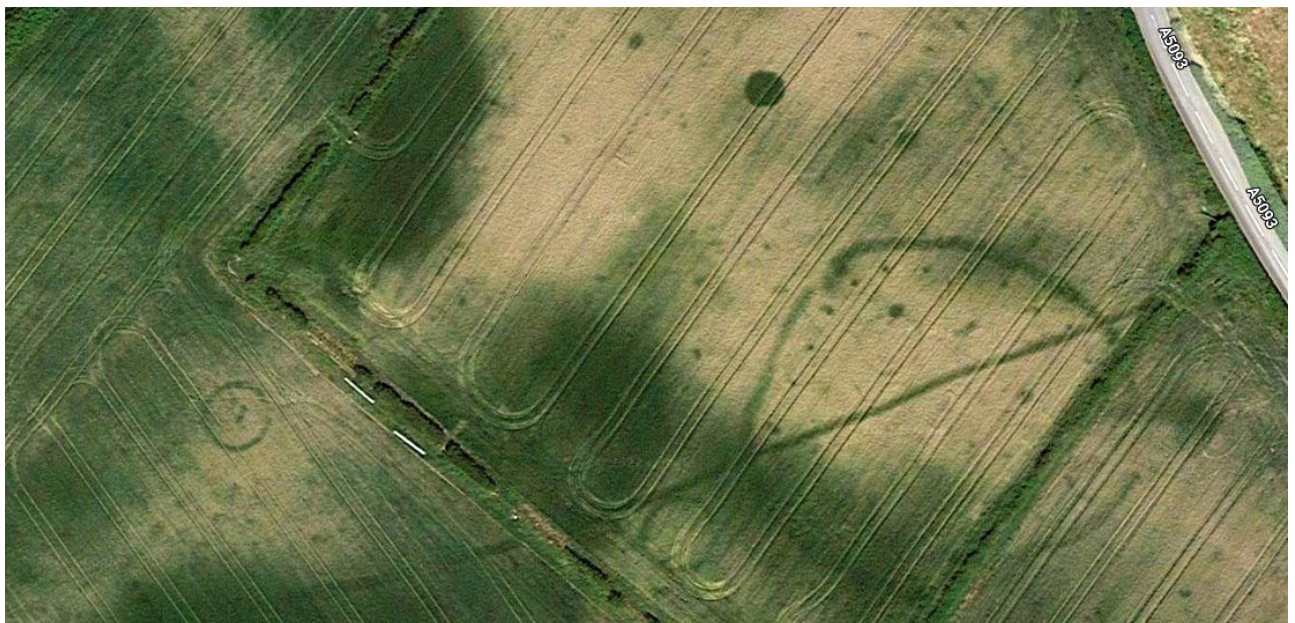
Part of a Neolithic stone axe (the cutting edge), is believed to have been ploughed up near Monks Holme in Kirksanton.

Another one was found in 1868, 3/4 mile south west of Silecroft; the present whereabouts of it is unknown.

A small polished stone axe was found in 1933 in the wall of an old stone hut in the garden of Cross Villa, Silecroft; it is now in the Tullie House Museum, Carlisle.

CROPMARKS

Here is the cropmark below Giant's Grave at Kirksanton with a line running through it and two smaller circles nearby:



Google Aerial: Giant's Grave Cropmark (2) (Image: Copyright Google, 2021)

And here is the one above Giant's Grave, followed by the two together, suggesting they are similar sizes:



Google Aerial: Giant's Grave Cropmark (3) (Image: Copyright Google, 2021)



Google Aerial: Giant's Grave (4) (Image: Copyright Google, 2021)

Here is another screen shot of the northern one:



Google Aerial: Giant's Grave (5) (Image: Copyright Google, 2021)

Which begs the question: what are those other cropmarks above the curvilinear one?

There is meant to be a third cropmark at Kirksanton which is to the north east of the top one on the other side of the railway but this currently does not show up on Google Earth; this is clearly a large and complex site.

GIANT'S GRAVE

Giant's Grave Standing Stones at Kirksanton (also known as 'The Portals of Eden') are just over two miles from Millom, seven miles from Swinside Stone Circle and are on private land. But there is a public footpath close-by (best to park just before Limestone Signal Box where there is room for about two cars. Go into the field on the left, through the gate; walk along by the hedge and you will eventually come to the stones). Frank Warriner tells us the Giant's Grave was mentioned in 1309 as "the two standing stones."^{iv} In the 18th Century it was said the two standing stones were part of a burial mound which is now gone.^v



Giant's Grave, Kirksanton (J. Bridget)

One is about three metres high whilst the other is around two and a half metres; they are separated by four and a half metres and are situated between the coast and Lacro Bank.

Both stones have evidence of prehistoric rock art in the form of a simple cup design carved into the rock – the stones could be from the Neolithic period with the cup marks added in the Bronze Age; one of the stones looks like a frowning person with one eye.



One of Giant's Grave Standing Stones, Kirksanton (J. Bridget)

Blackcombe lies to the north whilst Lacra Bank, and its numerous funerary stone monuments, is to the east. It is suggested^{vi} that as the two stones are aligned southwest-northeast, and their narrow edges point towards Whicham Beck Valley between Blackcombe and Lacra Bank, that they represent a safe route between the hills; or they could be an ancient sign post pointing in the direction of something else, maybe Swinside or Po House, where, nearby, there is part of a standing stone whose fabric is similar to that of the standing stones of Giant's Grave at Kirksanton: it has the same crystalline quartz banding.^{vii} It only stands 1.5m high, and some distance behind it is a natural spring which is marked by a flat cup marked slab.^{viii} Po House is, of course, not too far from Lacra Bank; it is also worth noting that quern stones have been found at Po House.

The simplest explanation would be that they were used by the farmer to align the stars in order to tell the season, important for sowing crops.

Lacra Bank

Not far from Giant's Grave is Lacra Bank, situated near the old Lacra Farm house above Kirksanton village and below Great Knott, with splendid views of the sea towards the south west. It represents a change in focus from the large, open, communal monuments of the Neolithic period, toward smaller, family or individual monuments possibly claiming tenure of the land.

The earliest description of the site was an article by J. Eccleston, *Ancient Remains at Lacra and Kirksanton*, 1872,^{ix}

It is an ancient cultivated estate, situated on the crown of a hill, 500 feet above sea level...It is held by the lords of Millom, by a peppercorn rent acknowledgement...The ancestors of the present proprietor, J.S. Myers, Esq., of Po House, purchased it from the Huddlestons. The objects worthy of notice on Lacra, are a kirk or keil called "Old Kirk,"^x two stone circles, three artificial platforms or terraces, an enclosure dyke, and an extensively furrowed surface.

Eccleston describes the ruins of the "Old Kirk," then tells us a short distance away *"are three terraces or platforms rising above each other. They are evidently artificial and may have been used for public gatherings..."* He continues,

Of the two stone circles, the lower one is the most perfect, wanting only one stone to make it complete. They have been eight in number, of the boulder type, and have formed a hexagon (sic), one at the centre, and two near together, at the eastern angle. The arrangement of the stones is nearly mathematically correct, being about six yards apart, and the same distance from the centre. The upper circle is situated near to the farm house of Lacra. It is the same dimensions as the lower, of the hexagon form, with one stone lately removed and one wanting. Here again are two stones placed at the eastern angle. This fact is significant with regard to the circles in these parts, the entrance to the Swinside circle being also on the eastern side. The summit of the hill at a subsequent day, but beyond record, has been brought under the dominion of the ploughshare. The furrows, which run in all directions, vary from five feet to nine feet in distance, and the work has been done at a time when no enclosure existed on Lacra. The plough may be traced to the verge of the steep, round the edge of the conical eminences, over the surfaces of rocks still bearing the grooves made by the ponderous ploughshare, and through the stone circles in regular line, without disturbing, to any great extent, the stones of which they are composed. From the nature of the work done it is manifestly that of oxen; and it is a fair inference that the race which then held dominion, had no regard or veneration for the works of their predecessors, whose customs, religion, and government were as unintelligible to them as to us....

The site has been used over many different periods and is believed to have been specifically created to carry out funerals. It is suggested^{xi} that there is also a rare stone avenue which, like the circles, possibly aligns towards the solstice sun. Stone avenues were perhaps an Early Bronze Age equivalent of the Neolithic cursus, implying they may have been used for processions.



Lacra B (Jem Freisesleben)^{xii}

Lacra is a funerary complex which includes at least four rather dilapidated stone circles (marked A, B, C and D on the diagram below); they all contain inner burials, with urn burials, a cist and a small round cairn, which may or may not be contemporary with the circles. The buildings entitled Lacra are the old farm house which is now in ruins. The article also includes an excavation report by Claire I Fell:^{xiii}

To get to the complex from Kirksanton village go over the railway crossing and take the path up the hillside to the northeast, and you will come to the ruined Lacra farmhouse. This is quite a steep climb. An alternative and easier but longer route can be

found on the other side of the hill: park near Po House and follow the old track.^{xiv}



Lacra Diagram, Transactions, Vol 48, 1948

As well as cremating and burying the dead, it is likely the site was used to honour ancestors with celebrations at winter and summer solstice, or even during the Pagan festival of All Hallows Eve

(Hallowe'en). For more information see The Modern Antiquarian,^{xv} the Megalithic Portal,^{xvi} and *Cumbria's Prehistoric Monuments*.^{xvii}

CONCLUSION

Whilst the Giant's Grave and Lacra Bank are excluded from the focus site, they will be next to it. The GDF focus site and area surrounding it is steeped in Prehistoric history. The view from Lacra Bank will be the above ground GDF facility. How much more of this history waits to be found? How much will be lost if a GDF is built here?

Jan Bridget

15th February 2025

ⁱ <https://www.duddonhistory.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Submerged-Forest-at-Haverigg.pdf>

ⁱⁱ *North-West Evening Mail*, 12 August 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ North West Evening Mail, 2011.

^{iv} Warriner, Frank (1974) *The Millom District A History*.

^v <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1009486?section=official-list-entry>

^{vi} <http://www.stone-circles.org.uk/stone/giantsgrave.htm>

^{vii} Sharon Arowsmith pointed this out during an Archaeology Course she ran in Millom.

^{viii} Cumbria Historic Environment Record

^{ix} Eccleston, J, '(1874), Ancient Remains At Lacra And Kirksanton, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* , 279-80.

^x Old church.

^{xi} <https://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=47829>

^{xii} [Between Silence and Light UK | Irene Rogan](#)

^{xiii} Dixon, J.A. (1948) Some Bronze Age burial circles at Lacra, near Kirksanton with an excavation report by Clare I. Fell *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*, Vol 48, p1-28.

^{xiv} This is clearly visible on Google map.

^{xv} <https://www.themodernantiquarian.com/site/1600/lacra.html>

^{xvi} <https://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=47829>

^{xvii} Ibbotson, Adam Morgan, (2021) *Cumbria's Prehistoric Monuments*, The History Press