

Ghosts & Legends of Wycoller

"Lad, Llad and Law"

Legend and superstition has given rise to a number of other stories and tales. The 'gravestone' on the moor at Crow Hill to the north east of Boulsworth, inscribed with the words "LAD OR SCARR ON COW HILL", has been said to be the burial site of a young boy who became lost on the moors in bad weather and died of exposure.

When his skeleton was discovered there was an argument between the parishes of Haworth, Stanbury and Trawden as to who should bury him. The Trawden authorities said the place was beyond their boundary, but eventually they agreed to accept the trouble and expense of burying the skeleton. Having buried the remains and raised a stone they then claimed that the boundary should be altered to bring the grave within Trawden. The gravestone is still there, on the flat of the moor, and bearing the inscription, "Lad or Scar on Crow Hill". In reality the stone was erected to mark the boundary between Wycoller and Oakworth at a point which had previously been marked by a number of loose stones piled on top of each other forming a piked hill, commonly called a Lawe in Scotland. Another legend surrounds the large block of Millstone Grit named Lad Law at the summit of Boulsworth Hill. The word L(l)ad has been interpreted as the Celtic word to Kill or slaughter, while law is said to be a corruption of the Saxon word 'Lleow' meaning hill. This translation coupled with the shape of a pothole in the stone itself led some fanciful speculation on ancient religious practices on the summit of Boulsworth Hill. There is also a legend that a skeleton was once found in a sitting position against a large stone immediately in front of Lad Law. The skeleton was said to be that of a man who had lost his way, wandered over the moor until he was exhausted and then sat down there to die. The stone is said to be clearly stained with an impression of the body that could not be removed.

Stories to make the blood curdle

Wycoller and the surrounding farmland is steeped in legend and mysterious stories, half based in fantasy and superstition, half in truth!!

"The Spectre Horseman"

Wycoller's most famous ghost is without doubt the Spectre Horseman and it is possible that its origin is related to the "Guytrash" ghost. This ghostly horseman is thought to be one of the squires of the Hall returning to the scene where he supposedly murdered his wife. It is said that the horseman is dressed in the costume of the early Stuart period and that he can be heard thundering through the village, across the packhorse bridge and up to the Hall where he dismounts, crashes through the main door and storms up the stairs.

Piercing screams from a woman are then heard which eventually subside into groans. The spectre then reappears at the Hall door, mounts his steed and gallops away. Fortunately, the ghost appears only once a year, when the weather is at its worst and darkness has fallen.

"Black Bess"

A second ghost, "Black Bess", is thought to be related to the first, because she is said to be the Squire's murdered wife. She was first seen in the ruins of the Hall when she disturbed two people who described her as dressed completely in black silk. Shortly after they had seen her, she disappeared as if into thin air. The ghost was seen at a later date by two workmen who described the same woman disappearing in the same mysterious manner.

Fred Bannister records a most unusual version of the story in 'The Annals of Trawden Forest'. The story begins in the West Indies, where one of the Cunliffes is said to have married a West Indian woman. The story goes that on his way back home he began to regret his hasty marriage to a coloured bride and threw her overboard causing her to drown. The spirit of the drowned woman, a true Black Bess, followed him back to Wycoller Hall, where she appeared from time to time in search of the man who was responsible for her death.

"Guytrash"

Guytrash: the very word conjures up a revolting image. This north country spirit often referred to simply as "Trash", was also known as Guytrash Padfoot. It appeared in the form of a horse or dog but, as the name padfoot implies, the dog spirit was the most commonly known. The inhabitants of Wycoller feared to meet Guytrash in the lonely lane leading down from Height Laithe to the hall, up the Dean towards Parson Lee, and in the countless field-paths that led from farm to farm and cottage to cottage. This spectre-hound was reputed to have large saucer-like eyes and its very presence heralded disaster. Guytrash was also known locally as "Shriker" or "Skriker" because of its shrieking. Its appearance was considered to be a warning of the impending death of a relative or friend and any attempt to interfere with it was believed to be fatal.

Extract taken from "Portrait of Wycoller" by John Bentley, which is available for purchase from the Aisled Barn Visitor Centre.