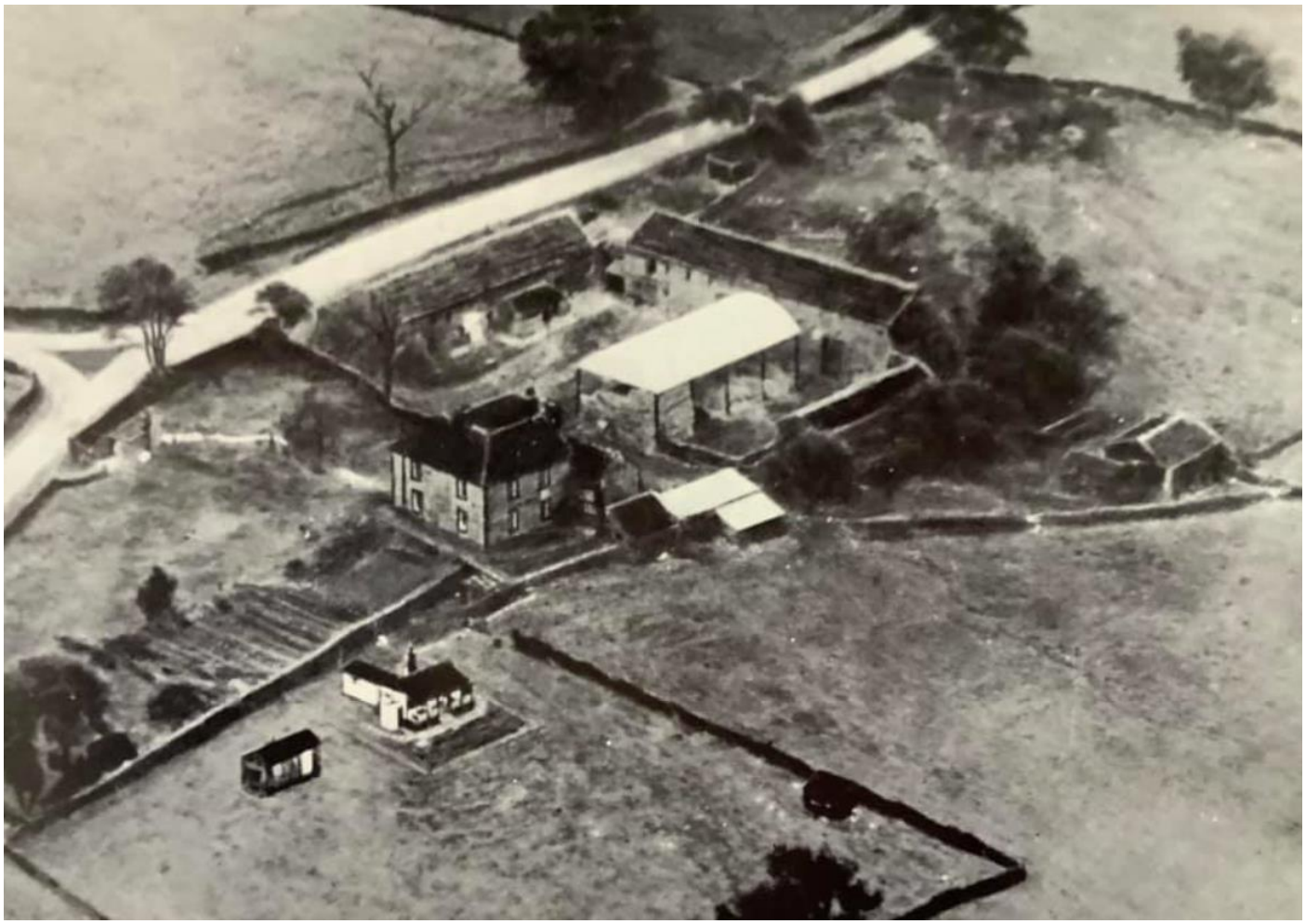
From the book “History of the Farm” by W. J. Hoskins

Featuring a contribution from Phyllis Crossland

Photo: Hunshelf Hall in 1953, with newly erected Dutch barn.



Two West Riding Farms

At first sight Wilstrop Hall and Hunshelf Hall seem to have little in common beyond the fact that they both lie in the West Riding of Yorkshire; and even here one of them (Hunshelf) lies high up the Don valley where steep-sided wooded valleys penetrate the Pennine foothills, and the other (Wilstrop) is right down in the Plain of York, not far from where the Nidd joins the Ouse and scarcely 50 ft. above sea level.

But they have certain other features in common, in their distant history at least, and this is really the only excuse for bringing them together like this. Both carry the name 'Hall', signifying the demesne or lord's home-farm at one time. Both were first settled well before the Norman Conquest and remained in English hands after the Conquest; and both (so I think) were once villages, the sites of which lie not far away from the present-day farmstead.

Hunshelf means '*Hun*'s shelf or ledge', a description that suits the site very well, as Mrs. Crossland says. In all probability *Hun* was the first settler on this rather difficult site. How far back he lived, we have no means of knowing. In 1066 the Saxon owner was one Alric, and though the estate passed to a powerful Norman—Ilbert de Lacy—Alric was allowed to stay on, possibly as the nominal owner under Ilbert. In many parts of England, the Anglo-Saxon owners were completely dispossessed by the Norman conquerors, but in parts of Yorkshire many were allowed to remain. Perhaps it was an attempt to pacify the North, as Yorkshire was involved in a massive rebellion against William the Conqueror in 1069. He repressed this rebellion, and others, with savagery, laying waste great tracts of countryside, which is why in Domesday Book (1068) Hunshelf is described simply as 'waste'. It had been worth ten shillings a year in 1066, but 20 years later it was worth nothing. But farming must have been resumed very shortly afterwards, and since then Hunshelf has had a continuous history as a farm.

One other point which Mrs. Crossland makes is worth taking up. She is almost certainly right in thinking that there was once a village near the present house. She mentions a field called 'Town Field', which she thinks may have been the land for the communal use of the people at that time. In fact I think this field almost certainly represents the side of the 'lost village' of Hunshelf. Down in the Midlands, where these lost or deserted villages are very numerous, I often found that their site could be identified by a field called 'Township Field' or sometimes 'Old Town Close'. I think 'Town Field' at Hunshelf is just such a clue, and would repay a close look for any signs of bumpiness or an irregular surface, especially one which cannot be ploughed because of stone underneath.

Like Hunshelf, Wilstrop takes its name from the original Old English settler. It means 'Wifel's *thorp*', and 'thorp' has the special meaning of a daughter-settlement from an older village. It is possible that the mother-village was Kirk Hammerton, with which Wilstrop later appears to be associated; but I am more inclined to think that Marston (now called Long Marston) was the mother-village, as the river Nidd must have been a formidable barrier in olden times. And again, Wilstrop is grouped with Marston and Tockwith in Domesday Book, which suggests an original connection.

At any rate, Wifel founded a new settlement close to the banks of the Nidd, at some unknown date. In 1066 a large estate, which included Marston, Tockwith, and Wilstrop was held by a Saxon Aelfwin, who again seems to have been allowed to remain on, but under a Norman overlord—Osbern de Arches. Wilstrop Hall was the demesne farm of Aelfwin, as Hunshelf was of Alric.

We do not know the size of Wilstrop village in 1086 (any more than we do of Hunshelf) owing to the way in which Domesday Book was compiled over most of Yorkshire. We get our first idea of the size of the village in the early fourteenth century, before the Black Death, when, as Mrs. Blacker shows, it had some 28 farmhouses and cottages, a fairly large village by the standards of the time in the West Riding. The old village survived down to the closing years of the fifteenth century, when it was depopulated by the local squire—Wilstrop, who took his name from the estate. It is sometimes thought that the New Rich of the Tudor period were the principal offenders in bringing about the depopulation of so many English villages, but more often than not it was the old gentry who were rationalizing (as we should call it) their estates, and going over to cattle and sheep pastures rather than arable husbandry. It should be said, however, that in many cases that we know of the village population had fallen so low because of repeated epidemics of bubonic plague that arable husbandry was no longer possible. Pasture-farming came about partly because of higher prices for sheep and cattle and their products, but also because of the great economy of labour it entailed.

The old village of Wilstrop disappeared then about 1490, and the score or more of medieval farms are now represented by only seven farms scattered over the estate. The old village site is completely deserted.

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HUNSHELF HALL (WEST RIDING)

by Phyllis Crossland

Our farm of 147 acres is situated in the southern corner of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 10 miles north-west of Sheffield, and close to the Pennine Hills. The lands contained in the fork of the greater and lesser Don form the township of Hunshelf, and there is much evidence to show that Hunshelf Hall which we now occupy as working

farmers was owned in former times by people of high social standing in the district.

The name seems to be derived from some 'shelving' towards the Don. In Domesday Book it is written *Hunescelf*, meaning 'Hūn's Scelf', a shelf or ledge of land. Certainly the positioning of our land bears this out. Hūn was the Old English landowner here. The same name occurs in Hunslet, now a suburb of Leeds.

The site is a fairly sheltered one and although we are on a hillside we are away from the full force of the wind. A few trees strategically placed by persons long since dead act as a windbreak.

The soil is a light loam, and the type of farming mixed. We have dairy and beef cattle, sheep, pigs, and grow oats, potatoes and turnips.

We have had a mains water supply only since 1949. Before that date our water was pumped from a well situated at the far side of the farmyard near to the road but on the farm side of the wall. As there are some old steps leading over the wall from the road to the pump-house we conclude that this well, apart from supplying the Hall, must have been used also by the villagers of long ago. There is another well here, too, out in the front garden, covered now of course, but it was used by our predecessors for a time at the beginning of this century. They stopped using this well as the water hadn't as good a taste as that from the other well near the road.

The farmstead is fairly central in relation to its fields, but whereas now it lies half a mile west of the present-day village of Greenmoor, I am convinced that a much earlier Hall on this same site was once near the centre of a medieval village. I say this because, in addition to the fact that Hunshelf is mentioned in very early records, the tangible evidence here around the actual place is fourfold. Firstly, there are the steps leading to the well which have already been mentioned. Secondly, a large field of ours just across the road from the old well bears the name of Town Field. This could well have been land for the communal use of the people at that time. Thirdly, the stocks were situated at the roadside near the Town Field until 1937 when they were moved into the centre of Greenmoor and re-erected to commemorate George VI's coronation. Fourthly, there is a little old smallholding called 'Peck Pond' just along the road to the west, which was originally an inn known as 'The Brown Cow'. This building and one other very old house—Don Hill—are the only ones remaining now at our end of the present-day village. The people who used the stocks, the well, and frequented the Brown Cow must have lived four or five centuries ago or possibly longer, as their dwellings are no more. The reason for the shift in population was the stone-quarrying industry which developed during the nineteenth century near Greenmoor. Consequently the newer houses were built there to be nearer to the men's work.

It is on record that Ailric the Saxon held three carucates of land at Hunescelf before the Conquest, but they were returned as 'waste' in the Domesday Survey. It seems likely that a mesne lord was placed here in Norman times as we have information of two charters belonging to the reign of Henry III or Edward I. These state: 'Thomas, son of William de Hunescelf, gives to Elias de Walderscelf, a piece of land which Matthew

de Hunescelf formerly held within the limits of Hunescelf. The tenant is to grind his corn at the mill of Hunescelf.' The second charter reads: 'Richard de Hundeschelf gives to Richard, son of Adam, and his heirs, pasture for all his cattle within the limits of the pasture of Hundeschelf, at the rent of *unum obulum argenti.*'* How long the Hunschelfs continued to hold the estate is not definitely known. There is no account of the course of descent which the manor took until it appears in the inquisition of Francis Wortley ancestor of the present Earl of Wharncliffe, in 1586. It could well be around this date that the older part of our existing house was built. It looks to be either late Elizabethan or early Jacobean. At any rate it is quite obvious to anyone, even with an inexperienced eye, that the present Hunshelf Hall comprises building of two distinct periods.

The old part appears to have been one large hall without upper floor to begin with. This floor, added later, 'cuts' the window in half, so that in the upper room the window is down at floor level. It has iron bars to it too. This old part of the house is gabled and the stonework more weatherworn than the newer part. According to the records, there was a fire at Hunshelf Hall in the early eighteenth century when most of the house was destroyed, together with a lot of the parish records. The old part left now is what survived the fire. We call it the back kitchen as my husband's family did use it quite a lot before I came here. It used to contain a big, old stone sink, wash copper and brew copper. We only use it as a store-room now, as really we have plenty of other living space. In the upper room the ceiling collapsed years ago leaving exposed to view all the ancient wooden timbers.

The greater part of the existing house was built on to the surviving part of the former one in 1746 by the owner at that time, a George Walker, and is typical Georgian in style. The builder's initials and date are to be seen clearly carved on a stone archway at the side of the house. This George Walker must have been an influential man of his time in the area, a sort of country squire. He is mentioned as encouraging the cloth trade to develop at Penistone, 4 miles away, by having a local Cloth Hall built instead of carrying cloth all the way to Sheffield. The clothiers had to make an agreement with him that: 'any person who took any kersey, plain, or other cloth to sell at Sheffield after 29th September 1743 should incur a penalty of three pounds for every piece sold.' Just when the Walker family took possession of the old house here, I don't know. This evidence could have been destroyed in the fire. We do know they had it as early as 1639, as seen in this interesting little bit of information from the Quarter Sessions accounts: 'On 16th January 1639 Elizabeth Pashley of Oxspring stole at Hunshelf a brass pan value six shillings and a small brass pot, the property of John Walker. She pleaded guilty and was fined 6d.' The last of the Walkers to own Hunshelf Hall were two sisters, spinsters, and it was then bought by a Mr. Smith at the beginning of the nineteenth century. When my husband came to live here in 1946 one of the bedroom windows was completely blocked up. This had probably been done in the early part of the nineteenth century to avoid paying the window tax. When my husband uncovered the window it

* A token rent of one halfpenny (W. G. H.).

was noticed that the glass was thicker than that in the other windows. It is the original 1746 window and has scratched on it *Dear Mis Walker*. The Mr. Smith who bought it after the Walkers let it to the Coldwell family who farmed here till 1904. They were in the 'gentleman farmer' class as can be gleaned from an original account written in 1912 of the early life of one of the old men of the parish, a George Marsh. He had told his story to the writer, making his mark X at the end, being unable to write. Telling of his boyhood in the 1840s and of his family's poverty, he said how they had been kept from starvation by the kindness and generosity of Mr. John Coldwell of Hunshelf Hall who often gave him food to take home. At the beginning of this century a service used to be held in the big room here on Sundays, taken by the Minister who used to come from Sheffield by train to Wortley Station to preach in the Chapel at Greenmoor. He would come on the Saturday evening and be 'put up' here for the night, then the family, servants, and farm workers would all assemble after breakfast for the service after which the parson would leave for the village and the Mr. Coldwell of that time would say, 'Now lads, back to work for you all'.

The Taylor family followed the Coldwells in 1904 and remained until my husband's family took it in 1946. In Mr. Taylor's day they still employed four men full-time besides seasonal helpers, and kept four working horses. Now my husband has only one full-time man and occasional casual help, but then he has two tractors and quite a lot of machinery. I think I am the first woman to look after this big house without help, but then I am the first to have electricity and mod. cons., so that explains it, and I don't make any butter or bake my own bread as my predecessors did.

The room we now use as a sitting-room was, to all appearances, a big living kitchen originally, with large open fireplace. This is evident as you look at the stone archways set into the walls round and at either side of the fireplace. This fireplace is a tiled, fairly modern-looking one, and had been put in before we came here, but it is not in keeping with the character of the room. If I could afford the money I would simply love to have it all knocked out and expose at least some of the original cavity, putting in a type of fireplace suitable for it. This room has two huge oak beams across it which fortunately haven't been plastered over. We have three other rooms on the ground floor, apart from the old back kitchen, two passages, two staircases, and five bedrooms and bathroom upstairs. There is a large cellar and a smaller one under two of the downstairs rooms, both with huge stone salting slabs, now obsolete, I'm afraid.

During our twenty years' stay here we have changed from well water to mains water, paraffin lamps to electricity, earth closets to flush toilets, tin bath to modern bathroom, and have become connected to the outside world by telephone and motor car. Yet, in spite of these necessary changes, this house retains much of its original character.

I would love to know more about the place, particularly when the older house was built, and I hope at a not too far off future date to be able to fill in some of the gaps in its history.