

Wolves



"Longer Sen", wolves were an accepted hazard of life in these parts, but there seems to be no record of when or where or how the last wolves were killed. Even the official history of Lancashire, The Victoria County History, can only say "the wolf, whose lair was among the crags of the Pennines and the Fells, was only finally exterminated in the 17th century" (1920 Supplement, p207). This date may be too late. The popular tradition that the last wolf in England was killed at Humphrey Head near Grange-over-Sands, by a knight returning from the Crusades, seems to have no basis in fact.

In 1066 there were ancient cattle-farms in the upland valleys, producing cheese, butter, oxen etc. The Normans allowed them to continue, but otherwise they strictly preserved for their hunting parties the whole of these remote upland areas - the "Forests" of Quernmore, Bleasdale, Bowland, Pendle and Rossendale.

The cattle-farms within the Forests were given the Norman-French name, "vaccaries". Near Chipping there were vaccaries at Hazelhurst, Fairsnape, Brooks, Blindhurst, Burnslack, Dinkling Green, Lickhurst, Greystonley and Fair Oak. These were supervised by civil servants who, of course, generated much "red-tape". Fortunately for us some of this has survived, though it is still not easily available to local historians because the documents are fragile and written in crude Latin. There are literally tons of dusty old documents which have never seen the light of day since they were filed away centuries ago. One has to rely on books such as "The Royal Forest of Lancaster" by R.Cunliffe Shaw, who has seen some of the records. He explains (p360) that around the year 1300 each manager of a vaccary had to fill up a form which started with a general summary -

ANNUAL RETURN FORM from VACCARY

Total cows and bulls at the start of the year.....
 Add calves born during the year.....
 Deduct Cattle which had died of "murrain" (unspecified cattle disease)....
 Cattle killed by wolves.....
 Cattle stolen.....
 Cattle supplied to the Central Cattle Pool.....
 Total cows and bulls at the end of the year.....

Then followed totals of the cattle in their various age groups,
 and a cash account which included -

Receipts from the hides and flesh of those cattle which had died of murrain
 or been strangled by the wolf.....

This evidence is from the vaccaries in the Forests of Pendle and Rossendale, where a man was paid to guard the calves from attacks by wolves. But there is no reason to doubt that wolves would also be a very real problem in the Bleasdale and Bowland areas around the year 1300.