

# Farming in Wycoller

As early as written records, go there were cattle rearing farms in Wycoller. These farms were known as Vaccaries and at Wycoller there were two of them. In keeping with Anglo-Saxon tradition, Wycoller was named after the prominent tree in the area and so they chose 'Wic-als', 'the dairy farm among the alders'.

Wycoller's early development as a farming community was fairly typical of upland villages in East Lancashire. Grazing stock was always the most significant, crop cultivation being uneconomic due to cheaper food supplies from south-west Lancashire.

in 1507, Henry VII, by the 'Grauntinge of the Forests' around Blackburn, made the tenants copy holders and in return for higher rents, he gave them title to their lands, with the provision to clear and enclose. This disafforestation led to the development of farmsteads and the emergence of yeoman farmers. Livestock included cattle, horses, oxen, pigs and sheep, the latter becoming more significant in the 18th century as woollen cloth production grew in importance. When, by 1870, the peak of weaving activity had died down, Wycoller's economic dependence again rested on pastoral farming.

Today, much of the land in the valley is owned by the County Council and one tenant farms this pasture land, rearing sheep with some beef cattle, typical of Pennine areas.



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## *Vaccaries*

Commercial cattle farms first appeared in Lancashire in the Royal Forests which were originally royal hunting areas granted to the de Lacy family in the 12th century. There were two in Wycoller, one at Nether Wycoller and the other at Over Wycoller. The farms were usually established on the better grazing land near rivers or streams and close to moorland for summer grazing. They were supervised by a chief steward or master forester and by sub-foresters responsible for each forest. Cowkeepers, aided by herdsmen, looked after the day to day running of the farms.

Records show that men were paid to guard the calves from attack by wolves which once prowled the area.

The keeper received the "white" or "lactage" which was the milk, butter and cheese. The cow-keeper in Wycoller would have the help of herdsmen to deal with the cattle. These herdsmen lived in the vicinity of the vaccary (cattle farm) and their rough cottages would be the early development of the hamlet of Wycoller.



## *Vaccary Walling*

An unusual feature of the area is the large number of slab stone walls. These can be found in Wycoller, Winewall and the Beardshaw area of Trawden; in fact all the sites of the early forest vaccaries (cattle farm). The largest number of these walls are in Wycoller where the stones tend to be larger and more regular than those in the neighbouring vaccary areas. These stones are more easily seen at the top of the steps leading from the end of Wycoller Hall to Tenter Field. They extend right to the Laneshaw Bridge-Haworth road. Travelling that road towards the former 'Herders Inn' they can be seen to the right of Height Laithe Farm, standing like rows of jagged teeth on the skyline.

