



**FIELD BOUNDARIES IN THE UPPER PORTER AND
MAYFIELD VALLEYS 2003/4**

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Friends of the Porter Valley

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared by a small group of members of the Friends of the Porter Valley (FoPV). It is the output of a survey conducted in 2003 and 2004 of the field boundaries and "wall furniture" in the countryside through which run the River Porter and its tributary the May Brook. Those engaged in this work were: Ann le Sage, Glynis Jones, Peter Bayliss, Walter and Eileen Fox, Penny Jewitt, Stephen Allan, Ken Mapley, Richard Donkin, Peter and Jean Kennett.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks go to the many owners and tenants in the countryside surrounding the River Porter and May Brook who allowed us access to their private land and patiently answered our questions about farming and the history of the area.

We also thank the Countryside Agency (CA) for funding this project with a Local Heritage Initiative grant. This is the second such grant from the CA to enable the Friends of the Porter Valley to investigate aspects of the valley and make them accessible to visitors through reports, talks and walks.

The report complements the "*Porter Valley Landscape History and Archaeology*" report written for the Friends of the Porter Valley by Dr Paul Ardron and printed in April 2004. Man has inhabited this Valley since Palaeolithic times and it is his impact on the landscape that is recorded in both these reports. We are grateful to Dr Paul Ardron for his advice throughout the project.

Location

The exact boundaries of the area surveyed are shown on the attached overview map drawn from the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens based on "6 inch" OS sheets SK 28NE, SK 28SE, SK38SW and SK38NW. Essentially it is the area within which the Friends of the Porter Valley have been active since 1994 bounded by Ringinglow Road, Fulwood Lane, Andwell Lane, Douse Croft Lane, Gorse Lane, Harrison Lane, School Green Lane, Quiet Lane, the River Porter through Whiteley Wood, Whiteley Wood Road, Trap Lane and thence along field boundaries to Common Lane. The survey was conducted in six zones, each illustrated here with its own map and catalogue of walls and features. Fieldwork was plotted on the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 plans 13 and 14 of 1935 (reduced to 70% for this report) which show field numbers of that date, together with areas of fields (in acres) and in some instances original field names.

[Ordnance Survey paper copying licence no:100036430]

How to use this report

The Porter and Mayfield Valleys' landscape is unique and like many upland pasture areas in Northern England it is increasingly at risk. Man created this landscape but 21st Century changes in human habitation or farming methods could lead to its loss. The Friends of the Porter Valley wanted to record it so that people could better understand and value it. Visitors may find it interesting to look up the features in this report as they walk the country footpaths and lanes. Binoculars will be useful since many items are inaccessible on private land and we ask that farmers and landowners' rights be respected.

A note on gateposts and stoops

Throughout the text we have chosen to use the word "stoops" to describe the many striking sandstone and millstone grit gateposts and fieldposts in the valley. This is clearly the recognised word for them in Derbyshire or South Yorkshire. "Stoop" is the Scandinavian word for stone and "Guidestoop" is the word regularly applied in the North of England to the guideposts or guidestones erected in moorland areas from the 17th century. Many of these were removed or obliterated in the 20th century to confuse potential enemy invaders and some have been incorporated into field entry and wall systems.

*See "The Guide Stoops of the Dark Peak"
Research and text by Howard Smith, illustrations by Chris Bilton*

Lanes and turnpikes

"Lane" is another old word and "lanes" are found extensively throughout the area. They were ancient tracks, routes or byways between woods or fields and usually took their name from the settlement or farm towards which they were leading.

Turnpike roads came later: The only turnpike in our study area is Ringinglow Road built under an Act dated 1758. It remained a turnpike until 1884. The wide grass verges visible today were left for travellers on horseback after the Ecclesall Enclosure Act of 1779 stopped them crossing common land.

Hollow-ways

"Hollow-ways" or holloways are another ancient feature of this landscape noted in this report. They are sunken tracks which in some places have been improved and become the basis for lanes and modern roads or elsewhere leave their traces on the slopes of the hills.

3 LANDSCAPE OF THE UPPER PORTER AND MAYFIELD VALLEYS

The Porter and May Brooks rise on the moors above Sheffield and flow 10km to join the River Don in the heart of Sheffield. Their valleys form natural green corridors leading from the congested roads around Hunter's Bar to the open moors of the Peak District National Park.

In the course of its descent the Porter falls some 340 metres through a constantly changing landscape, linking the steeply incised and wooded valley of Porter Clough to a gentler farmed landscape of green hillsides with traditional pasturage and stone buildings. It then passes through the archaeological remains of our early industrial heritage (weirs, goits, millponds, millraces and dams) and past both ancient and semi-natural woodlands. It is the major feature in the recreational and ornamental parks at Bingham and Endcliffe that were created for social purposes in the 19th century. It then enters culverts alongside the Ecclesall Road and flows eastwards past the General Cemetery and the Sheffield Botanical Gardens into the city centre.

In the 18th century the Porter Brook provided power to more than 20 water wheels for the manufacture of cutlery, hand tools and other metal products. All but six of the Porter millponds (known locally as "dams") have disappeared over the years as their original use declined but an old Corn Mill on the May Brook is still identifiable off Mayfield Road. What remains is an attractive linear amenity studded with features of exceptional historic interest and set amongst green and tranquil pastures.

The valleys contain considerable ecological capital, including areas of managed farmland and blocks of ancient oak and mixed woodland with spectacular displays of spring flowers and autumn fungi. Semi-natural scrub, riverine and pond habitats line the riverbeds. Wet valley-side flushes contain rare species. Old flower-rich meadows of a type that are fast disappearing from the countryside, and acid grasslands that in autumn are bright with wax-cap toadstools, make up their flanks. There is a wide range of insects and birds; mammals include several species of bat, foxes, water voles and some discrete badger communities. The entire 5km of the valley bottom and the upper reaches of the May Brook are designated as "Areas of Natural History Interest" in the Urban Development Plan (UDP). The Council parks in the valley bottom are listed in English Heritage's Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

There are splendid views of this landscape from vantage points on Ringinglow Road, Fulwood Lane and Harrison Lane, but some of the best views of this landscape are from the valley floor as the walker climbs gradually up to Ringinglow.

Other products by the Friends of the Porter Valley which complement this survey:

- Ecology Survey of the Porter Valley October 2001
- Archaeology along the Porter and Mayfield Brooks October 2002
- Plants in the Porter Valley and their ecology 2003
- Porter Valley Landscape History and Archaeology Final report 2004
- General leaflet on The Porter Valley: Wildlife and History 2002
- Archaeology leaflet: Reading the Landscape in the Porter Valley 2004



Looking south to Ringinglow from fields above Mayfield Road. (Photo by Peter Kennett)