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Goyt Valley is a popular area for visitors. The book describes life in the Valley before and after the building of the reservoirs, and the local tales and places of interest in the vicinity. There are sections on Errwood Hall, the "Cat and Fiddle" Inn and notorious Tunstead Dickie.

This new edition with additional photographs by Keith Warrender gives a new generation a chance to read about the history, atmosphere and scenery of the Valley which fascinated the author – Clifford Rathbone.

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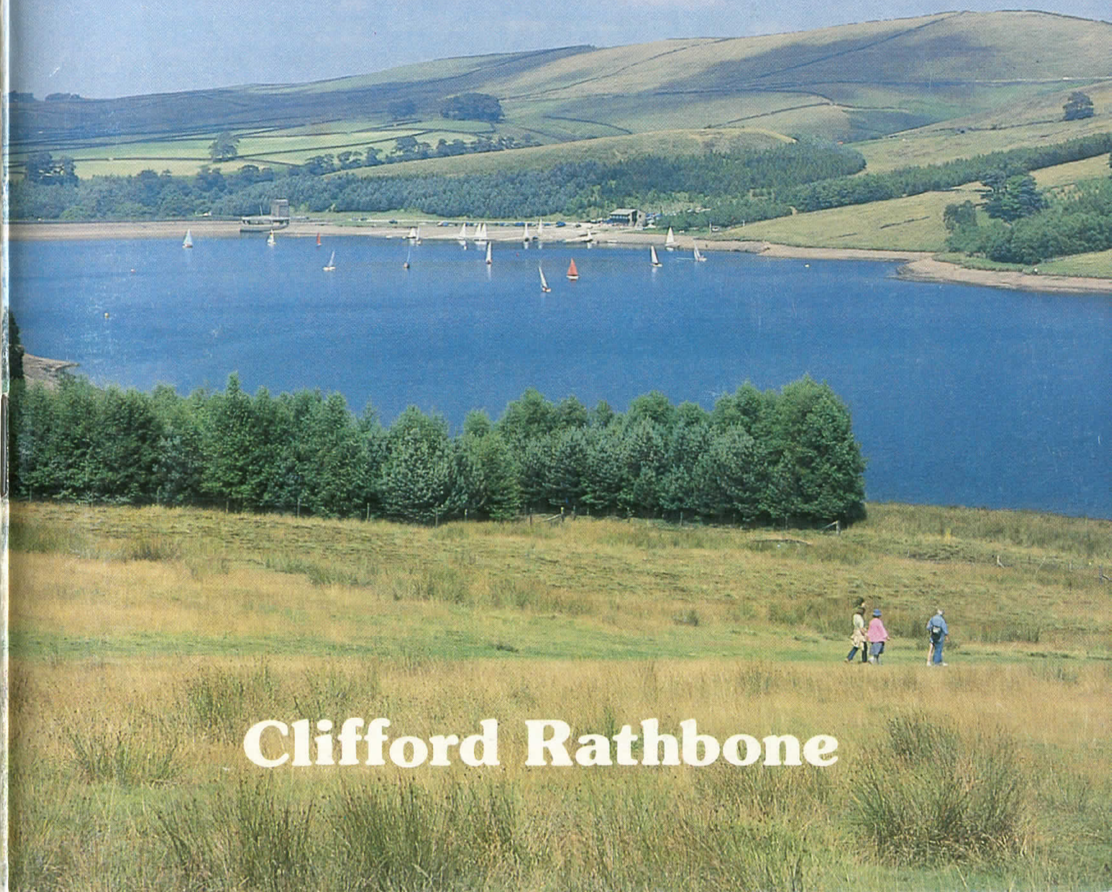
Goyt Valley Story



Clifford Rathbone

ERRWOOD – AUTUMN

A glowing face the moorland turns,
To meet the westering sun's farewell
And ever where his radiance fell,
Blood red the withered bracken burns.

The wild fowl calling from the hill,
The wheeling plovers mournful plaint,
That from the upland echoes faint
The tinkle of some hidden rill.

No other sound than these to break,
The brooding silence over all,
Save that the distant waterfall
A murmur in the Vale doth make.

A.H.

Cover photograph: Errwood Reservoir
Opposite: Errwood Hall

Goyt Valley STORY

Clifford Rathbone

Willow
PUBLISHING

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Goyt Valley Story is a series of articles by the author and published under the nom-de-plume of 'The Stroller' during the summer of 1955 in the 'Macclesfield County Express' with photographs by Henry Redfern. It was first published in 1965 and reprinted in 1968 and 1969. In this revised edition, with additional photographs by Keith Warrender, the Publisher wishes to thank Mrs. A. D. Rathbone and 'The Macclesfield Express' for their co-operation.

The author died in November 1975 and since the book was written there have inevitably been changes in the Valley. Some of these are described in the Appendix.

Marple Hall

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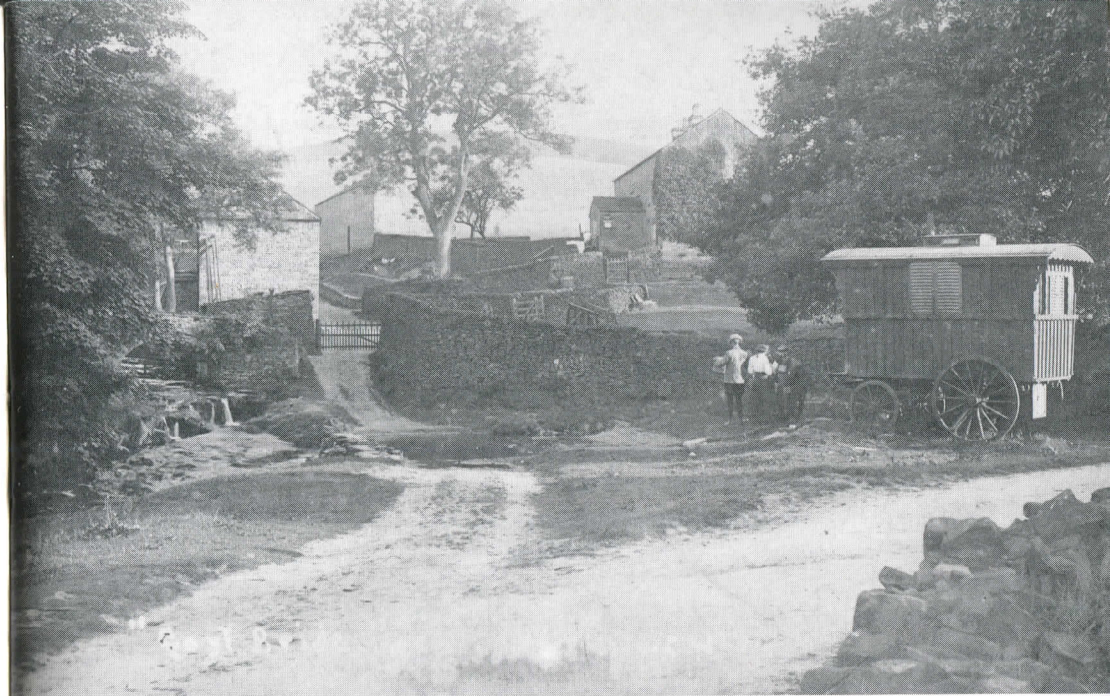
Preface

There is something which appeals about a valley. Perhaps it is because we can be alone with nature; we can get away from the noise and bustle of workaday life. I have a great and abiding love for valleys and in recent years I have followed the courses of a number of rivers — the Bollin, the Dane, the Dove, the Manifold, the Goyt and the Wye, and they have all given me wonderful experiences. The first issue of this volume sold out quickly and from the letters received it was obvious that this valley of the Goyt has thousands of admirers. Since those days a second portion of the valley has been flooded to make room for another reservoir for Stockport and a new chapter has been included to cover this.

When the news first came through that Stockport intended to build another reservoir in the valley, and particularly that the area around Errwood and the beautiful Goyt's Bridge was to be flooded, it was a great shock, but later this was tempered by the announcement that the ruins of Errwood Hall, the former home of the Grimshawes, would not be affected and that an alternative road would be built above the reservoir. However, the valley will never be the same again, for part of the valley so many of us have loved will have gone. Such is the price we have to pay for progress.

Errwood Hall, with its banks of rhododendron and azalea bushes, has always had a strange fascination for me. I have approached it from Stake House end, from Street Lane by Pym Chair and, of course, from the valley road below. Before the hall was demolished I stood in the upper rooms and looked down on the true beauty of the valley and tried to imagine just what it was like when the Grimshawes were in residence. It was then a busy little hamlet, with its private school, farm houses, etc. The hall itself was a noble building with its chapel attached. These have all gone, but the ruins of the once stately home remain.

The hall was built in the first half of the 19th century and the last occupant was Mrs. Mary Gosselin, daughter of the son of the builder of the hall. She died in 1930 and it was there that the contents of the home were sold. She used to drive her carriage and pair through the valley to Whaley Bridge. The proposal of Stockport Corporation to build their first reservoir in the valley — Fernilee reservoir — angered her, but what she would have said had she known that ultimately it was the intention to drown another part of the valley with the water lapping almost against where her front door was, I tremble to think.



Goyt's Bridge

My story of the valley was first told in a series of articles in the 'Macclesfield County Express' under the nome-de-plume of 'The Stroller'. I trust, therefore, that those reading this little book will appreciate its source. There are numerous people who should be thanked, first those who have lived in, and known, the valley for much longer than I have. They have provided me with most of the information. Lastly, there is my wife, always a cheerful companion on my walks.

I would say to all my readers: Do not be content by just reading this little book; get out a strong pair of boots and try walking along sections of the valley. For once leave the car behind. You will be surprised at the joy it will bring. You will be able to see the countryside instead of glancing at it. You will hear the songs of the birds and the music of the river as it splashes its way over boulders, but most important of all you will be able to breathe God's fresh air into your lungs.

The Goyt rises from the slopes of Axe Edge, the great watershed of the Peak District, flows through Taxal, Whaley Bridge, Furness Vale, New Mills, Mellor, Marple, Chadkirk, under Otterspool Bridge, and past Goyt Hall, now a farmhouse, before being swallowed up in the waters of the Mersey just before entering Stockport.

CLIFFORD RATHBONE

Goyt Valley

Cat and Fiddle to Goyt Bridge

Many are the occasions I have walked through the valley of the River Goyt for the sole pleasure of taking in the beauty of the surroundings. I have been at all times of the year. In winter when the snow has lain so deep that I have sunk into it well above my ankles at almost every step; in autumn when the bronzed moors rising precipitously from the stony bed of the river have shivered in the gentle breeze giving it a loveliness surpassing description, and then I have returned in summer to see the great transformation worked by nature. The greens of the bladelike ferns and the bilberry bushes are matched by the purple flowers of the heather. It is the popular view that it is in summer that the valley looks its best. Personally, I can never quite make up my mind. To me there is something thrilling about the wild appearance it has in winter. But those are my own views.

This journey is being taken not merely for pleasure, although I have no doubt I shall have plenty. I am in search of knowledge; knowledge of the people who through the centuries have loved and worked in close proximity to the river. I am tracing the river from its source on the moors just below the Cat and Fiddle to where it joins the Mersey near to Stockport, and I hope to learn much.

Beyond Taxal it will be to me, a journey of adventure. When we in this part of the country talk about Goyt Valley we refer to that part from the main Macclesfield-Buxton road over the old Errwood Estate to Taxal.

As you penetrate further into the valley new vistas open up. Parts of the valley have been dammed to provide a reservoir to meet the needs of Stockport, and work has already begun on a second reservoir. There are sections where the water is still used to keep the wheels of industry turning. There will be stories of tragedy and romance.

On the first stage of my journey I was fortunate in being accompanied by a charming lady of 76 years who lived for a great number of years on the Errwood Estate and received her early education at the small private school, now disappeared, which stood quite close to Goyt Bridge.

With her as my guide I was able to picture what that delightful area round about Errwood looked like when the Grimshawes were in residence at the Hall. The farms, the cottages, and most of the hall and private chapel have now been demolished, and all that remains to remind us of the days when Errwood was a happy and flourishing little community, practically self-contained, possessing even its own coalmine, are the ruins of the hall, and the rhododendrons, but more about that later.

I began my journey from the Cat and Fiddle Inn along the roadway which leaves the main thoroughfare to Buxton at a point about 100 yards on the Derbyshire side of the inn, but before doing so, I watched the holidaymakers, who had driven in their cars up to 'The Cat' feeding the sheep.

Sheep are normally very timid animals, but in these parts they have become so accustomed to being fed by visitors that they will rush up to any car which stops by the roadside and beg for morsels like hungry dogs. I have even seen them enter the North Western bus after it has stopped at the Inn. They have become quite an attraction among the young people brought to this open moorland country by their parents.

The Cat and Fiddle Inn has the distinction of being the second highest Inn in England and stands 1,690 feet above sea level. It was built early in the 19th century by John Ryle, of Macclesfield, who was a banker in the house of Daintry and Ryle, in the days when there were so many private banking houses. Daintry and Ryle had premises on Park Green, Macclesfield. John Ryle acquired considerable wealth and in turn purchased the Henbury and Errwood estates.

The exact date of the building of the Cat and Fiddle is not known, but in 1831 it was described as "a newly erected and well accustomed inn or public house called and known as the cat and fiddle". Many attempts have been made to explain the name of the inn. Local tradition used to state that the inn received its queer name from the fact that an early Duke of Devonshire used frequently to drive along the road and would stop at the summit to enjoy the view and pass half an hour playing upon his fiddle, to which instrument he was greatly devoted. Presumably he went to play on the moors because there he could annoy no-one but himself.

There are scores of other theories. By some it is said that it was named in honour of Catherine le Fidele, wife of Czar Peter the Great, while still another is that it merely indicates the game Cat (trap ball) and a fiddle for dancing, which is probably the true one. Over the main door of the inn is a carving of a cat playing a fiddle. But let us get on our journey.

At the beginning, the Goyt is just a thin silver streak forcing its way through the bracken and heather. "The turf's like spring and the air's like wine," wrote Masefield. He must have been at a spot like this when those words came to him.

The road along which I was walking down into the valley was the main road into Derbyshire before the top road into Buxton was cut. On the left are the foundations of the house which in years gone by was the stopping place for the coach before arriving in Burbage. The stepping-off stones

The Cat and Fiddle Inn

to watch the waterwheel. There were quite a number of farms and cottages in the valley in those days, and the people living in them thought nothing of walking from Macclesfield to Errwood and Goyt Bridge after they had done their shopping. My companion had many stories to relate. The glimmer of the candles providing the illumination in the cottages by the old mill would no doubt be welcome signs to the travellers in those days.

We made our way to Goyt Bridge and then up the three quarters of a mile drive to what remains of Errwood Hall, and all the time my companion was living over again the happy days of her youth among the small community whose homes were on the Errwood estate before a large portion of the valley was drowned to make the Fernilee Reservoir for the Stockport Corporation.

To prevent the danger of pollution, farms were closed and buildings demolished. Today this is a valley of happy memories, and as I walked through it I could imagine that the ghosts of those who had lived here in years gone by were walking about feeling not a little angry that the buildings which they had spent so much care in erecting had been pulled down. Periodically my companion would pause and recall some little incident and I felt that she could see again the Mistress of Errwood driving in her coach and pair from the hall and through the valley, now under water, to Whaley.

The valley is at its prettiest at Goyt's Bridge. A stream from Errwood joins the Goyt and the old stone bridge almost touching the water makes a grand picture, but it must have looked so much better years ago when on the bend in the lane by the entrance gates to Errwood stood the charming stone-built cottage with its well-stocked garden. At the rear of the cottage was the private school provided by the Grimshawes for the children living on the estate. On the opposite side of the river were two farms, Goytshead and Goytsbridge. The Hibberts lived at one, and the Ferns at the other.

Opposite: (Top) Cottages at Stake Clough for employees at the old Stake Clough Mill. (Below) Goyt's Bridge in its new location.

Errwood Hall

Before beginning our long walk to the site of the old hall we stood for a while at Goyt's Bridge, where my companion pictured for me the days of her childhood. We talked of the time when she and her friends walked all the way from Macclesfield after they had been shopping in the town and of the days when the Truemans kept the Cat and Fiddle. During the shooting season there were dances in the tearooms by the side of the inn and employees of the Errwood Estate and their families were invited. In the early hours of the morning the otherwise lonely road through the valley echoed the merry laughter of the young people as they returned to their homes.

The gate to the drive to Errwood is now bolted and barred and we climbed the stile by the side and set out on our journey of rediscovery. As once again my companion stepped on to the drive I thought I noticed her eyes sparkle. To her it must have been like going back home.

We had travelled only a few yards when she pointed out the spot on which formerly stood the private school. There were about 30 children attending at one time. It was then that I heard for the first time of Miss Dolores, a beautiful Spanish Lady of noble birth, who was the personal companion of old Mrs. Grimshawe towards the end of the last century.

Miss Dolores was greatly loved not only by the Grimshawes, but by young and old on the estate. She was a lady of culture and learning, but never had very good health and died in her middle forties when on a visit to the French town of Lourdes. It was in memory of her that the Grimshawes built the tiny shrine on the moorlands at the back of the hall. Miss Dolores taught needlework and other subjects at the private school, and was helped by the wife of the gardener who lived at the nearby cottage, now demolished. We left the drive and under the shade of a large tree I was shown the burial ground of the dogs from the hall. Then there was the spot where my companion slipped down the embankment one dark night. Every tree seemed to bring back a memory.

We walked in between high banks of rhododendron and azalea bushes and my companion became poetic about the beauty of them when they were in bloom. I could agree with everything she said for I have often visited Errwood to see the rhododendrons in bloom. It used to be said that to stand in the tower of the hall at rhododendron time and look out over the valley was a wonderful experience. The beauty of the blooms gave the impression that a rainbow had moved across and left its colours behind.

Errwood Hall

The Grimshawes were great travellers and had their own yacht which took them to all parts of the world. Many of the rhododendron bushes were brought back from foreign lands to serve as ballast for the yacht.

I learned of Apple Tree Walk, Scotch Plantation Walk, Italian Rose Walk and of the charm and beauty of the gardens. I could imagine the Grimshawes and their guests walking through these spacious grounds for they were fond of entertaining. Eventually we reached what remains of the home of the Grimshawes.

There is nothing more pathetic than the ruins of a once stately home. I thought of the toil and struggles of the early builders, and of the pride they took in their craft. After Errwood had ceased to be a private residence, it served as a youth hostel for a while but then when Stockport Corporation bought the land they signed its death warrant and gave orders for its demolition. Its sturdy walls defied even that, for although the roof and all the timber have gone, much of the walls still remain.

I walked through the ruins and my companion spoke of the days when the hall was packed with guests, many of them titled, especially at the shooting season. Rubble lay thick on the stone staircase, but I managed to climb it and from the top looked out over the valley—a valley of memories.

The ruins of Errwood

I descended and stood by the framework of the window overlooking the former terrace gardens. Close by are the ruins of the cottages occupied by the servants, the laundry, the greenhouses, and the vegetable gardens. The hall was in its prime towards the end of the last century.

The Grimshawes were devout Roman Catholics and had their own resident priest. The last priest was Father Grimes. The family were of Lancashire descent, and built Errwood Hall in the Goyt in the first half of the 19th century. The son of the builder of the hall, Samuel Dominic Grimshawe, died in 1883 and his wife died ten years later. They had two daughters, Mary, who married Mr. Helier Robert Hadsley Gosselin, of Hertford, and Ann, who married Captain The Hon. Edward F. J. Preston.

Mrs. Gosselin died in the hall in 1930 and it was following this that the hall and its contents were sold. She was known locally as the lady bountiful. She was a lady of many accomplishments and spoke five languages. The proposal of Stockport Corporation to build a reservoir in the valley of the Goyt was very distasteful to her, and at the time it was stated that the worry of that hastened her death.

I was taken to see the private burial ground of the Grimshawes which is on one of the highest points on the former Errwood Estate. It overlooks a magnificent panorama of countryside. Today the burial ground is entered through an avenue of yew trees, and contains the graves of members of the Grimshawe family and some of their servants.

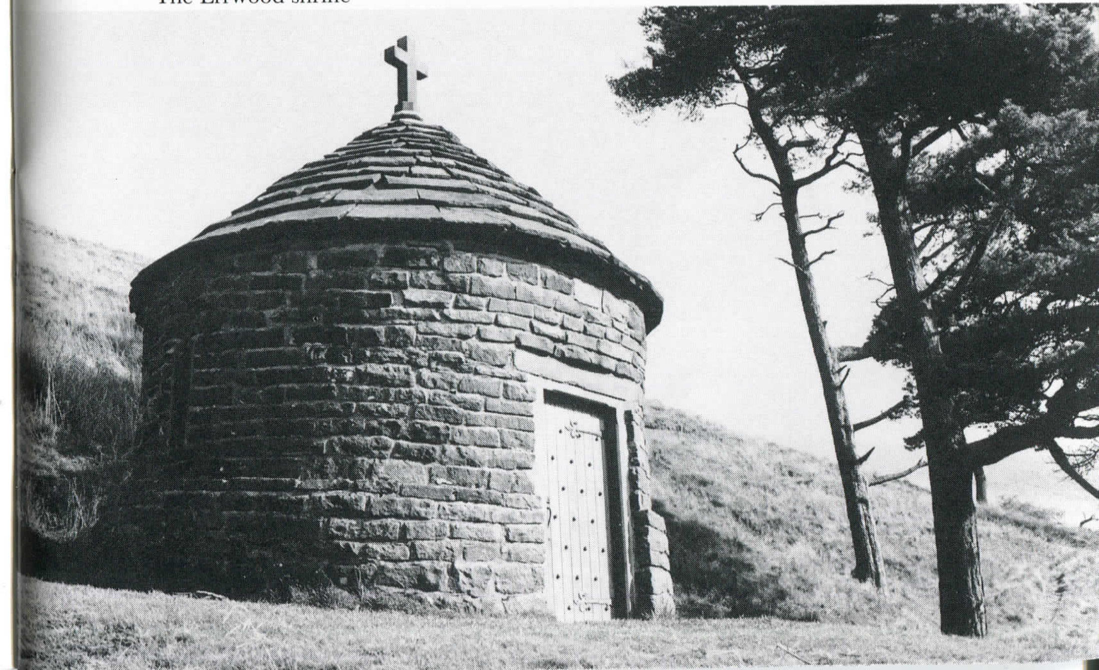
These gravestones have their own stories to tell. Underneath the names of Samuel Grimshawe, who died in 1883, and his wife who died ten years later is the following inscription: "Arthur Grimshawe, died in infancy". What a blow that death must have been.

Here is also buried John Butler, "Captain of the yacht, 'Mariquita,' for 16 years the friend and faithful servant of the late Samuel Grimshawe." He died in 1886. There are the graves of a young French maid and the daughter of the gamekeeper.

As we stood overlooking the fertile valleys, I heard of the days when the Grimshawes engaged large numbers of Irishmen to help to gather in the harvest and of how as many as five sheep were killed in one week to provide them with meat. I heard of the amusing story of the Irishman, who seeing rhubarb for the first time mowed down the family's very fine crop thinking it was some form of weed. He was profuse in his apologies afterwards.

There used to be a pathway from the hall below the burial ground to the tiny shrine on the moorland not far from the old Roman road, known as The Street, leading from the valley to Kettleshulme. I again visited this lonely shrine, a tiny building with its altar on which there always seem to be freshly placed flowers. This was built in 1889 by the Grimshawes in memory of Miss Dolores, the Spanish companion to old Mrs. Grimshawe, and periodically the resident priest conducted services there

The Errwood shrine



attended by the servants from the hall. The shrine was named St. Joseph's and the translation of the inscription over the altar is: "No one asks in vain of St. Joseph. A token of gratitude." The initials "D de Y" underneath are those of Miss Dolores.

Today this tiny shrine on which so many people come quite accidentally, as I did some years ago, enables visitors to meditate and pray in the heart of beautiful country. For this we have to thank the Grimshawes of Errwood Hall.

I have visited it at regular intervals and there was a time some years ago when I became anxious about its future. The stone walls of the shrine looked in danger of falling down, but there was doubt as to whose responsibility it was. Stockport Water Board, however, much to their credit, took on the job of making the shrine safe.

They re-pointed the walls and did other little jobs. I called one day while the work was being done and as I chatted to some of the workmen I realised that to them this was more than just a job of work. Here, out on the wild moors, miles from any signs of habitation, they were performing a labour of love. Over the years visitors have added small items to the interior of the shrine and there was one tiny statue, which had been broken. One of the workmen had spent his lunch-time break modelling a new head for the tiny statue out of cement.

Goyt's Bridge facing the entrance to Errwood Hall before the valley was flooded.

Errwood Reservoir

Since the first two chapters were written for the initial edition of this story of the Goyt Valley, great changes have overtaken the valley round about Errwood.

It is now the Autumn of 1967 and I make my last visit to the valley before sending the final copy to the printers. When first I learned that they were going to flood the valley in order to satisfy the growing thirst of the people of Stockport and its industries, I was filled with horror — the same horror that comes to a child when a toy, or a pet for which it had great love and affection, is torn away from it.

Since I was a child I have spent so many happy hours round about Goyt Bridge and Errwood. I had paddled in the river, played childish games underneath the ancient bridge, collected sweet-chestnuts from the beautiful trees — almost every yard had happy memories for me. And now they were going to tear down the trees, demolish the bridges and flood the valley with water.

After Errwood had ceased to be a private residence — I recall having attended the sale of the furniture and effects — the building was demolished, or partly so. However it remained a big attraction for visitors to the valley and I never failed to climb the long drive to walk among the ruins from which there is such a fine view over the valley.

I have watched the bulldozers tear up what was once such a beautiful valley, seen the trees felled and many of them burned. Yes, I admit that as I stood watching the burning piles of timber sending their smoke high into the heavens tears came to my eyes — it was as though all my happy memories were being consumed on these pyres. It was no pleasant task for the woodmen.

For a period the whole area was an untidy mess, walls were down, the hillsides were torn up; it was such a scene of desolation that I kept away for a long time — it was more than I could bear. However, the Stockport District Water Board proved to be an authority with a soul. They had to find extra water for their area and there had been a long standing agreement that eventually they would build a second reservoir in the valley. After consultation with those watchdogs of the countryside — the Peak Park Planning Board — a scheme was evolved that, while completely changing the character of the valley, would give it a new beauty. A full plan for landscaping was drawn up, while a new road was to be built so

The Errwood Reservoir

that visitors would still be able to motor, or walk through, but higher up the valley.

The job is now almost completed and full credit should be given to the Water Board for the consideration they have shown for the feelings of all who have such an affection for the Goyt Valley. The valley has been tidied up, but the spots where we spent those happy days around Goyt Bridge, the old gardener's cottage, the farmhouses, etc., are flooded. The old bridge has been re-built higher up the valley. The new road has been bridged over the former drive to Errwood Hall.

The old entrance gates have gone and the lower part of the drive and the area, on which formerly stood the little school attended by the children of the servants at the hall and neighbouring farms, is under water. As I paid my last visit water was lapping against the remains of the lower drive, which now had a new 20th century entrance — the sturdy concrete supports to the road above.

The blooms of the thousands of rhododendron and azalea bushes, which tower above the long drive to the top of the hill, leading to the moors beyond, had long since died, but they will bloom again and give great colour to the valley. In future visitors will have a grandstand view of this lovely scene from the bridge.

Memories of the Grimshawes returned as I walked slowly up the drive to the ruins of their once stately home. They have taken more stone from the ruins, presumably to rebuild the walls in the vicinity of the reservoir. I trust, however, that the powers that be will take steps to maintain what ruins are left so that memories of the old days when this was such a busy little hamlet will not be lost forever. This would make an admirable picnic centre — some picnic centres have been promised.

The old graveyard will remain, the chapel was taken down many years ago, and we shall always have the tiny shrine over the moors to remind us of the days when the people who lived at the hall walked along the pathway to attend short services there.

The Errwood reservoir will have a storage capacity of 927 million gallons, it will be 1,520 yards in length and covers an area of 78 acres. The maximum depth will be 117 feet. The length of new roads built is 3,100 yards. They tell me that the main function of Errwood reservoir will be to flow into Fernilee reservoir and keep it topped up. It will increase the Water Board's resources from the Goyt Valley to 2.7 million gallons a day.

Much forestry work still remains to be done. While regretting the disappearance of the old valley, some word of thanks must go to the Board's members and officials for the consideration they have shown. They are to improve facilities for visitors to the area. Let us hope that they will be appreciated and respected. And now let us continue the story of the valley.

Pym Chair to Taxal

After leaving the shrine of St. Joseph at the back of the hall I continued my climb up the old Roman road, "The Street", to Pym Chair, or I should say where Pym Chair formerly stood, for I could find no trace of it. When last I visited this spot some years ago I found the stone known as Pym Chair under some stones which had been knocked off a wall. The stone was then broken into two pieces, one bearing the letter P and the other the letter C.

You will want to know who Pym was, and why he had a chair in this isolated spot. No-one has been able to give a definite answer to those questions. He may have been a religious teacher accustomed to sit in this chair while he addressed his followers in this isolated spot where they would be safe from the authorities. Some have suggested that the chair may have been associated with Pym the Great Parliamentarian in his fight against the Royalists. It is said that he may have crossed the ridge with the Roundhead troops and, in passing, sat down on the stone which had the shape of a chair, and that thereafter it was called Pym Chair.

Miss Gaskell, of Ingersley Hall, who was related to the Grimshawes of Errwood Hall, wrote to the late Mr. Walter Smith, when he was carrying out research into the history of the stone, and she favoured the view that Pym was a highwayman. She wrote: "There was a band of highwaymen who located themselves on the old Roman Road on the hill now called Pym Chair, after their leader Pym, who caused the stone chair to be erected to watch more comfortably the packs of mules laden with merchandise proceeding along the road visible from the summit and would send his men down to waylay and plunder them."

The original chair was situated at an altitude of 1,547 feet. The stone was intact in 1838, but was then broken up and used to mend the road. The two pieces bearing the letters P and C were retrieved and had been by the roadside for many years.

A little farther on is the tiny church of Jenkin, erected in 1733 by voluntary subscription. Why is it called Jenkin Chapel? It is said that the person who held out the bag to receive the voluntary subscriptions of the people, said: "It's Jinkin," every time a coin was dropped into the bag, and afterwards it became known as Jenkin Chapel.

If you wish, there are lovely walks into Saltersford and Rainow, or by Windgather Rocks into Kettleshulme. I returned down The Street to the valley of the Goyt to continue my walk. I took the road through the valley to Taxal. But before I left Goyt's Bridge I was told of the days when the

road I was going over was used by old Mrs. Grimshawe when she drove her carriage and pair to Whaley Bridge. Most of the road is now at the bottom of the Fernilee Reservoir built in the valley by Stockport Corporation.

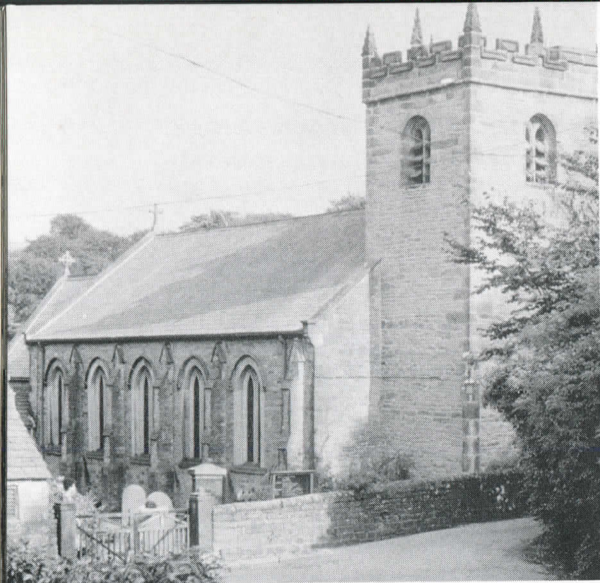
This part of the walk is a complete change from the stretch from the Cat and Fiddle. Here there are more green fields and foliage, while in the distance is the Fernilee Reservoir, which has now transformed this part of the valley. If anything, it has added to its charm. There is the suspension bridge. It is well worthwhile to walk across the bridge. On the far side are the remains of the Cromford and High Peak Railway, one of the earliest rail tracks laid down. It was opened in 1830 at a cost of £200,000 and was used to connect the Cromford canal and the Midland Railway at Whatstandwell, in Derbyshire, with the Peak Forest Canal and the London and North Western system at Whaley Bridge.

The track was laid over 32 miles of mountainous country. It was used purely for the carrying of goods, although for a while passengers were conveyed on one length of the line, but an accident occurred and so this was stopped. It was a single line. The train had some very steep inclines to climb and in those sections was worked by an endless chain. The line in this area is no longer used. It was not far from the suspension bridge that there formerly stood the old powder mill. What was left of it is now under water. It was a very ancient mill and it used to be said that gunpowder made there was used by the British ships in their battle with the Spanish Armada in 1588 and more recently powder was provided by the mill for use in the 1914–18 war. What memories this valley must have, and what stories it could relate if it had the power of speech.

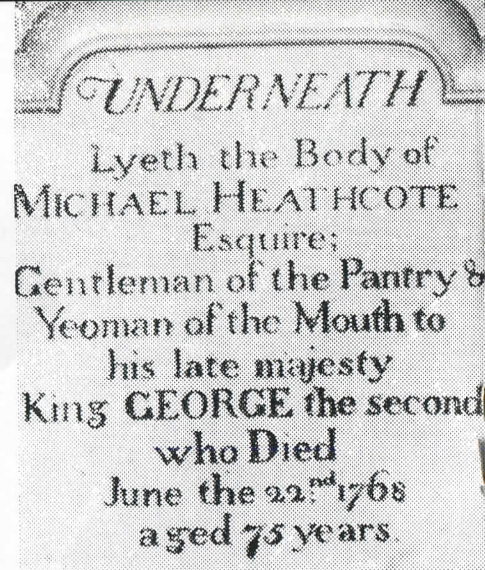
Just beyond the reservoir a footpath leads by a wood and then over an open field to Taxal. The first view of Taxal is sudden, and surprising with its charm. As I stepped out into the narrow lane, there right in front of me was the quaint, squat tower of the ancient church. Taxal is a parish which seems to have grown away from its church, which stands some distance from any inhabited part of the parish, although close by is the Rectory, a farm and the parish inn now a private residence, but still well known as the Royal Oak. It is a long narrow parish which extends as far as the Cat and Fiddle, and the Goyt serves as the boundary mark. The village of Taxal was formerly in Cheshire, but is now in Derbyshire, although the ecclesiastical parish remains in the Chester Diocese. Just one of the peculiarities of this lovely village.

The church tower has only one clock dial and that faces away from the village and across the valley, while the two men of Taxal (stone carvings in

Jenkin Chapel



Taxal Church



The Michael Heathcote memorial.

the tower) look out admiringly on the loveliness of the surrounds. The Taxal yew tree is famed for its size and its age, but then so many claims are made for these yew trees. I have come across so many "among the largest in the country" and "reputed to be more than 600 years old." The picture from the churchyard is one of considerable beauty. Inside the church are buried Samuel Grimshawe who built Errwood Hall, and his wife Anne. Samuel died in 1851 aged 83 years. Their only daughter married Mr. John Upton Gaskell, of Ingersley.

But the most interesting memorial is to Michael Heathcote, Esquire, "Gentleman of the pantry and yeoman of the mouth to his late Majesty King George the Second, who died June 22, 1763, aged 73 years." Those were the days when the crowned heads of England were ever afraid of the attempts on their lives and Michael Heathcote sampled all food before it was taken in front of the king. It apparently did him no harm for he lived to a good old age. Taxal Church dedicated to St. James has looked down on to the valley since the time when in the reign of Edward I the Downes family held the Manor of Taxal by service in the royal forest of Macclesfield.

The ancient residence, Overton Hall, was taken down at the beginning of the 19th century, but a perusal of the old deeds of the family by Dr. Ormerod, when he wrote his history of Cheshire, revealed the many curious manorial rights enjoyed by the Downes family, members of which were Rectors of Taxal as early as the 13th and 14th centuries. They had the right of cutting turves, getting coal and claiming waifs and strays.

When the King came hunting it was a Downes who had the privilege of rousing the first stag.

The last Reginald Downes left documents in which he claimed that he had the right to hold the King's stirrup, and that Lord Derby held Mr. Downes' stirrup. This apparently was rather distasteful to Lord Derby—of much nobler birth than the Downes—for it is written "Lord Derby, instead of holding the stirrup, put his strop or whip and held it towards the stirrup whilst Mr. Downes mounted."

This same Reginald Downes boasted that he "could bring all Taxal to his court, to be kept in his compass window, commonly called by the name of the bay window, where the courts had been formerly kept," and that "he held his lands by the blast of a horn on Midsummer Day and the paying of a pepper-corn yearly."

Each Midsummer Day Reginald Downes would leave his home and climb to the top of Windgather rocks, at Kettleshulme, above Taxal, and there blow his horn to inform all and sundry that he was still the owner of the manor of Taxal. There was a tradition once prevalent that the family had the right to hang offenders caught within the forest and a piece of land near to their former home, Overton Hall, was known as gallows yard.

Windgather Rocks

Those were the days when the Goyt flowed on from the valley below the church through more delightful country to Stockport, but that was before industry grew up on its banks and belched out its filth to transform the river from a gentle flowing trout stream into a smelly, polluted waterway. The manor of Taxal passed from the Downes in turn to the Shallcrosses, the Dickensons, the Bowers, and then the Jodrells. The Jodrells are, of course, the family which has done most for Taxal. William Jodrell, who died in 1375, served as an archer with the Black Prince in France. He had lands in the Macclesfield Forest, Roger Jodrell fought at Agincourt. Since then the Jodrells have served their country in many ways. This is undoubtedly one of the prettiest spots in the valley of the Goyt. Somehow, however, I felt that the centuries-old tower of the church had turned its back on that part of the parish which had become industrialised, and preferred to look across the valley towards Errwood. The carvings of the heads of the two men smile at all who come from the valley footpath on their way to Whaley Bridge, and I imagined them saying: "Get back by the bank of the river and take in the beauty of the sylvan vale below the churchyard."

That is what I did.

Goyt Valley

Whaley Bridge

I took the footpath by the side of the churchyard and dropped down once again to the river where I discovered a number of young people bathing in a portion of the water they had dammed, while lower down I came across a lonely angler. He had some very hard things to say about the pollution of rivers and the Goyt in particular, and later when I walked into Whaley Bridge I heard more grumblings.

Whaley Bridge is now no longer a village: it is a busy little town. Before the boundary revisions of 1936 there were so many anomalies about Whaley Bridge that it was once termed the best known example of Muddlecombe. It was in two counties, Cheshire and Derbyshire, had two police forces, parts of it were administered by the Rural Districts of Macclesfield, Disley, and Chapel-en-le-Frith, respectively and there was a joint Parks Committee for the control of the Memorial Park. Now all that has been put right and it is a compact Urban District.

It is now in Derbyshire, covers an area of 3,500 acres, and has a population of 5,500. The coat-of-arms of the Whaley Bridge Urban District Council, which came into being in 1936, is a reproduction of the ancient bridge over the Goyt from which it takes its name. This bridge which was in the centre of the town, has been replaced by a more modern construction.

Whaley was, however, fond of its bridge and the black oak from the foundations was used for the making of the chair now occupied by the Chairman at the meetings of the Council. In truth it can be stated that the Chairman of Whaley sits on the Bridge. "Whaley Bridge," says the Official Guide, "is the hub of much activity today and the River Goyt has contributed a great deal to the district's industrial life as well as to increasing the appreciation of the local resident and the stranger alike of much of nature's beauty which abounds in the area and attracts, stimulates, and enchants."

If you take the trouble to look, there is much about this well-run Urban District to commend it to visitors. Toddbrook Reservoir, built to serve the Peak Forest Canal, is practically in the middle of the town, and round about it are many delightful walks, and then, of course, there is the famous Roosdyche, at one time claimed to be a Roman chariot way, or race-course, but more about that later.

I called at the Jodrell Arms, which although not as ancient an inn as the Cock Inn, is still very old. It was formerly a farm. When it was being

converted into an inn, the intention was to have the entrance facing to where the railway station now is. A beautiful doorway was built and then the railway company refused to grant a right-of-way, so the entrance had to be made at what would have been the side. The doorway still remains looking on to the railway station. The railway came to Whaley with the growth of industry and it was, so I was told, the intention to take it through the Goyt Valley to Buxton, but the Grimshawes of Errwood would not consider "such a godless monster" passing over their land, so the line from Manchester turned off to Chapel-en-le-Frith and on to Buxton.

I wandered first out of the town up to an area known as Stoneheads, and by the Whaley Bridge Golf Links. It was there that I came across a stone by the side of the roadway which told me that: "William Wood, Eyam, Derbyshire, was murdered here on July 16, 1823." Underneath the inscription are the frightening words: "Prepare to meet thy God." I could not understand why anyone should go to the trouble to have such words inscribed at such a place.

It is a very lonely spot and William Wood must have found it so when he was set upon by three thieves who so brutally did him to death on that July night in 1823. The story related to me is that a carter returning home found Wood's body nearly buried under stones from the wall. He had been murdered for the money he carried, believed to have been £100. The crime was discovered to have been committed by three youths — one of whom committed suicide in his cell, another was never caught, while a third paid the full penalty of the law. For years it was believed that Wood's ghost haunted the spot and refused to allow the bloodstained hole to be obliterated. There was nothing unusual about it when I was there.

From here I went on to call at the old Posting House. It is believed that it was first built 200 years ago and served as a posting house for the vehicles travelling over the hills along the old turnpike road which connected Lancashire with Derbyshire. Here the horses would be changed while the drivers and what passengers they might have, took refreshments at the inn which stood across the way. This was known as "Soldier Dick."

The building was very much broken down when Mr. and Mrs. Hurst purchased it in 1922, but they spent a considerable sum of money in renovations and alterations. The old stone archways have been retained and now form an interesting part of the house. An old shippon which stood by the side of the main building is now a well-equipped kitchen. This is a fine example of how an historic building can be retained and, with imagination and initiative, converted into a modern house, without entirely losing its identity.

The Old Posting House, Whaley Bridge.

The murder stone.

Whaley Bridge itself has much of interest, but to motorists and hikers it is an ideal starting point for tours into the Peak District. To Lancashire folk, Whaley Bridge is the gateway to the Goyt Valley and during the summer months they come to the town in their hundreds.

Whaley bridge owes much of its growth to the power which the River Goyt has given to its industry and one would have thought that its people would have shown a greater affection for the river, but no. Why should people show such a complete disregard for the rivers which flow through the towns. I am alluding not so much to the pollution caused by industry but to the fact that so many seem to treat a river as a general dumping ground.

Back at home I was searching through the records of the Justices of the Peace for the County Palatine of Cheshire preserved by the Records Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, and came across an interesting reference to the ancient bridge. In 1641, Joseph Shallcross made application to the Justices for a certificate for carrying out repairs to the bridge. He wrote: "May it please you to be certified that the Bridge called Wayley Bridge standing upon the River Goyte dividing in that place the counties of Derbie and Chester was at the last Assizes for the Countie of

Derbie by the Jurie of grand Inquest presented and found to be in decaie: and that the moitie thereof on Derbyshire side ought to be repayred by the inhabitants of that Countie, and the other moitie by the inhabitants of the Countie of Chester." He went on to report that Derbyshire had agreed to pay £45 as their share and he appealed to Chester to state what they would pay. Sir Edward Fitton, Mr. Doctor Nicolis, and Mr. Stanley were appointed to view the bridge and certify what charge should be recommended to the next Assize. No doubt Cheshire paid her due share and the bridge was put in a good state of repair.

It was while I was talking to some of the older inhabitants that I was told of some of the unusual happenings which legend has passed down through the centuries. One July day, 300 years ago, there was a strange phenomenon at Whaley, Taxal and the old Macclesfield Forest. A great pillar of smoke said to be as high as a steeple and 20 yards broad, swept for about six miles over the moorlands, making "an hideous noise." According to an account quoted by T. A. Coward, in his history of Cheshire, it picked up stone walls and trees from a wood and carried them to fresh places, it cleared haycocks, laid growing corn and when it reached the town called Taxal, and visited "Waley Bridge" it overthrew a house or two and then went "up the hills into Derbyshire, and so vanished."

I next set out to find what is perhaps the most discussed spot in Whaley Bridge and District, the Roosdyche. Controversy has raged for centuries over its origin. It was for long believed to have been built by the Romans as a chariot racecourse, but extensive research has failed to produce any definite evidence. It is well worth a visit. To get there I climbed up the Old Road, and climb is the word. After crossing the now disused Cromford and High Peak Railway lines and having read the notice which warns pedestrians to "look up and down the line before crossing," I found the hill which led eventually to the Roosdyche, exceedingly steep. At the bottom of the hill I stopped to chat with Mr. J. R. Wood and he recalled the days when the pit near to the railway was working and when it was possible to buy coal at eightpence a cwt.

The tall, stone, tower-like building, half-way up the hill was part of the pit workings. He told me to take the pathway at the top of the hill marked: "To the cricket ground," and that just before I reached the cricket grounds I should come to the Roosdyche on my left. I followed his directions and there, sure enough, was what to me looked just like a valley on the hilltop. I walked from one end to the other. You get a strange feeling as you walk alone through this peculiar valley, for peculiar it is. It is three-quarters of a mile long and banked up on either side and its average width is about 30

yards. Half-way through I climbed up the embankment overlooking Whaley Bridge and the picture which was unfolded for me made me realise why they call this "Little Switzerland." To the left is Toddbrook reservoir and beyond, the tree-covered hillside with the homes of the people dotted all over the place. This was a delightful view of the valley of the Goyt. Then I looked back along the deep cleft through which I had walked and wondered whether it had not been used for some purpose by the Romans. Today it is lined with trees.

Let us see what others have said about this remarkable spot. Writing in 1878, Macclesfield's own Dr. J. G. Sainter, F.G.S., said this: "Upon crossing the River Goyt at the Whaley Bridge station and taking the way up a lane to the left for about half a mile, there will come into view on the left, with its fine avenue of trees, what goes by the name of the Rhedagua, or the ancient Roman chariot racecourse: and it is not improbable that it may have been used also for similar purposes by their successors when it went by the name of the Roosdyche" (which he stated meant a high wood with a ditch running through it). "Originally," he adds, "this furrow, or groove, may have been the result of a huge landslip, or has been caused by the passage of an iceberg: or it may be a portion of the bed of an ancient river or watercourse that has been formed during the occurrence of one of these oscillations of level between land and sea in the Glacial Drift period. Although so many centuries have passed since the Rhedagua was in use, it still remains in a wonderful state of preservation and with little trouble and expense it might be made available once more for a similar purpose, with other sports and pastimes."

The old Cromford and High Peak Railway incline, Whaley Bridge.

Whaley Bridge

He gives the following measurements:– Length of race ground, 694 yards: width near the extremity, 30 yards: width near the middle, 20 yards. He adds that the above measurements do not include that portion of ground where are the terraces for spectators. Firth, in his "Highways and Byways of Derbyshire," thinks differently. He states: "The old theory that the Roosdyche was a Roman racecourse does not commend itself to my judgment, though it is tempting enough when one looks down the glade and remembers the magnet shaped hippodrome at Constantinople. But, after all, the Romans did not plant their racecourses on the tops of remote hillsides."

The people of Whaley Bridge stick to the belief that it was used by the Romans, as a racecourse. In the centre, the surface of the Roosdyche is only tolerably level, I was trying to make up my own mind as to what it was used for centuries ago—I am sure some use was made of it either by the Romans, or by others before they came—when quite suddenly it rained. It was as though I had walked straight into a rain cloud, and within a matter of minutes I was drenched to the skin. The trees gave little or no shelter, and I was so wet that I ceased to worry.

Tunstead Dickie

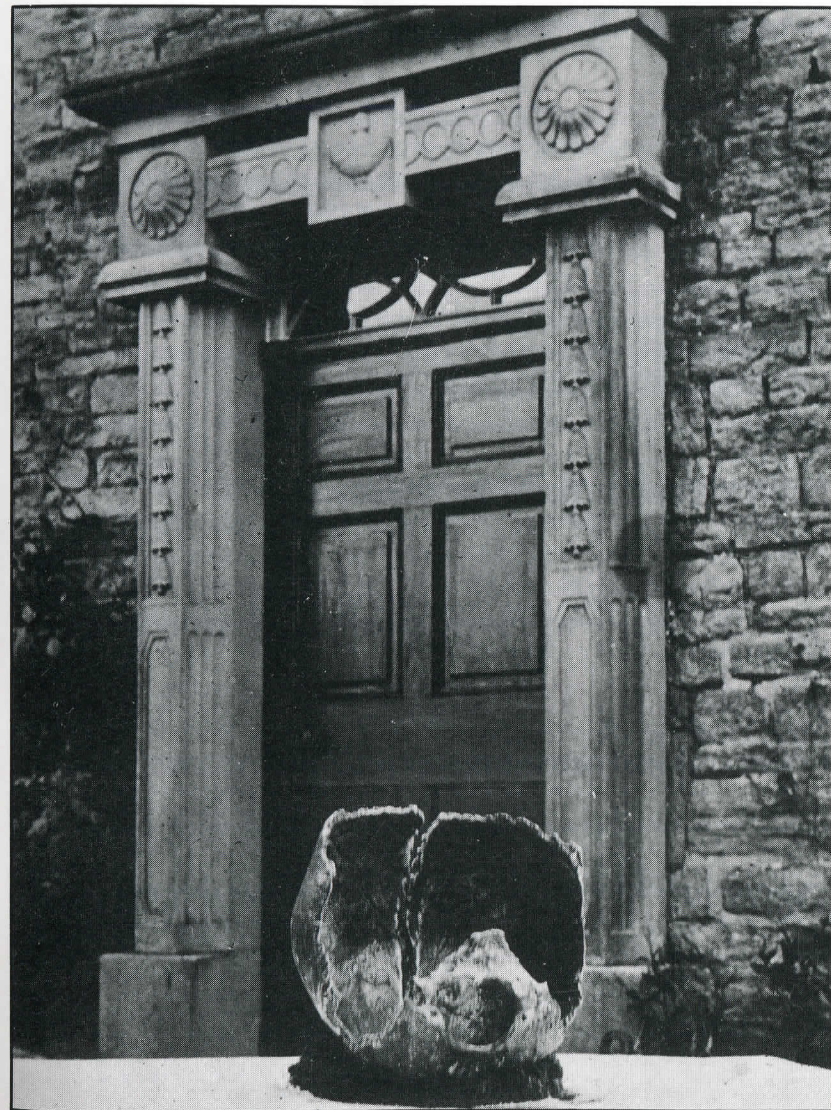
While I was in Whaley Bridge I heard so much about the skull of Dickie of Tunstead, the skull which refused to be buried and to which legend had attributed the cause of many catastrophies, that I could not resist the temptation to wander a little from the Valley of the Goyt along the road to Chapel-en-le-Frith to the hamlet of Tunstead in the hope of seeing the skull.

For more than a century it had rested in the window of Tunstead Farm, overlooking Coombe Valley, so I was told. It had a reputation of being unable to settle in any grave. Whenever it had been buried in the past, such strange things had happened that the occupiers of the farm were only too pleased to dig it up again.

Dickie's skull, they told me, was believed to be that of one Ned Dickson, of Tunstead, who left his farm to fight in the French wars. He was reported dead, and a cousin, perhaps a little prematurely, took possession of his property. When Dickie returned very much alive and anxious to have his home back, the cousin and his wife murdered him in his sleep. His skull took revenge by refusing to lie buried in the earth and in course of time all local calamities were put down to its vengeful influence.

When the Old North Western Railway was taken by the side of Tunstead Farm, a bridge built over it was found to be on quicksand and was thrown down. Again Dickie's skull took the blame. However, the considerable walk to Tunstead Farm ended in bitter disappointment, for the then occupants, Mr. and Mrs. Vickers, who had been there for five years, had seen nothing of the skull. "It was not here when we came, and I have no idea where it is," said Mr. Vickers. This news will surprise Whaley Bridge, for I was assured by them that it was still there. What has happened to the skull apparently is a mystery.

Crighton Porteous, in his book on Derbyshire, which was published in 1950, stated that the skull was at Tunstead Farm. "How old it is," he wrote, "no-one knows, but when it was examined some years ago by a medical man it was said to show no sign of decay and he thought it was the skull of a girl of about 18 years. One theory is that it may have been taken in the forgotten past from a tumulus on the hillside above." He goes on to tell the story of the days when farmers rode on horseback to take their produce to market. "The tenant of Tunstead Farm was riding back from market with his wife up behind him. She was tired after a long day, but it was her duty at every gate to get down, hold it open, and fasten it again when her husband had ridden through. "I wish Dickie would oppen 'em," said the weary woman getting ready to drop off again. As she did so, the gate obligingly opened. The woman could almost have bitten her tongue out for having spoken. After that, every gate to the farm opened in the same way, but the good woman instead of being grateful reached home nearly in a collapse."



Tunstead Dickie

No doubt, many of the stories which have been attributed to Dickie's skull are the product of the vivid imagination of the hill country farmers, and have been passed down from one generation to another. The official guide, issued by the Whaley Bridge Urban District Council also includes reference to the skull. It states: "Not far away, in the little cluster of houses known as Tunstead Milton, the skull of Dickie o' Tunstead, reposes on a copy of the Bible, surrounded by the superstitious aura of more than a century."

The skull has now gone, but where?

The journey was not altogether wasted, for it gave me an opportunity of taking in the beauty of Coombs reservoir from above, and that alone was worth the trip. From Whaley Bridge I made my way through the valley to Furness Vale, New Mills and then on through Mellor to Marple. New Mills is a thriving urban district built on the hillside rising from the Goyt on the Derbyshire side of the river. It gives the impression of being a township built on bridges. The River Sett, which rises near to Edale Cross has taken in the waters of Kinder before it joins the Goyt at New Mills. Both rivers Kinder and Sett have flowed over the wild moorland around Kinder, through country much loved by all ramblers, and it seems such a pity that the waters of these two streams should have to be so polluted when they join the Goyt.

Before I climbed through the busy shopping centre to the Town Hall which stands some hundreds of feet high above the valley, I admired the railway viaduct built over the Goyt at the end of last century and the new bridge which carries the main road to the shopping centre of New Mills. To the right of this bridge, whose supporting arches rise more than 100ft. from the river bed, is another bridge over the Sett. There seemed to be bridges all around me, and what wonderful ones they were.

In the valley below the main street lie the ruins of one of the oldest mills in New Mills. It was while I was in this valley, now very much overgrown and wild, that I met 78-year-old Mr. Albert Haveyard. He told me that the new bridge was built in 1884 and he could not remember any repairs having had to be carried out to it so well did the men do their job. He remembered the mill in the valley working, in fact it was destroyed by fire at the beginning of the present century. Looking at it today, I wondered however the work-people managed to get down to it, for there are no roads leading there, but Mr. Haveyard told me that in the old days there were two roads leading down into the valley.

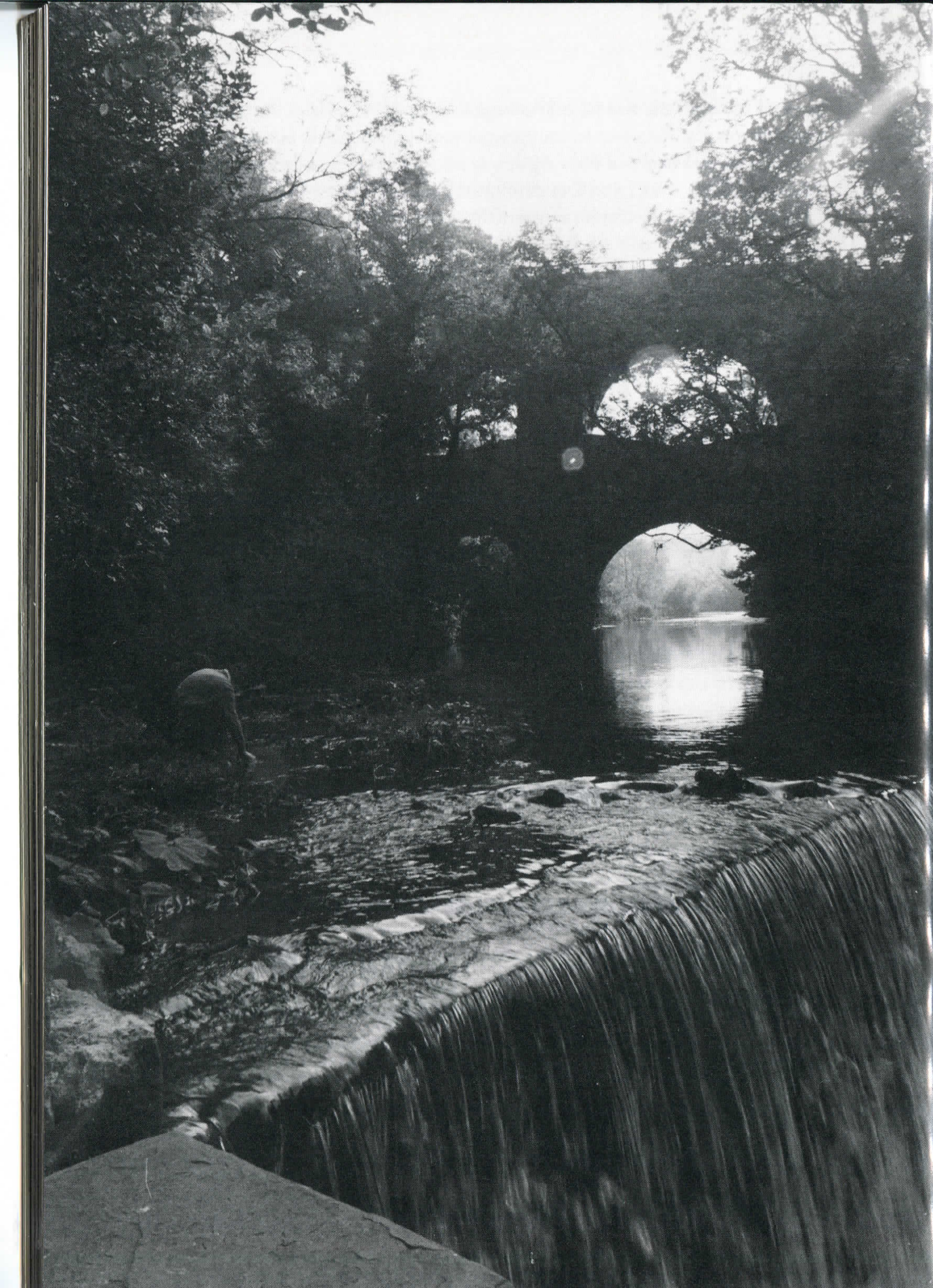
The mill was driven by water power from the Goyt and he recalled the old water paddle-wheel. He could even relate to me stories told to him by

his wife's father, who was 91 years of age when he died, of how he used to pick trout out of the river when they got near to the paddle-wheel.

The original name of New Mills was much more colourful, namely, Bowden-Middle-Cale, and then stretched from Kinder Scout to Mellor. New Mills is still looked upon as one of the gateways to Kinder. It formerly comprised the hamlets of Beard, Ollerset, Whittle, Thornsett, Great Hamlet, Phoeside Kinder, Chinley, Bugsworth, and Brownside, but two centuries ago it was sub-divided. Before then, the inhabitants of all the hamlets ground their corn at one mill in Hayfield, but on the division a new mill was erected on the banks of the Kinder in the hamlet of Ollerset and the name New Mills was conferred on the four hamlets which were the beginning of the present urban district. What more romantic story of local government could you wish for than that?

At the Town Hall I was handed a copy of the official guide to New Mills in which it is claimed that no less than 8% of the entire textile printing carried out in this country is accomplished at New Mills. For a town with a population of only 8,473, New Mills has a large number of mills, but the town has grown away from the River Goyt. It was the proximity of the Rivers Goyt and Sett which led to New Mills being developed. It has been an important centre of the textile printing, bleaching and dyeing trade for a great number of years.

New Mills claims to be the home of engraving to calico printers, for it was here in the year 1821 that John Potts first conceived the idea for using the calico engraving, the method employed by engravers in the Potteries to obtain more durable and brilliant effects. His experiments were successful and were adopted throughout Great Britain, Europe and America.



Strines and Marple

New Mills has some interesting buildings and churches, but I was not sorry to get away to follow the River Goyt through the valley to Strines and on to Marple. This should have been a pleasant walk, but it was far from that. The stench from the polluted river was such that at times I was forced to hold my handkerchief to my nose. It was disgusting and from what I was told in the valley it had been worse. I am no scientist, but I find it hard to believe that there is not something that can be done to minimise, if now wipe out altogether, this foul pollution of our rivers. If someone tipped a pile of rotting refuse into a main street and left it there, a prosecution would quickly follow, yet apparently nothing can be done to stop practically the same thing happening to our rivers.

I keep harping on this subject, but then I feel so strongly about it. It seems strange to me that an age that can produce the atom bomb, and the hydrogen bomb at huge expense can sit back and allow such things as river pollution to go on. I must, however, admit that although I have been through the valley of the Goyt at Marple many times, the stench from the river has never been as bad as it was on this occasion. *There has been a great improvement in recent years, and it is hoped to have the river clear of pollution very soon now.*

This is the valley of Samuel Oldknow, who in the late 18th century harnessed the waters of the Goyt to drive his cotton mill and brought a new prosperity to Marple. His mill has now vanished, but there are still many reminders of the days when Samuel Oldknow had more than 1,200 names on his wages lists. In 1785 the following advertisement appeared in the Manchester Mercury: "All that ancient Estate called Goit Cliff Tor, consisting of a messuage or farmhouse, barn, stable, shippon and other necessary and convenient outbuildings and several closes, fields, or parcels of land . . . it has likewise the sole right to the powerful River Goit which might easily be appropriated for the use of cotton or other manufactories, worked by water, and for which buildings might be erected at a moderate charge, there being stone and clay for making bricks."

It was in 1787 that Samuel Oldknow purchased the estate, he then being a prosperous manufacturer at Stockport. I once again called at Bottoms Hall Farm, built by Oldknow. It was here that he had his apprentice house, where he lodged the young children loaned to him from the neighbouring pauper houses. Mr. Herbert A. Duckworth, in a

Samuel Oldknow and his Marple mill.

history of Marple, quotes many examples of how these children came into the employ of Oldknow. The Overseers of the Poor for Ashford, Derbyshire, wrote to Oldknow in 1796: "We have two fine healthy boys whom we wish to put out as Parish Apprentices, the eldest is about 10 years of age, the youngest about nine, but they will be bound till they arrive at 21 years of age." The letter added that the ratepayers of Ashford would not be willing to part with much money and they would like to know the lowest terms for which he would accept the two boys. Oldknow replied that he would require £2 2s. to take the boys and also clothes and two shirts. Often the terms of their indentures included a proviso that they should attend church twice on Sundays. As employers went in those days Samuel Oldknow was considered good, although he was a strict disciplinarian.

In December, 1797, Oldknow was determined to wipe out "the impious vice of profane cursing and swearing" and posted up in the mill a notice which stated: "All hands in the service of Samuel Oldknow working in his mill, or elsewhere, must be subject to the following rule: "that when any person, either man, woman or child, is heard to curse or swear the same shall forfeit one shilling."

To stamp out absenteeism he ruled "That when any hand is absent from work (unless unavoidable detained by sickness, or leave being first obtained) the same shall forfeit as many hours of work as have been lost: and if by the job or piece, after the rate of 2s. 6d. per day, such forfeitures to be put in a box and distributed to the sick and necessitous at the discretion of their employer." He engaged a special doctor to care for the ills of the children who were apprenticed to him, and he also provided teachers to advance their knowledge. They had good food. It is recorded that this included porridge and bacon for breakfast, meat every day for dinner, with puddings and pies on alternative days. There was a large orchard in the farm grounds and all the fruit from this was supplied to the apprentices. They did their health exercises in the meadows by the side of the River Goyt. What Oldknow would have had to say about river pollution is not difficult to imagine. The owners of Bottoms Hall Farm have always taken a keen interest in the history of the building.

There is the 18th century shippon which is 28 yards long and has tie-up for 24 cattle. The feeding troughs are hewn out of solid stone, and Oldknow had his own water-feeding system in those distant days. Oldknow utilised the water from a nearby reservoir for driving a shaft for cutting hay, turnips, mangolds, etc., for use on the farm. One could go on writing about Samuel Oldknow, who was one of Marple's greatest benefactors. His mill in the valley was burned down in 1892.

Roman Lake, Marple.

Near to Bottoms Hall Farm is the boating pool, known as Marple Lake. It is a delightful stretch of water in a lovely setting. As I walked by, two young boys were fishing at the far end, and the rowing boats were laid up by the side. At weekends this is a very busy spot. Originally this was the reservoir built by Oldknow to drive his machinery.

On the hillside above the water is the stone seat on which Oldknow would sit during the summer months to look over the valley and no doubt watch his apprentices at play. The railway viaduct passes over the valley in these parts and a little distance away is the picturesque pack-horse bridge over the river. I walked over this to admire the lovely old cottage Lumm House. The occupants were out but a date over the doorway indicates that it was built in 1650. That, of course, would be the original house.

Marple, of course, is noted as being the birthplace of the celebrated Judge, John Bradshaw, who presided at the court which tried Charles the First. He was not born at Marple Hall as so many believe, but at Wybersley in the same township. Marple Hall was the home of Henry Bradshaw, his brother. Unfortunately, Marple Hall which has been described as "King of the Manor Houses of the district" has disappeared. It was for generations the seat of the Vernons of Haddon Hall, and was sold to the Bradshaw family in 1606. It is stated that Judge Bradshaw did live at Marple Hall for a time. He received his early education at Macclesfield Grammar School, and legend states that it was while at Macclesfield he wrote the following sentence on a stone in the Parish Churchyard:

> "My brother Henry must heir the land
> My brother Frank must be at his command:
> Whilst I, poor Jack, will do that
> That all the world shall wonder at."

Bradshaw served his clerkship to a solicitor in Congleton and in 1647 was voted by both Houses to the office of Chief Justice of Chester. He was appointed President of the Court which condemned Charles the First to a violent death.

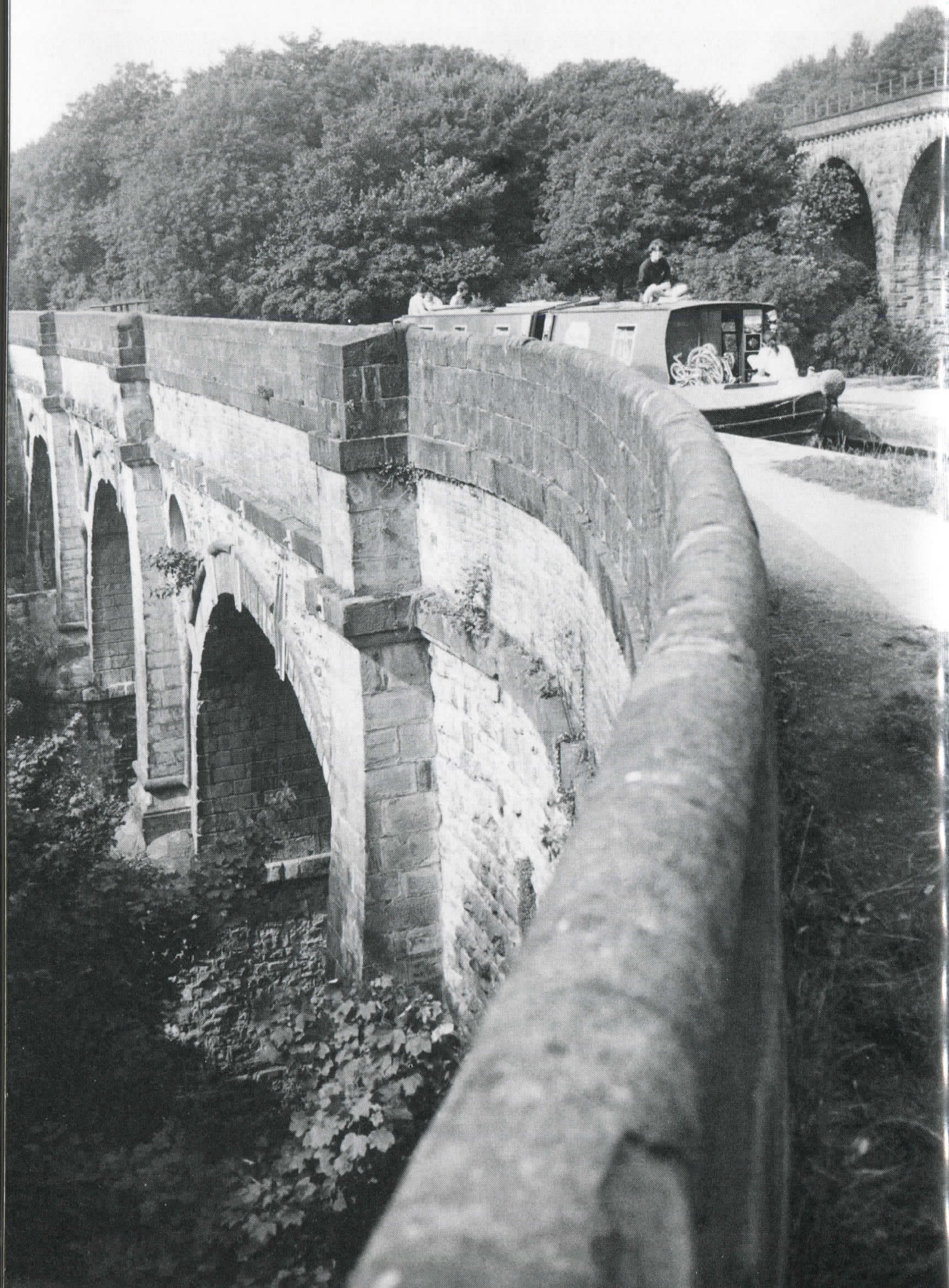
Before leaving the valley of the Goyt at Marple, I heard some of the ghost stories associated with the former Marple Hall. The heavy rain had given an added impetus to the river as it rushed along on its way to Stockport. It was hereabouts that centuries ago a courier of the King was believed to have met his death.

The story goes that a daughter of Colonel Henry Bradshaw had fallen in love with an officer of the Royalist Army. This was kept a secret from

The Round House, Marple.

the Bradshaw menfolk for they were Parliamentarians. The officer called one night at the hall on his way carrying despatches for the King. The daughter, wishing to serve her father's cause, but at the same time not lose the affection of her lover, gave instructions to one of the servants, entrusted with the task of escorting the officer over the River Goyt next morning, to sink the despatches in the river.

The servant became too zealous and, instead of sinking the despatches, caused the officer to fall from his horse into the river and drown. It is said that Miss Bradshaw, who was watching from the hillside, saw all that happened and was so overcome with grief that she went out of her mind and her ghost haunted the spot for years afterwards.



Chadkirk to Journey's End

I left this valley of memories to go to another delightful little valley through which the Goyt passes—the valley of Chadkirk, which is situated on the extreme edge of the ancient Macclesfield Forest. It is in this valley quite near to the river that the ancient Chadkirk Chapel, "raised out of its ruins in 1747," stands and round about are many reminders of the early religious life in the quiet secluded spot.

Half-way up to the hill to the hamlet known as Bury mi wick is the St. Chad's Well, or Holy Well. There is very little water in the well today and it is not very easy to find, but in the old days the clear crystal spring which fed the well was reputed to have strange medicinal qualities and there are stories of miraculous cures having been effected here.

St. Chad was a missionary sent in the seventh century to evangelise the country west of the Pennines and tradition has stated that he resided somewhere in the vicinity of the present church at Chadkirk. He afterwards became Bishop of Lichfield and died in 673. The church, now used on only a few occasions each year, is approached through the garden of Chadkirk House and is in a delightful spot.

What stories this lovely old building could relate of religious struggles, of neglect, and then of fights to keep it open. There are records of a chaplain of Chadkirk as early as 1347 and Mr. Raymond Richards, in his "Old Cheshire Churches," states that the Davenports of Henbury, who built Goyt Hall lower down the valley, claimed to have founded the chantry of Chadkirk, but, states Mr. Richards, it is more likely that they founded a religious house there when the lands came into their possession and endowed it to establish a family connection.

It may be that the Davenports built a residence by the side of the chapel, the site of which is now occupied by Chadkirk House, built in 1748 by George Nicholson, who was buried inside the chapel. Close to the chapel is what was known as the Priests' Walk. Here, no doubt, the priests in charge of the little chapel walked in meditation. In those days this was the only place of worship in the district and the people walked along the footpaths through the thickly-wooded countryside.

It was to Chadkirk that the great Puritan preacher, Adam Martindale, was invited in 1648, but he did not see fit to accept. The tiny chapel was, however, used by the Nonconforming clergy. Earwaker states that, after the restoration in 1660, the chapel appeared to have been neglected by the Rectors of Stockport and, like many others of the smaller chapels, to

Peak Forest Canal Aqueduct

have gradually passed into the hands of the Nonconformists.

The last of the Nonconformist ministers was Mr. Gamaliel Jones, who continued to prosecute his labours there until 1705 when, through episcopal interference, he and his Puritan congregation were at length obliged to leave Chadkirk Chapel to "a handsome new chapel at Hatherlow." After this, the old chapel fell into ruins and at one time it was actually used as a stable for cattle. However, as the notice over the door states, it "was raised out of its ruins in 1747; repaired and beautified and the loft erected in 1761; again repaired and beautified in 1860 and restored again in 1876." The churchyard, now very much overgrown, is said to contain the graves of a number of young children who were victims of the black plague. The church is in the parish of Romiley.

I walked from the church to where the Goyt flows by the Chadkirk Printworks, now owned by the Calico Printers' Association Ltd., and reputed to be one of the oldest printworks in the country, dating back to 1758. After passing by the mill, the River Goyt flows under Otterspool Bridge, Romiley. There has been a bridge here for more than 500 years. It marked the extreme boundary of the Macclesfield Forest and before 1500 was known by the name of Rohehundesbrig.

It probably gets its present name from the fact that otters at one time sported in the deeper parts of the river at this point. No otter would go anywhere near the river today. When a perambulation of the Macclesfield Forest was carried out in 1619, it was recorded that "the circuit of the said forest of Macclesfield begins at a certain bridge now called Otterspoole Bridge and formerly called Rohehundesbrig."

On the far side of the bridge on the right of the road leading into Romiley, there formerly stood the inn known as the Stag and Pheasant. This is now a private residence, Otterspool Cottage. This building has had a varied history, for in turn it has been occupied as a Vicarage and the home of the estate bailiff.

After resting awhile at Otterspool Bridge I took to the wide cart track which runs through the valley of the Goyt in the direction of Stockport. I had gone a good mile when the track brought me to more open country and there in front of me was Goyt Hall. My first view was of the back of the building and it looked just the same as any of the other farms in the locality, but when I came to the gateway it was a much different picture that I saw. There in front of me was what remains of the 16th century manor house of the Davenports. I was shown a picture of the house as it was before the alterations and it was a fine specimen of a black and white timber and plaster house. The gable next to the porch was, however,

Chadkirk Chapel

pulled down many years ago and a very modern brick extension erected in its place. The main front of the house is much the same as it was in its original state.

As I approached, a number of geese which had been disporting themselves in the small pool in front of the hall created a bigger din than a dozen watchdogs and with necks extended to the full splashed through the water to find retreat at the rear of the farm buildings. Before I rang the bell on the front door, I walked to the gate at the bottom of the yard to look over the valley. In the fields the freshly cut corn stood in stooks arranged with the neatness and symmetry of a battalion of soldiers on parade, while in the background were the wooded banks of the Goyt and in the clearing on the far side of the river I could see the Offerton cricket ground with its sight screens looking very much like windows in the green foliage. Up above, dark clouds hurried across the sky blotting out from time to time the warm rays of the sun.

Otterspool Bridge

For the past 27 years the Holmes have lived at Goyt Hall Farm and it was Mr. F. Holmes who eventually came to me. He spoke with great fervour of the beauties of the valley. He informed me that all that remained of the original Davenport Manor House was the front. The interior had been completely altered. He spoke of the two tall and stately poplar trees which formerly stood at the front of the hall. "They were wonderful trees and it was a great blow to me when during a violent storm one of them was blown down and the other had to be taken down because of its danger," he said. "I would have given almost anything to have saved those two trees."

It was clear to me that there had grown up between this weather-beaten old farmer and those two trees a great and abiding attachment. They had meant a lot to him. As he looked out of his bedroom window each morning, they spoke to him of the direction of the wind, always a helpful weather guide. He had watched them battle against the fierce winds and gales which year in and year out had swept down the valley and he had always hoped that they would win through, yet all along he knew that one day their bodies would weaken with age and the continual struggle against the elements would be lost. When the day did come, it

was a great shock. He was a man after my own heart, for I know the sorrow which comes from the felling of a tree which has been a companion over the years. Oh that there were more men like Mr. Holmes then we should not see such wanton tree-felling all over the country.

From here the Goyt flows slowly on its way to Stockport, where it is joined by the Tame and becomes the Mersey. There have been differences of opinion in the past as to when the Goyt becomes the Mersey. A history of Cheshire, written in 1853, states: "The Mersey is formed by the junction of the Etherow and Goyt. The Etherow rises near Woodhead. From its source it forms the boundary for some distance between Cheshire and Derbyshire, and enters this county between Compstall bridge and Marple bridge, at its confluence with the Goyt, which rises in Macclesfield Forest, and for about nine miles is the boundary between Cheshire and Derbyshire. At the above confluence the united rivers take the name of Mersey, which passes Chadkirk, Offerton, and Bredbury, to the town of Stockport, where a little below the bridge of Portwood it has its junction with the Tame."

As I left Goyt Hall I made my way up the hill in the direction of Bredbury and looked back towards the farm. The wind was blowing hard when I reached the top and I rested awhile to take in the unusual beauty of the scene in front of me. The valley below was quiet as I watched the birds fly from one stook of corn to another, filling their craws with the valuable grain; amid all the corn fields was one solitary hay harvest where men were working in an effort to gather it in before the next rain fell, while as a strange backcloth to this lovely rural scene was industrial Stockport. From the top of this hill, Stockport, or the part of it that I could see, seemed to fit in with the picture. It showed what progress had been made since the Davenports first built their hall in the valley in the latter part of the 16th century. It also indicated how interdependent town and country are. The townspeople could not survive if it were not for the flour which would be produced from that wheat in the valley and it would not be possible to gather it in so quickly if it were not for the machinery manufactured in the towns.

Appendix

The Goyt Valley Traffic Scheme

The scheme is an exercise in managing the countryside for the benefit of all concerned, whether they be motorists, walkers, farmers or foresters.

On summer weekends non-essential traffic is banned on the main valley road between The Street and Derbyshire Bridge. This allows visitors to leave their cars and walk along the traffic-free roads or use the specially provided mini-buses to better appreciate the beauty of the valley.

Special facilities have been provided by the National Park Authority to help people enjoy their visit to the valley. These include waymarked walks, a nature trail and picnic areas adjoining the car parks. A full-time ranger is based in the area and works in close liaison with local farmers, landowners and visitors. He is assisted at weekends by part-time rangers who are also there to help the visitor get the fullest benefit from his stay. Further details are available in the free Goyt Valley Traffic Scheme leaflet, available from the National Park Office or Information Centre.

Chadkirk

Chadkirk and adjacent areas became the property of the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport in 1974 and are being developed, in co-operation with the Countryside Commission as a public amenity in the form of a Farm Interpretive Centre and Museum. The facilities available explain the role of the farmer within modern society and allow visitors to observe, at close quarters, a small farm at work. The Chapel, whilst retaining some of its religious atmosphere, contains exhibitions designed to relate and illustrate significant aspects of Britain's long and colourful agricultural history.

Chadkirk