

GOSH – IT’S COSH!

An isolated farmstead beyond Littondale.

Visited on November 10, 2004, by Cyril, David, Trevor, Bill and Popsie.

Weather: Chill northerly wind and some blue-black clouds but mainly sunny and dry.



David, duty chauffeur, took the high road back o’Penyghent – which stood in shadow, like some cut-out propped against the sky – and managed to negotiate through one of several herds of suckler cattle that dotted the landscape. The particular herd was blocking the road near Giant’s Grave. Trevor gallantly played toreador.

David drew up at the edge of a pasture near Halton Gill, as an oldish chap with a dog strode on to it. He did not give the intruding vehicle a second glance. When Bill mentioned that our destination was Cosh, which was on the market, he grunted: “Has ta bowt it?” Bill shook his head, remarking: “Are you thinking of buying it?” He replied: “I wouldn’t like to be fun [found] dead out theer!”

His arrival triggered off a sheep spectacular involving about 200 animals and a young chap on a quad (all-terrain vehicle). With a couple of lively collies – and with Popsie watching with special insight, for she too is a collie – the sheep bunched, ran to the top-end of the pasture and returned in line ahead with other sheep collected en route. They formed one compact, jostling bunch that flooded on to the road and across the narrow bridge over the Skirfare, startling a motorist who could only watch with drooping lower jaw as the woolly flood enveloped his car.

We booted up. Trevor looked under the car, seeking a lost gaiter. Twas not there. He hoped that during the walk he would not be lopsided. David gave Popsie a large stick to play with. The doggie soon involved others, depositing the aforementioned stick on the ground, crouching beside it and daring anyone to pick it up. Popsie’s reflexes were momentarily quicker than ours.

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Halton Gill stood in a patch of hard northern sunlight. Our path lay close to the river, from which leapt a dozen quacking mallard. We crossed two minor watercourses on plank bridges. At Foxup, we met Mrs Lund, farmer's wife, and there was some good-natured banter of the Dales sort, including a guessing game relating to our ages – she turned out to be sixtyish.

We heard during our stay at Foxup that Cosh, the old farmhouse and a small plot of land, had been sold for t'topside of £100,000. Whew! The last residents before the sale had been a family – ma, pa, six children – lodged there by the Department of Social Security. The oldest girl, who went to school outside Littondale, was picked up specially by taxi at a cost of £60 a day. Double whew! On our way through the hamlet, we saw a sign: "Private Road. No thru traffic." Beyond Foxup, we were in tousled fields, with sheep, crows and gulls for company. A jet aircraft screamed. None of the grazing sheep glanced upwards.

We arrived in the muddy yard of an outbarn which, judging by a tangle of short wool on the ground, had been used for sheep-shearing. The outer wall of the barn held patches of blue dye where the local sheep had rubbed, a blue patch on each body distinguishing this flock from the others in the locality. Cyril, catering officer, provided us with piping hot coffee and fruit cake. The next barn was so immaculate it would have been a shame if farmstock had used it. We presumed that its restoration had been carried out by some charitable organisation like a Millennium Trust. As we passed a conspicuous ash tree – conspicuous because it was the only big tree for miles – David pronounced it to be an ash. And, he added, the tree's buds were turning green. Whew!

Now we had a distant view of a sunlit fellside and the long low farm of the ruined barn, near which (but not yet visible) was the old Cosh farmhouse. We were enchanted by the way the hard sunlight picked out the forms and tints of the autumn landscape. A kestrel hovered. On our way along the side of Cosh Beck we found a patch of grouse feathers. A cock pheasant lost itself in a patch of rushes from which an excited Popsie roused it. Trevor found a colony of fly agaric – particularly rare form that did not look exactly like fly agaric nor had it some birch trees to grow under. As none of us knew much about fungi, we decided that a bold ? should be put next to it in the official record of the outing.

Onwards, in sunlight, sheltered from the wind but with a uniformly dark cloud to the east. We climbed up the side of the narrow gill and saw Cosh Farmhouse. Sunlight brought a silvery gleam to black bars that protected the windows. We joined the track beside which it stood and, after a round of photography, continued for a short distance to a sheltered spot by the beck. Outcropping slabs of limestone provided us with seats.

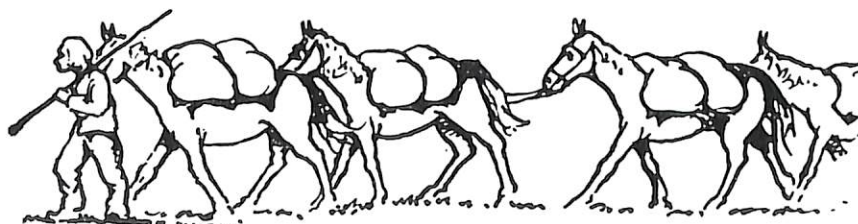
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A sandwich census revealed that Trevor had ham with chutney and Bill was tucking in to tuna with chutney. He tossed one sandwich to Popsie who neatly separated the two halves and collected the filling with prescribed licks. Cyril had ham rolls with mustard and David's preference was for crisps and tinned sardines. Popsie was tucking in to dog biscuits, of the type fed to resting greyhounds, with "good boys", these being crispy biscuits and, surprise, surprise, a small tin of tuna in sunflower oil.

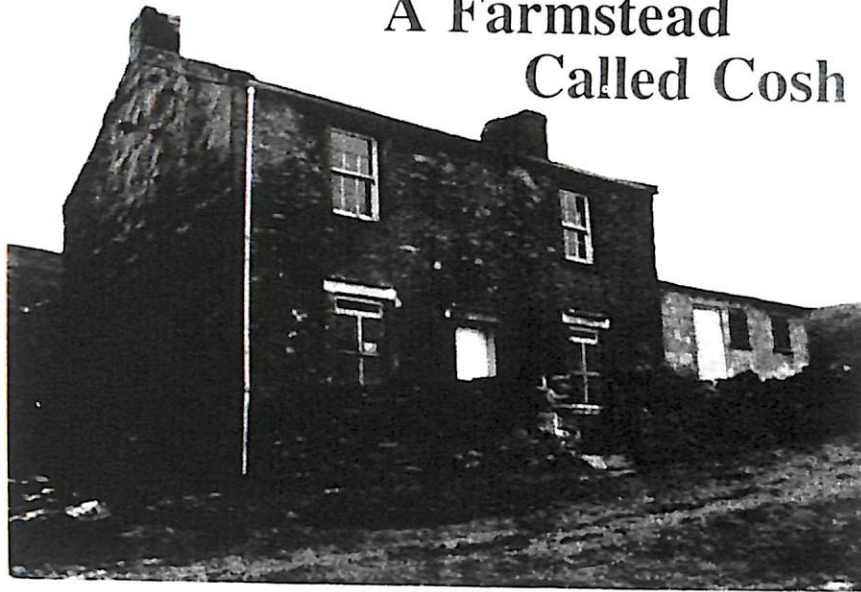
Back at Cosh, we saw a main building in quite good shape, three of four windows being double-glazed. The front door looked careworn, the garden gate was half-a-gate and rusty, the garden had stone slabs and a large number of plant pots. On the way back to Foxup we examined decrepit vehicles, a Land Rover and Volvo, in an advance state of decay. We followed the long track down to Foxup, stopping when we heard the hysterical quacking call of a peregrine that had been seen off by some testy crows. The falcon had violated their air space above a small conifer wood.

At Foxup, Mr Lund, an older man and a young lady, were sorting out sheep – more precisely yows - which looked especially pretty, having their right ^{horns} ~~haunt~~ painted blue. November is tugging time in the Dales. Mr Lund said he had no less than sixty tups, to each of which would be allocated a harem of demure yows. The penned sheep sang the usual grand chorus of bleating, which deafened the sound of the shutter on Bill's digital camera as – hysterical, like the aforementioned peregrine – he recorded the Dales event for posterity. Though, as his old boss used to say, what's posterity done for us?

As we approached the Giant's Graves on the return journey, Trevor let out a whoop of delight. Lying beside the road, in the area where he had done some beast-shooing, lay – his missing gaiter. Back in Settle, he was reminded by David that the ascent of Great Gable on the morrow (Remembrance Day) would mean an early start. Six-thirty.



A Farmstead Called Cosh



*They're plucking geese i' Scotland
And sending t' feathers here . . .*

THIS DALES CHANT was heard as flurries of snow settled on the Pennines. Among the isolated farms where snow might lie for months on end was Cosh, two and a-half miles beyond Foxup, which itself is remote, being tucked away at the head of Littondale. Early this century the Brown family of Cosh thought nothing of walking five miles to Horton to catch a train or driving some of their Swaledale ewes for 10 miles to the market at Hawes.

One December, the snow lay at Cosh for so long there was a danger that the sheep might starve. So William Brown gathered them, mounted his pony and drove the sheep across the white landscape looking for green fields where farmers might provide grazing for a copper or two a sheep. There were 450 sheep. The first night was spent with friends at Neils Ing, "back o' Penyghent", and then he moved on towards the Ribbles Valley. He found quarters for his sheep, for a whole month, at farms around Wigglesworth, where the stock from Cosh was referred to as "them snowbound sheep".

In 1917, a bad winter, one of the sheep at Cosh spent three weeks under snow, and lived to bleat the tale. (That ewe was 14 years old when she died accidentally, having wandered into a dipping tub when there was no one about

to rescue her). Robert Brown, son of William, recalls milking the house cow at Cosh in winter. Light was provided by a candle stuck on a "through end" in the shippon and the milker sat on a three-legged stool.

The Browns of Cosh and families living at other remote farms laid in special stores for winter use. Richard Brown remembers a 10 stone bag of white flour. The pig-killer, John Cowan of Halton Gill, had to have a little drop of whisky, "or the pig wouldn't cure properly"! Several days after the animal was killed, John and several farmers returned to cut it up — and to play cards for the rest of the long winter night. "They played whist, sometimes nap . . ."

A Norse Name. The name Cosh is brief, terse indeed, and so it's pretty certain to be Norse. The settlers of over 1,000 years ago didn't waste time with words. Their name was simplified to an Old English form.

A. H. Smith, who compiled the eight-volume *Placenames of the West Riding of Yorkshire*, which was published over 20 years ago, pondered hard and long over Cosh. It was referred to in 1457, being then a grange of Fountains Abbey. He concluded that the name means "cottage, hut or hovel."

Halliwell Sutcliffe, who liked a dash of romance in anything he wrote, informs us in *The Striding Dales* that in Scandinavia the shepherds' huts, built high up the mountains,

are named *Kosh*, "but they are deserted when winter sets its teeth about the heights." He who settled at Cosh had the pluck to dwell there throughout the winter. The monks knew it as Grenefeld Coche; the pastures take their names from the farm — Cosh Inside, Cosh Outside, Cosh Penyghent.

A farmer at Foxup eyed me through murk and drizzle, and remarked "It was a grand day yesterday!" Here was I, about to walk to Cosh on a solitary wet day during one of the longest droughts on record. I walked into a chilling wind. There was a flypast of oystercatchers, piping shrilly, as though trying to infuse some life into a dull day.

Cosh Beck, which joins Foxup Beck to become the river Skirfare, was on my left. Yellow wagtails rose from my path, which ran beside buttercup-spangled turf. The path lay across a stretch of weather-polished limestone that had cracks festooned with red-and-yellow musk and some thyme. Now the curlews took over, one group passing me on to another so that every creature in the little dalehead and across the expansive moors was aware of my intrusion.

The farmer at Foxup had said I might get a Land Rover along the track in dry weather. The Browns, who followed the Campbells at Cosh, used a horse and cart to collect groceries — a month's supply at a time. T. and A. Stockdale of Hebden, provision merchants, left the goods at Foxup. Coal was carted, five hundredweights at a time, for 12 miles from Grassington station. It is no wonder that the family at Cosh was keen to dig a little peat.

A Gated Track. I encountered two gates, each of which was hanging well and had been newly impregnated with creosote. The agility of moorland sheep was acknowledged by the double fastening — metal bar and also hook on chain. (Elsewhere in the Dales that day I noted a fashion for securing gates with brand-new cow ties).

The track to Cosh had its own deep drainage channels. These were the wheel ruts of vehicles that had gone before. William Brown was a good tenant; he often attended to the drainage of the track, though once, exasperated, he asked the landlord if something could not be done to improve it. Surely the landlord himself would not care to use it! The landlord responded quickly. How did William Brown cope? He "twisted about and twisted about". Then, said the landlord, if he were to go to Cosh he would do the same!

Along such upland tracks there once passed much of the trade of the Dales, with goods secured to the backs of pack animals.

Cosh stands in the parish of Littondale, but is administered from Horton parish. Once, it is claimed, three houses stood here. For years,

the pastures were rented by farmers living at Askrigg. After the days of William Brown, a succession of shepherds and their families occupied the remaining house at Cosh. In the early part of the 1939-45 war, Richard Brown and his wife were here.



The ruined barn.

In due course, the 1,129.812 acres of Cosh were added to those of High Birkwith, four miles distant. Mr. J. A. Morphett bought Cosh from Mrs. G. M. Ritchie 40 years ago. The combined farms are run by Mr. Alex Morphett and two of his sons, David and Richard. As they supervise the large flock of sheep, they invariably walk, with their dogs, though a motor-trike with balloon tyres is available. Transport may be needed to carry fodder round to Cosh in winter. The farmhouse itself is leased by a Yorkshire college.

Early this century, there were Campbells at Cosh. Robert Campbell, who died at Amcliffe in 1955, aged 85, had lived as a hind at the remote farm some 50 years before. Marie Hartley and Joan Ingilby have recorded that he went to Settle with horse and cart once a month, and his provisions cost no more than three gold sovereigns. Robert farmed 18 acres of meadowland, kept two cows and a horse, grazed 500 sheep and summered another 700.

Farm in View. Halliwell Sutcliffe, visiting Cosh in the bleakness of a snowbound day, remembered the barking of a farm dog. Something was alive after all! "A sudden bend showed a hollow of the uplands, and in it stood a stout farmstead. Children were playing in the snow. A buxom farm-wife ran to the door, to learn what the dog's warning meant. The contrast was bewildering between the loneliness that had been and this present human warmth."

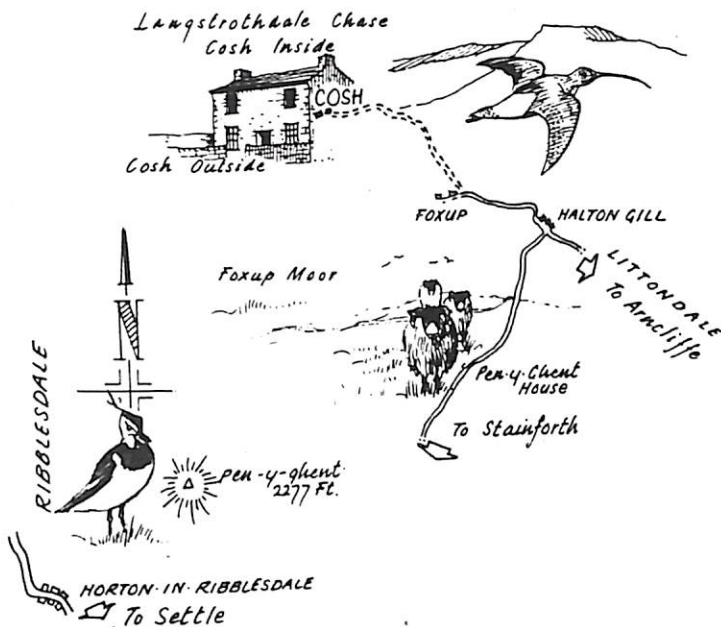
I knew that Cosh was near when I saw two large trees, sycamores, marking out this settlement as surely as thorn or rowan marks

out a pothole. The track swerved and dipped. Into view came the farmhouse, also a large ruined outbuilding and an outbarn. The "weather wall" of the farmhouse was plastered with tar. Water flowed from among rocks behind this small, simple structure. (The spring, source of the water supply, was said to be exceptionally cold).

Richard Brown remembers when the outbuilding was complete, holding a hay "mew", tying for four cows and a box for the pony, Daisy, a dappled grey animal that became white with the passing years. On the ground floor of the farm were living room, sitting room, kitchen and pantry, with three bedrooms for a family of eight: two adults, three girls, three boys. He recalls the kitchen range, with the fireplace flanked by oven and water boiler; also the stopstone (the sink, though without taps) and the set-boiler (used to boil the clothes on washing day). In winter, gaps around the doors were plugged by sacking!

The 14-acres of meadowland at Cosh were "a bit rough". Some of it, and also the gills, were mown by scythe. A gate was taken from its hinges and, horse-drawn, was used as a hay sweep. A horse and sled were used for transporting the hay undercover. At peat-cutting time, the turves were stacked loosely on the moor, exposed to drying sunshine and breezes.

MAP BY E. GOWER



Cattle Trade. Each summer, up to 50 cattle belonging to other farmers were "gisted" at Cosh and took advantage of the flush of good sweet grass. "Dad even took Highland cattle from the Pratts at Hawes." Any lucrative job was sought in those days. William Brown would take draft ewes to Hawes market, a distance of 10 miles, and he was not averse to walking back with them if the trade was not to his satisfaction. This he did in 1933 — a time of Depression — when Richard Brown drove the animals to Hawes and, it was confidently expected, each sheep would make £2.10s

They fell short of this figure, so the sheep were walked back to Cosh and were then taken to Crummack and on to Bentham auction. "The sheep were sold for sixpence apiece more than had been offered at Hawes". William Brown was satisfied though, as Richard observes, nobody bothered to take into account the time taken to sell them.

Time was of no account. When William Brown decided to take his family to the Gala at Skipton, they crossed the moors to Horton, a distance of five miles, and entrained for Skipton. The journey in reverse was cheerfully tolerated at the end of the exciting summer day.

The children had a round trip of six miles to school at Halton Gill, where the schoolmistress, was "well liked"; she arranged for wet

clothes to be dried off by the stove and supervised the making of toast at dinnertime. It was a noisy school. The children wore clogs made by the Jowetts of Arncliffe. Two of the girls from Cosh lodged at Halton Gill from Monday to Friday, but when Richard was five no lodging place was available and so his mother kept him at home until he was seven.

Home for Shepherds. William Brown arrived at Cosh from Walden Head. He remained at Cosh for 11 years and continued to pay rent for the farm when he left for Crummock. There followed a succession of shepherds — Charlie Allan, Thompson, Tom Dolphin, William Robinson and Tom Kitchen. In 1939, Richard Brown and his sister lived at Cosh. Richard was married in 1940, and he and his wife took their turn at farming against the wild countryside and wild elements.

The winters of 1940 and 1941 were bad. In 1941, "we took five heifers to Crummock because we were getting short of hay. It was a

grim trip. We couldn't open the gates and had to walk over the walls!

Mrs. Brown recalls: "There were not many hikers then. The postman was very good and walked up whenever there was mail rather than leaving it at Foxup. He'd have a bite of dinner with us. If we saw someone passing through the farmyard, we were so pleased to see them we invited them inside to have a cup of tea. And, of course, because we lived miles from the nearest house, we were always glad to have a chat with someone else!"

The seasons brought their special delights — tweets and curlews in spring, black grouse into the meadows in late summer, the pageant of fading vegetation in autumn, the clean, healthful days of winter — unless blizzards raged, separating the sheep from their food.

A wild spot, indeed. Of one occupant at Cosh it was said: "You're nowt but a moorpowt, lad."

W. R. Mitchell

Tales of Old Knaresborough



THE MOST POPULAR view of Knaresborough, with its red-roofed cottages and high stone railway bridge, is such a romantic image that if a visitor found nothing else to interest him, this alone should be sufficient to prevent disappointment. The river Nidd flowing smoothly at the foot of the rocky precipitous heights along the quiet wooded valley could possibly have been marred by the great stone viaduct linking the two sides, and before it was built it could have been thought that with its construction Knaresborough might lose half its charm. Fortunately quite the reverse is the case. The railway bridge with its battlemented parapets is now so weathered that it has melted into its surroundings as though it had come into

existence as long ago as the oldest building visible.

One of the houses high above the river is reputed to have been the residence for a short time of Oliver Cromwell and there exists an anecdote told by a descendant of one of the maids who served at this Manor House at the time. The maid having been instructed to air the bed in Cromwell's room, on arrival found him seated by the fireside untying his garters. Having aired the bed the girl left the room, closing the door after her. She then stopped and peeped through the keyhole. She saw that Cromwell had risen to his feet and was advancing toward the bed. On reaching it he