

Sawyersgarth Farm has been owned by the Wager family since 1939 when Lawrence and Phyl Wager bought the farm. Ownership of Sawyersgarth is now shared between their five children Jonathan, Bob, Jane, Sarah and Alison. For all these five children Sawyersgarth was a major formative influence on their upbringing: the people of the dale, the farming activity, the house and its surroundings, the rocks, flowers, birds and archaeology of the limestone dales. It was then the turn of the 13 Wager grandchildren to grow up under the spell of Sawyersgarth and Littondale.

## Sawyersgarth

I first came to Littondale in 1934 when I married Lawrence Wager. He and his brother had spent many school holidays in the dale, walking, climbing, cycling. The family rented various cottages in Arncliffe. Then the brothers rented a one up - one down for £10 a year next to the Falcon. It had no water or sanitation. When Jonathan was born in 1937 this cottage seemed inadequate. Lawrence had always thought Sawyersgarth a splendid farm, off the road, good house, Crystal Beck, and with land right up to the tops and down to the Skirfare. He wrote to Major Walker in 1939 they met several times and Sawyersgarth was ours. The old Shooting Box was on Sawyersgarth land and Major Walker retained the shooting rights with a new Shooting Box on Belders.

The tenants then were John Campbell's father and mother and they welcomed us when we stayed the first time. Walter Metcalfe followed before moving to Foxup when Tom Metcalfe and his wife took on the tenancy with a family of eight. Tom and Stanley were inventive farmers, being one of the first to make silage in the dale. Tom was also a very good mechanic, his bull-nosed Morris converted into a reaper was well known cutting people's hay in the dale. He generated his own electricity and had a T.V. several years before the mains reached the upper dale.

Our family spent all the summer of 1940 at Sawyersgarth where it was an excellent refuge from the south of England. When Lawrence joined the R.A.F.V.R. as an aerial photographic interpreter, we spent all his leaves there and when he became Professor in Durham we were closer and used Sawyersgarth more. During the post war years Harry Battersby re-roofed Sawyersgarth house and did many other improvements. We always enjoyed chats with his father and mother when we went to the Post Office. When there was petrol rationing in the 1940s we were thankful to be supplied with groceries from Markers van.

I will remember the Sports Day in 1953 for the Queens Coronation held at Halton Gill. The news of the ascent of Mount Everest was received on the same day. Lawrence Wager had been a climber on the 1933 Everest Expedition and had almost got to the summit. Many dale's friends came and reminisced with him that day.

Phyllis M. Wager.

## Notes on Sawyersgarth

It was two when my father acquired Sawyersgarth as a new family base in Lillardale. His father and then my father had held tenancies on a number of cottages in Arncliffe since 1907.

My childhood holidays were spent learning to farm with Stanley Meecham and his father Tom, with my brother Bob; gathering Capple Stones, turning new mown hay by rake and scything the wallsides. In those days, with 16 winter-milking cows and 100 dale bred ewes, the farm needed all the hay it could make. As children we scoured the dale for bird nests, explored the local caves by candle-light and geologised with our father along the beck getting to know the structure of the limestone and mill stone grit. I was fascinated by signs of lead mining and character of stonewalls and developed an interest in 'cultural landscapes'. Living at Sawyersgarth inspired me to study rural estate management and later land economy becoming a town planner and now an environmental planner working in development assistance in such countries as Mongolia, China, Vietnam and Cambodia.

In 1973 top barn was converted for my family as a retreat from academic life at Manchester University, enabling a fourth generation of wages to know and love the Dale.

Janet Wages

October 2000

For Millennium Booklet – Litton

## SAWYERSGARTH FARM

### 1. Ownership

Sawyersgarth Farm has been owned by the Wager family since 1939 when Lawrence and Phyl Wager bought the farm from <sup>Captain</sup> Major Walker for £2000. At that time Lawrence was a lecturer in geology at Reading University. As much as the war and then petrol rationing allowed the house was used by the Wagers' growing family during all school and university holidays. The family were based in Durham from 1944 and Oxford from 1950 where Lawrence was Professor of Geology until his tragically early death in 1965. Phyl Wager lives in Oxford and still comes to stay at Sawyersgarth.

### 2. Present ownership

Ownership of Sawyersgarth is now shared between the five children of Lawrence and Phyl Wager:

Jonathan, an academic and planning consultant, married to Birgitta, living in Bowdon, Cheshire;

Bob who is a farmer in the Scottish Borders near Jedburgh, married to Hazel;

Jane who married Richard Hargreaves and moved to Strand House in Hawkswick after Richard's retirement from teaching in 1991;

Sarah who has recently retired from teaching in Thame, Oxfordshire;

Alison who became a GP in Twickenham and married Richard Davidson, a lawyer and artist.

For all these five children Sawyersgarth was a major formative influence on their upbringing: the people of the dale, the farming activity, the house and its surroundings, the rocks, flowers, birds and archaeology of the limestone dales. It was then the turn of the 13 Wager grandchildren to grow up under the spell of Sawyersgarth and Littondale, spending as much time there as their family lives allowed. There were a number of family Christmases at Sawyersgarth in the 1970s and 80s, members coming together from different parts of the country, with up to 23 people sitting down to Christmas dinner in the big kitchen.

### 3. Tenant farmers

It has always been the family policy to enable the 170 acres of Sawyersgarth Farm to be farmed in the traditional way, with care taken for the maintenance of the land, walls and barns. Mostly there have been tenants living in the cottage attached to the house and working the land, though it is recognized now that such a small farm on its own cannot support a family. Roger and Gil Gibson with their children Claire and Michael took over the tenancy in 1996, farming the land alongside Roger's contract walling and fencing business and Gil's work as an occupational therapist.

### 4. Sawyersgarth wood

In years gone by there would have been almost continuous woodland, running the length of the dale on the hillsides above the farm settlements; it is said that a squirrel could get from Halton Gill to Hawkswick without touching the ground. In 1979, in partnership with the National Park and the Countryside Commission, five acres of hillside above the Bottom Cow Pasture were fenced off and planted with 2,500 native trees. After many years battling against voles, rabbits, bracken and, recently, ragwort, the plantation is now looking more and more like a substantial, traditional woodland.

### 5. The house

There are three date stones on the house, 1621, 1706 and 1714, with the same surname initial T, which indicates the original date of the building of Sawyersgarth and subsequent major alterations. The T suggests that the same family built and lived in the house for at least the first 100 years. There is also a date stone 1698 on the bottom barn which was reused when the barn was rebuilt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Local family names occurring in connection with the tenancy over the last 150 years include Inglebys, Hunters, Metcalfs and Campbells. It wasn't until renovations in 1966 that the cottage and the house were divided up into self-contained homes; until then the Wagers shared the house and garden with the tenants. The house is a grade 2 listed building.

(Sawyersgarth – PMW)

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During the post-war years Harry Battersby re-roofed Sawyersgarth house and did many other improvements. We always enjoyed chats with his mother and father when we went to the Post Office. When there was petrol rationing in the 1940s we were thankful to be supplied with groceries from Harker's van. I well remember the Sports Day at Halton Gill in 1953 for the Queen's coronation. The news of the ascent of Mount Everest was received on the same day. Lawrence Wager had been a climber on the 1933 Everest Expedition and had almost got to the summit. Many Dales friends came and reminisced with him that day.

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Phyl Wager:

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