

SOUTH YORKSHIRE'S LOVELIEST DALE?

THE EWDEN VALLEY

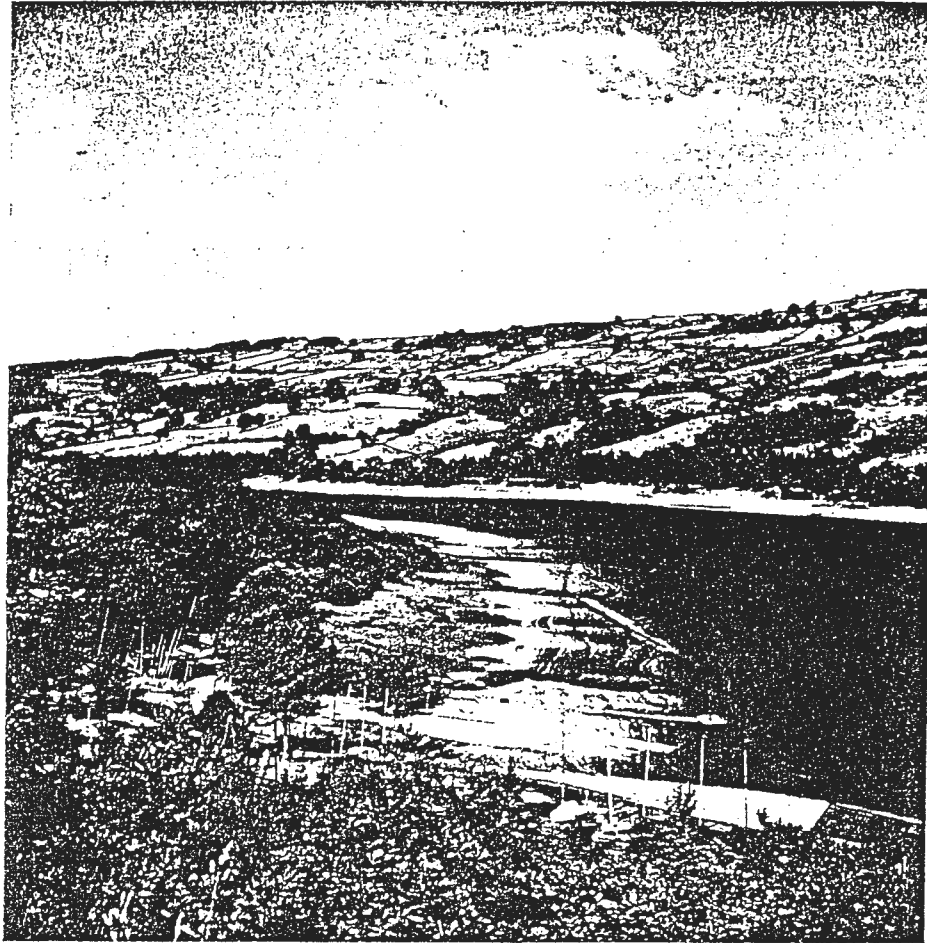
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THE Don is South Yorkshire's largest and most important river. Rising eight miles west of Penistone, it flows along the eastern edge of the Pennine country for some 15 miles before entering the dark, industrial landscape of Sheffield. In this youthful stage the Don is joined by several eastward-flowing tributaries—the Porter or Little Don, Ewden, Loxley and Rivelin among them. Probably the most attractive of these east-west dales is the Ewden Valley.

Ancient oak woodlands that once covered most of these steep valleys to the west and north of Sheffield were removed during the Middle Ages as a source of charcoal for the local iron smelting industry. Today but small areas of these natural deciduous woodlands remain, one such being in the middle reaches of the Ewden Valley.

The Ewden Beck joins the Don where it meanders below Wharnccliffe Wood, between Stocksbridge and Oughtibridge. The stream has fallen about 1,400ft in the seven miles from its source upon the high watershed of the Pennines to the west. On the high ground overlooking the lowest part of the dale are two interesting settlements, one a village, the other a hamlet. The village is Bolsterstone, standing at almost 1,000ft on a ridge on the northern side, an ancient site with the remains of a Norman castle and a squat-towered parish church looking out across the dale to the Pennine moors. The hamlet is Brightholmlee, which occupies a commanding position above the southern mouth of the Ewden Valley; it is a collection of old cottages and farms with an attractive set of gritstone troughs beside the steep lane where horses and cattle are still watered.

Two reservoirs were constructed in this lower part of the valley. The lower, More Hall (Fig 1), has a surface area of 65 acres and is used as compensation water for the Ewden Beck. Yachting enthusiasts find it very useful, and on a bright day the colourful sails make a grand sight below the frowning, gritstone moors. The upper water is Broomhead Reservoir, which has a surface area of 123 acres. Its 1,100 million gallon capacity makes it the third largest of Sheffield's water-supply reservoirs. Both Ewden reservoirs were completed in 1929. As Broomhead Reservoir filled an old farmer is reported to



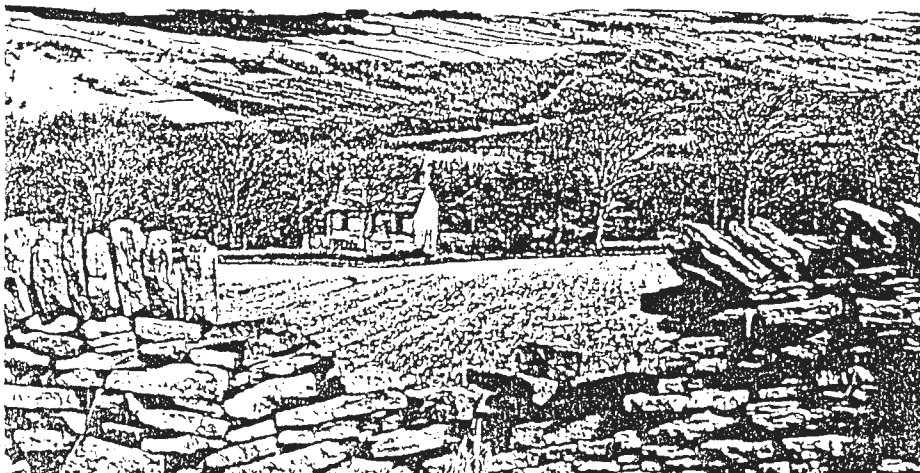
1—MORE HALL RESERVOIR IN LOWER EWDEN DALE, LOOKING TOWARDS BOLSTERSTONE VILLAGE. This reservoir has a surface area of 65 acres

have observed that "It'll niver owd watter, lad" and, sure enough, it was not until 1933 that serious leaks in the bed of the dam were finally sealed. The problem was caused by underground fissures and persistent slipping of the hillsides.

The little village of Ewden occupies the sunny, northern slope between the two reservoirs and is largely a grouping of water-board dwellings. The coming of the reservoirs caused particular changes to some of the old buildings on the southern slopes of the valley. The ancient farm of Dwarriden ("the dwarf's dean" or "hollow") was the home of the Ronsleys from about 1685 to 1935, when it became empty and was later demolished by Sheffield Corporation. The ancient cruck barn has been retained as a storage shed and is unique due to the great height of the stylobats (the stone bases for support of the cruck beams).

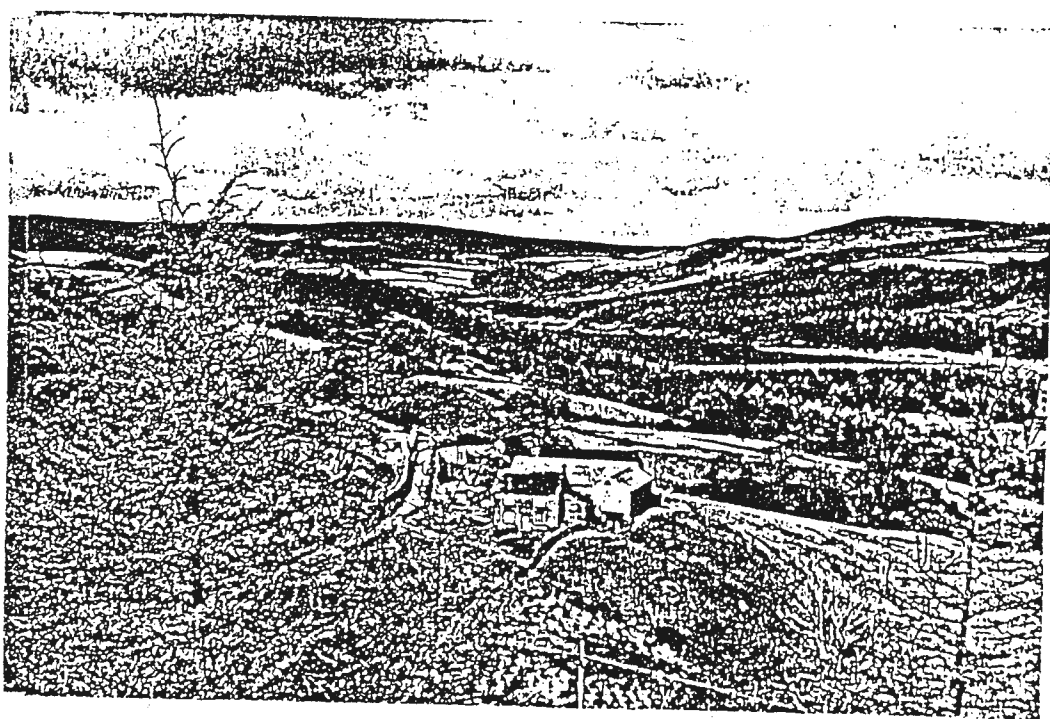
This site at Dwarriden, just south of Broomhead Reservoir, was obviously an important one for it stands where two old trackways cross. Nearer Brightholmlee are two farms with ancient cruck buildings still standing. By the beck in the valley below stood Broomhead Mill (recorded in the 13th century) and New Mill (thus described about 1275) and remains of lead and zinc sulphide workings, but all have now disappeared since the coming of the reservoirs.

The ground steepens westwards of Broomhead Reservoir, rising 400ft to the edge of the open moors. Upon this slope and almost surrounded by planted coniferous forest stands Wigtwizzle, formerly an important hamlet of old farms with an interesting history but now reduced to one dwelling (Fig 4). It is known that Thomas Hall died at Wigtwizzle Hall Farm in 1644, leaving goods valued at £132. This dwelling had rare swan-neck carvings over four windows and niches for Elizabethan Sheffield Carvers.

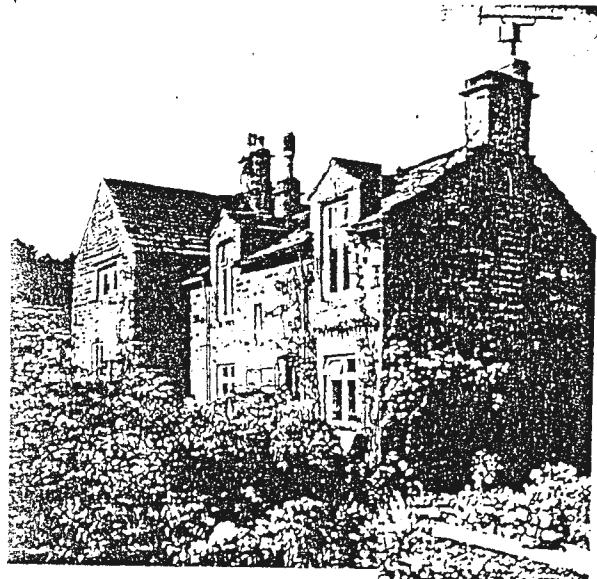


here but afterwards it became a farmhouse. It is a tragedy that what was once a delightful hillside settlement crouching sheltered beneath the eaves of the Pennines should have been reduced to a single smallholding and a few ancient outbuildings because of "legalised vandalism" by a former planning authority.

Wigtwizzle stands at the edge of Broomhead Park, a spacious sweep of green sward dotted with ancient trees and an unexpected spot to find such a dignified landscape, an oasis lying between the open moors to the west and the steeper dale's country below to the east. The original Broomhead Hall was built in 1311 and replaced in 1640 by a larger house erected by Christopher Wilson, a captain in the Parliamentary army. This must have been a most attractive house, but all that remains today is a pair of gateposts to the west of the present building. This third dwelling was built in 1831 by James Rimington in the gabled Tudor fashion that was



3—UPPER EWDEN DALE FROM THE SOUTH-EAST. Raynor House Farm is in the foreground



4—THE ONLY HOUSE REMAINING AT WIGTWIZZLE

5—YEW TREE FARM, BOLSTERSTONE. Looking westwards to Broomhead Moor, once rich in grouse

of Derwent Dale. Immediately upstream of the bridge, however, the beck flows in a densely wooded cleft. Rhododendrons form a thicket difficult to negotiate as one walks up by the cascading waters towards the head of Ewden.

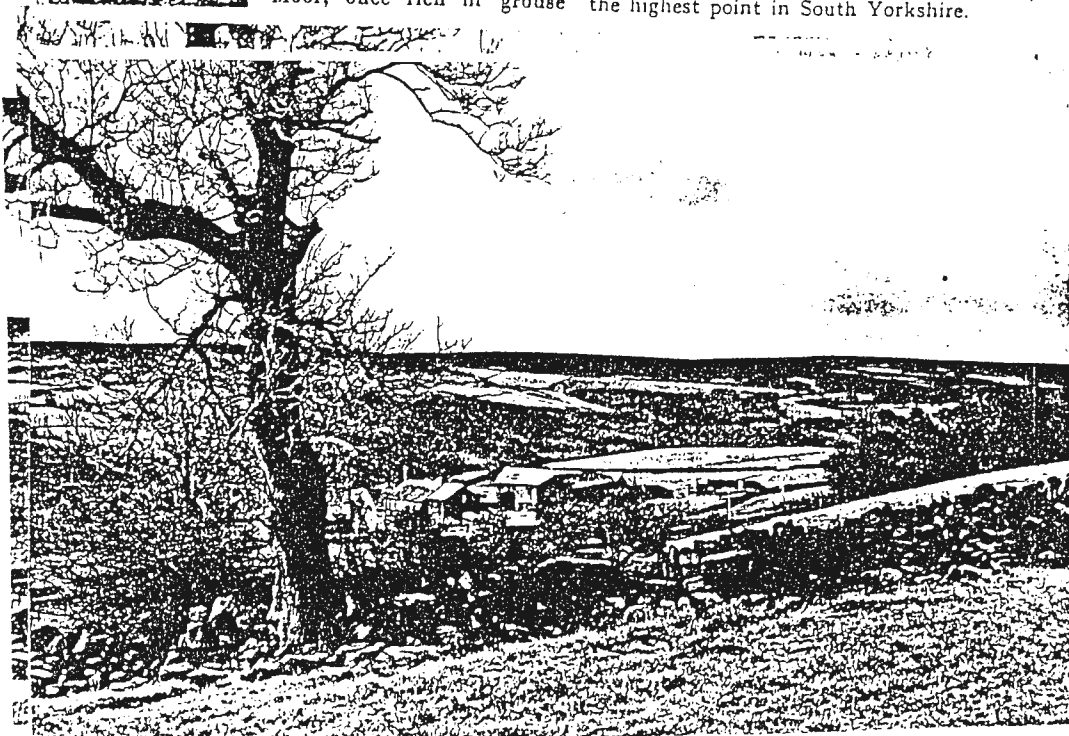
Across the narrow defile of the dale, on the south side, is an impressive 1-mile-long pre-historic earthwork and a cluster of Bronze Age tumuli. Here, too, is a stone circle that is difficult to find among the tall heather and summer bracken. The broad wilderness bounding the southern side of the upper Ewden is Broomhead Moor, formerly one of the richest grouse moors in Britain.

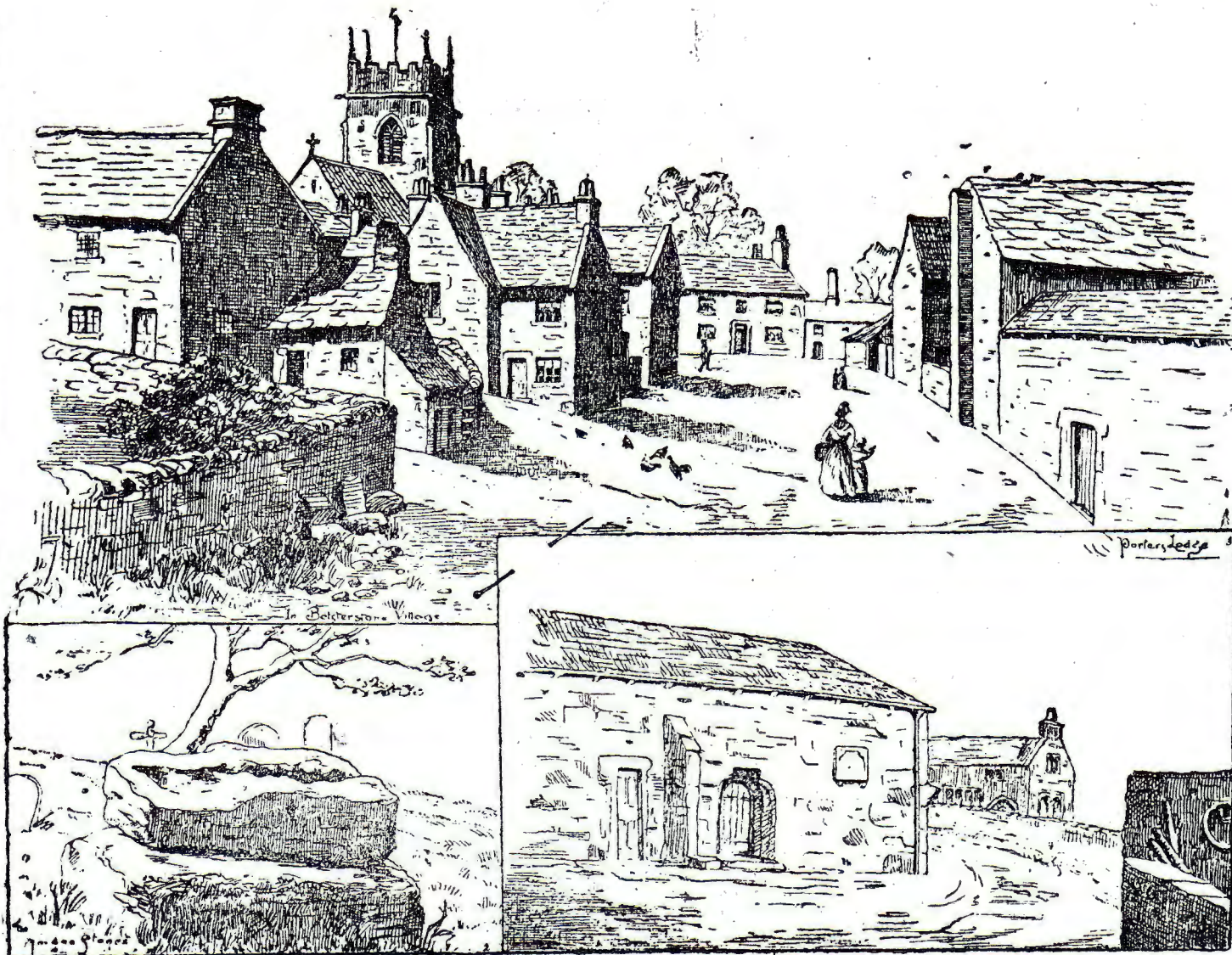
The uppermost reaches of the Ewden Beck wind through the peaty wastes of Upper Commons, bleak in winter. The gentle eminence of Pike Low (1,567ft) commands the northern frontier of the basin and is topped by another prehistoric burial mound. The water tumbles in places down attractive little falls where the millstone grit rock outcrops. The several rivulets that join to form the Ewden begin life on the peaty slopes close to the summit of Margery Hill (1,793ft), the highest point in South Yorkshire.

then becoming so popular. Later it contained the imposing early Georgian staircase from the Duke of Leeds's demolished Kiveton Park, near Rotherham—thought by many authorities to be the finest oak staircase in Yorkshire.

The Rimington Wilsons lived at Broomhead Hall until 1939, when it became in turn a school, insurance offices and a base for army units. After the war the only occupants have been farm workers, and since 1960 it has lain empty and is fast becoming a complete ruin, though the adjoining Home Farm and garden is still tenanted. In early summer the gardens to the west and south of the house exhibit a mass of colour as the azaleas and rhododendrons bloom in turn; an arresting contrast with the windy moors across the Langsett-Bradfield hill road.

This north-south road crosses the Ewden Beck by means of a steep, hairpin bend and a narrow bridge. This really marks the boundary between the upper and lower parts of the dale. To the west the moors rise steadily to 1,750ft and more on the watershed





BOLSTERSTONE.

- 1.—VILLAGE STREET, BOLSTERSTONE.
 - 2.—TWO LARGE STONES, CALLED "THE MAIDEN," NOW IN THE CHURCHYARD.
 - 3.—OLD BUILDING, CALLED THE PORTER'S LODGE OF BOLSTERSTONE CASTLE.
- SUPPOSED DATE OF DOORWAY, A.D. 1250.

The little village of Bolsterstone has large claims to antiquity, but like many other places of similar pretensions, its claims are of a somewhat shadowy nature. Its historians cannot even tell us why it is called Bolsterstone. It has two curious stones in the church yard, which are sometimes called the "Maiden Stones," and which are figured in the left hand corner of our sketch, but what these stones were used for and whether they have any real connection with the name of the place nobody knows. They now stand in the churchyard; their original position being in the roadway.

Ecclesiastical Bolsterstone originally belonged to the large parish of Ecclesfield, but was soon portioned off with Bradfield. This arrangement, however, was

not one which could last long. The Rev. J. Eastwood, M.A., in his "History of the Parish of Ecclesfield," says:—

The spiritual wants of so wide a district as that of Bradfield, were early found to be too much for one church to supply, situated as it was at a very great distance from many of the hamlets dependent upon it; and at least two other chapels arose within the chapelry besides that of Wadsley. One of these was at Bolsterstone, about three miles north of Bradfield Church, founded in 1412 by Sir Robert Rockley as a private chapel, as described in Hallamshire, p. 280. This chapel came at length to be used as a place of public worship for the neighbourhood generally.

In 1707, the return of the Parliamentary Survey was "No maintenance for a minister; about 90 families. To be made a parish church."

In 1727, an assize trial took place, when the lord of the manor successfully resisted a claim of the Vicar of Ecclesfield to present to the perpetual curacy. The right of presentation is now in the family of Rimington Wilson.

There is nothing to interest the antiquarian in the present building, which is most unecclesiastical, and only claims respect as having been built by the exertions of the Rev. Thomas Bland, with very little expense to the parishioners. It was consecrated in 1795. The *piscina* from the old building is still standing on the village green, where are also the stocks and stone seat.*

* These are the stones referred to above, Mr. Wilson conjectures that they are the remains of an old *maiden*, or guillotine, and that one of them was the uneasy *bolster* on which the head of the criminal was laid.