

Southfield Conservation Area Character Appraisal

1. Introduction

The 1990 Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act gives powers to local authorities to designate Conservation Areas, in order to protect areas of historic and architectural importance. Whilst Conservation Areas originally focused only on the built heritage, leading to boundaries being drawn tightly around groups of buildings, in recent years there has been an increasing recognition that the interest of the built heritage cannot be considered in isolation from the surrounding landscape.

The Southfield area, a collection of historic hamlets situated on a shelf of the valley slope to the east of Nelson and set within an attractive pastoral landscape, is a locally valued heritage asset containing a number of buildings of architectural and historic interest.

2. The special architectural and historic interest of the Southfield Conservation Area

A Conservation Area should only be designated where the Council considers there to be special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

Southfield is a historic area with attractive small settlements on the topmost slopes of the Pendle Water valley. There are six statutory Grade II listed buildings and one Grade II* building in the area, each supported by a range of barns and other farm buildings. These buildings are set in attractive fields generally with dry stone walls and hedgerows around the settlements on the lower valley slopes, the shape of which indicates a mix of ancient and post-mediaeval enclosure. The importance of the woodland at Catlow Brook is acknowledged by Tree Preservation Order No. 7 1984. With this exception, most trees are set in and around the settlements or on the hedgerows on the lower slopes.

Most buildings are set within small farm groups - Lower Town House, Higher Town House, Southfield, Southfield Fold, Southfield House and Chapel, and Catlow. There are many high quality vernacular houses of the 17th and 18th centuries. Many of the barns were redundant but are now converted to houses, which is bringing new life into the area. Southfield Methodist Chapel is a listed chapel set within a barn, having strong connections to John Wesley, who preached there.

The largest single feature is Catlow Quarry which supplied much of the local stone for the Nelson area. The 19th century terraced cottages were often associated with quarrying and are generally located outside the settlements. Quarrying brought considerable change to the area in the 19th century, so that the landscape today is a product of farming and quarrying. Generations of residents of Nelson have been attracted to Southfield as an area for quiet recreation, and a number of promoted walking routes pass through the area, notably the Pendle Way

3. History of the area

Marsden is known to have been occupied since around the 7th century. Many of the place names are of Norse origin suggesting extensive occupation in the 10th century. In Domesday, Marsden was part of the Hundred of Blackburn and was owned by the King. Land around Townhouse was granted to the Monks of the priory of St John at Pontefract in the 12th century and in 1497 the priory leased a house and 40 acres 'lying in Marsden and Southfield' to John of Mancknowles. The name Southfield suggests the name given to common plough land of Marsden to the south of Barkerhouse Road.

The highways themselves mark Southfield as an important area in the medieval transport network. Roads connecting the markets of Colne, Clitheroe, Burnley and Halifax all pass through Marsden. These roads, probably of pre-historic origin, traditionally kept to the high ground away from the marshy valley floors.

As one of the first areas in north east Lancashire to be enclosed, Southfield displays a settlement pattern which can be attributed directly to medieval systems of land tenure. The three small hamlets are each grouped around stone farmhouses which, in their design and substantial size, reflect the prosperity and social standing of the owners in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The famous family names of the area start to appear from the 13th century onwards with Richard and John of Catlow appearing in a lease of 1200. By the middle of the 1500's Catlow had passed to the Sagar family. The Lees of Southfield Fold appear in the records in 1517 and the Southfield House family of Richard of Marsden are named in land grants of 1344. It is these families and their descendants who crafted the landscape in the Southfield area; they were all classed as yeoman farmers, a group of people who had some freedom to develop their land and holdings albeit in a marginal farming area.

In the religious revival of the 18th century, Southfield was a centre of Methodism. William Sagar of Southfield House was a friend of John Wesley, who stayed with Sagar when he preached locally. Sagar converted part of his barn into a chapel in 1797, his main trade was as a wool stapler (which explains the concentration of 3-storey cottages in the hamlet).

4. The houses

The present houses are all replacements of earlier and probably much less prestigious buildings. The majority of building took place between the mid 16th century and the early 17th century in a period of remarkable and regionally important house building development. Of 30 buildings Pearson¹ identifies as being built by substantial yeomen in the first part of the 17th century, four are situated in Southfield. It is perhaps even more remarkable that these houses were built in a period of crop failure, typhus epidemics and the economic dislocation brought about

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by a developing civil war. Records of farming income would only indicate small profits in this period, certainly insufficient to invest large amounts in extensive domestic house building. The critical factor in achieving the capital necessary for such a building boom would seem to be the growing importance of textiles in the area's economy.

Of the 13 'clothiers' named by Bennett², in the Marsden area between 1558-1755, three are known to have lived in the Southfield area - Lawrence Lee (1653), William Sagar (1750) and Lawrence Hitchen (1755). The growing importance of woollen cloth manufacture is seen in the design of the cottages adjacent to Southfield House Farm. Southfield House and Catlow House represent the only large scale 18th century redevelopment.

The layout of the 17th century houses of Southfield gives vital evidence of life in this period. Common features are:

- two-storeys in height
- similarity in design
- a housebody (main room) with large fire
- an entrance(s) associated with the large fire
- parlours – originally bedrooms, later becoming dining rooms
- servants' rooms e.g. Lower Townhouse kitchen and buttery, Southfield Fold milkhouse;
- some had workshops, e.g. Lower Townhouse and Southfield Fold

Five of the houses are listed buildings:

- Lower Townhouse – Grade II* (in top 6% of listed buildings nationally)
- Southfield Fold Farm – Grade II
- Catlow Hall and Catlow Fold Farm – Grade II
- Southfield House – Grade II
- Catlow House – Grade II

Whilst many of the redundant stone built barns have been converted to housing, the conversions have generally been sympathetic to the local vernacular, so preserving the historic atmosphere of the hamlets.

5. Land use

Over many centuries there has been continuity in land use and human activity in Southfield, with farming providing the basis. The long history of enclosure has created a landscape which, in its field patterns and secondary heritage artefacts (such as stone stiles and horse troughs), binds the area together. There has been significant rationalisation in farming enterprise in recent decades.

6. Last major development

The last major development took place in the mid 19th century with the development of Catlow Quarries, which supplied much of the stone for building Nelson, and was transported to other areas by canal and rail. The quarries' main legacy has been in adding a complexity and interest to the landscape, increasing its value for nature conservation. The quarries led to the development of occasional terraced stone cottages in the Southfield area including Lower Row and Mount Pleasant. The virtual absence of Victorian and later developments is largely responsible for the special character of the area.

7. Decline

The 17th and 18th century heyday of the area remains 'frozen' to this day, retaining the field patterns and buildings of that period, with the exception of such industrial development as Catlow quarries. As such Southfield represents an area of substantial historical, social, economic and architectural interest. Its decline stems from the mid to late 18th century when the new turnpike roads - Manchester Road, Leeds Road and Scotland Road - took their traffic along the valley routes. This problem was increased with the coming of the railways and the development of Nelson as the transport and factory centre of the area leaving Southfield as a remarkable example of an earlier society.

¹ Pearson S. 1985 RCHME Rural Houses of the Lancashire Pennines

² Bennett W. 1957 The History of Marsden and Nelson