

Malcolm Saville and North Yorkshire
Stephen Bigger, 2011



Fictitious Spaunton near Goathland (in *Mystery Mine*) is named after the village of Spaunton near Kirkbymoorside.

Preface

Most of my papers on Malcolm Saville start life in the magazine of the Malcolm Saville Society, *Acksherley!* and assume that readers have some knowledge of the books discussed. (*Acksherley!* was a Lone Pine catch-phrase). For on-line readers, here is some background. Malcolm Saville wrote for children between 1943 and 1982, the year of his death. Saville was not a full-time writer, but worked full-time for various publishers. His average of 6 or 7 books per year during his working life is remarkable. He encouraged his young readers to write to him and he endeavoured to give them personal responses. The effect of this is that a society has grown up as these children, as adults, come together for regular gatherings and outings. I personally did not read much Saville as a child – only *Saucers over the Moor* as a 14 year old – and neither wrote or received a reply, so my interest is somewhat out of the ordinary. I write as a social historian, and examine the background of stories to shed a window of light on life in the 1940s to 1960s, the time I grew up.

The stories consist of holiday-time adventures: his best-known series is of the Lone Pine Club, consisting to 20 full-length stories. The paper below discusses his 1959 Lone Pine title, *Mystery Mine*, set near Goathland and Whitby. This incorporates scenes in Wharram Percy Deserted Village, 25 miles to the south, which is discussed in section II. I also discuss an earlier (1952) title in his Buckingham series, *The Buckingham at Ravenswyke* especially in section I. There is reference also to a third Yorkshire title set in Swaledale, *The Secret of Buzzard Scar* from the Nettleford series.

Saville is known, and indeed praised, for his treatment of place. His stories were set in real places, some visited on holiday (presumably the holiday could then be set against income tax!), others through his work. As I suggest below, since Saville was according to the dedication with his boss, Theo Stephens, the Whitby trip may have started at least with a work-trip to the Harrogate Flower Show which resumed in 1947. Saville preferred not to make locations up either in large-scale or small. If a place is described, it is likely to be a real place waiting to be discovered – although not necessarily a place where it is said to be. His prefaces often come clean and advise child readers to go out and explore. This helps the descriptions, which tend not to be vague: if you can find the right spot, the descriptions of views left, right and forward can still be seen. Where Saville has jumbled things up, undoubtedly deliberately, finding and following locations becomes an art form in itself.

There are only four books covering the north of England, several in his ‘beloved Shropshire’ (his friend Geoffrey Trease’s phrase) and the rest featuring the south from Suffolk to Cornwall, since Saville had his roots in Sussex.

You can find my collected articles on Saville on <http://eprints.worc.ac.uk/800>. You can find the Malcolm Saville Society on <http://www.witchend.com>.

Chapter One

Espionage and Uranium in North Yorkshire



Two of Malcolm Saville's stories were set in North Yorkshire near Whitby, based in locations close to Goathland on the North York Moors, the area familiar today as Heartbeat country. The heritage steam railway from Grosmont to Pickering was still a main line to Whitby in the 1950s. *The Buckingham's at Ravenswyke* was written in 1952 as a sequel to *The Master of Maryknoll* which ends with Alex Renislau, father of Charles, returning to Britain from Switzerland with a creditable yet mysterious war record, and conducting his own concerto in London. Charles' mother, always a long-suffering and stabilizing influence, is always called 'Mrs Renislau': she retreats backstage as the series progresses. His war and cold war background, left Alex Renislau still vulnerable to kidnapping by secret agents with Soviet connections. Saville had just made a strong statement about the cold war and iron curtain in *The Sign of the Alpen Rose*, a Jillies story (1950) set in the Austrian alps close to the communist zone border. To Saville, Soviet communism was a negation of personal freedoms, though admitting that people had the right to choose. At the end of that decade, *Mystery Mine*, written in 1959 in the Lone Pine series, was also set near Goathland, featuring the (fictional) discovery of uranium there.

The dedication of *The Buckingham's at Ravenswyke* is to Theo Stephens OBE "who came to Whitby too". Theo Stephens was editor of *My Garden* magazine up to its closure in 1952, and after the second world war Saville had been his associate editor, even moving house to Guildford when the magazine's headquarters moved there from London. The cost of this alas was one of the causes of its demise. Sometime around 1950, the two were in Whitby which gave Saville an opportunity to research this book – the visit may have been linked with a business trip to the Harrogate Flower Show, the pre-eminent gardening show in the north of England, with royal patronage., which after wartime

closure re-opened for business in 1947. I have written about this phase of Saville's career previously in *Acksherley!* The car journey from Harrogate to Goathland, via Kirkbymoorside and Pickering, takes about two hours. The rail journey, through York, Malton and Pickering, would have taken longer.

In *The Buckingham's at Ravenswyke*, the second title of the Buckingham series, Charles Renislau the son of a Polish musician and composer writes to the Buckingham's from Ravenswyke House, Ravenswyke north of Goathland. His father Alex Renislau has gone there to escape London so he can find the peace and quiet to write a new symphony. Ravenswyke House was old, "a sturdy stone-built house" facing across the moors.. Inside



it has "lots of passages and very low ceilings. Its walls are of thick, grey stone and it stands by itself in a wildish garden" (p.18). Juliet's room was tiny "with an old fashioned wash-stand" (p.71). If hotels are candidates for locations, Mallyon Spout Hotel is stone-built, overlooking the moor with gardens totally wild and natural,

leading down to the waterfall itself.

The name of the house and village does exist in North Yorkshire near Kirkbymoorside,



Ravenswick Hall and estate, (note the spelling) but without a village¹. There is a hamlet called Spaunton close by to it, on Spaunton Moor near Lasingham and Hutton-le-Hole, so the coincidence is striking. If Saville had driven

from Harrogate to Whitby, the most direct route would take him through Kirkbymoorside

side. However, Raven and Wyke names are common in North Yorkshire. There are the Raven Stones near the Wheeldale roman road., Raven Hill near Sandsend to the north of Whitby, and an ancient country house and hotel called Raven Hall, Ravenscar (see further below) near Robin Hood Bay which is close by Blea Wyke Point – Hayburn Wyke is the next creek to the south, Maw Wyke Hole to the north beyond Robin Hood’s Bay. Saville himself, giving little away in a letter to a fan, John who appears to have found a farm named Ravenswyke on a map (perhaps our Ravenswick), said “possibly I too may have seen it [the name Ravenswyke] at one time or another on a map”². He had already complained that John had dared to write twice, so was not encouraging debate. Incidentally, had Saville ever travelled by train from Scarborough to Whitby, he would have come through Hayburn Wyke and Ravenscar, ending at Whitby West Station (closed 1961 and marked on the frontispiece map) on Prospect Hill (he also uses the name Prospect, see below). Wyke is not only a Yorkshire place name, but is also a village between Guildford and Aldershot, a coincidence not perhaps lost on Saville who lived then in Guildford: it could derive from the Viking *vik* ‘creek’ (hence in North Yorkshire Wykes are near the coast) or Roman *vicus* ‘village’ with alternative spellings such as *wick*, or *wyck*. So, Saville may well have seen Ravenswick near Spaunton on his OS map, or passed through, but his other explorations near Robin Hoods Bay helped to refine his choice and changed the –wick into –wyke.. It would take several more years before he breathed new life into Spaunton.

The story finds Charles finding it hard to adapt to living with his father, who was a stranger, and somewhat moody. His mother is concerned that her son might need company, told him to invite some friends over, so the story starts with his long letter of invitation to the Buckingham. He mentions a mysterious Eagle Hall, a secret research base, so Simon packed a periscope to look over its wall. Were the scientists working for war or peace? Saville carefully established the ambiguity. The head scientist of Eagle Hall, John Marsdon, is a family friend, and the mystery that readers would soon be enthralled in begins with a strange man near Eagle Hall almost running Charles over. John Marsdon’s daughter Felicity is spoiled, and shrill (“don’t you ever marry a girl that that” was his father’s opinion) and gets romantically involved with the mysterious spy,

Cartwright (she was ‘groomed’, as we would say today). She will be sent to a London Secretarial College, her exasperated father said. Charles describes Eagle Hall thus in his initial letter to Juliet: “before the war it was a hotel because people used to come here to be braced up by the air on the moors. Now Eagle Hall is either chemical laboratories or something of that sort. Some of the people who work there also live there but others live with families or in houses or cottages in the villages nearby...Eagle Hall has a high wall all round it and some gardens, and a cottage at the gate which is only opened when you have told a man who you are and who you want and why.”. It is four miles away on the moors, but the direction is not given. In a fog, Charles said, he realised that if he turned right he would come to Eagle Hall gates; if he kept left he would get home to Ravenswyck. Raven Hall, towards Robin Hoods Bay, fits the bill well. It started life as an 18th century stately home called ‘Peak House’, then an asylum (George III is reputed to have been treated there) and later a hotel with swimming pool and golf links. There are some walls of substance, including a magnificent castellated walled terrace garden. It has recently (2004) been refurbished as an hotel. Raven Hall is on the coast, and the failed new town of Ravenscar was planned on its estate: if it was the model for Eagle Hall, it has been moved substantially inland.



The scene moves to Whitby, the Abbey and the fish staithes, and a mystery unfurls. The Buckingham arrive to help sort it out, involving them in detailed exploration of the area, taking them as far as Robin Hoods Bay and a long walk home over the moors through Fylingthorpe, including overnight sanctuary in a cave of some significance to the story.

Saville’s description of foreigners is rather chauvinist. Mr Renislau does ‘odd’ things like kissing Mrs Buckingham’s hand “*because he’s a musician and Polish*” (p.17). Charles is ultra-polite “*because he’s only half English*”, and can be temperamental for the same reason. It is clearly a great misfortune to be born not fully English. On Yorkshire folk, Charles Renislau writes: “*We*

don't know many people here yet because I don't think Yorkshire people make friends very easily. They're nice but they look at you rather suspiciously and don't even seem to say much and what they do say is difficult to understand at first". However, Yorkshire folk have some saving features – they like music, cooking and cricket. By the end of the book, cricket won them friends as Charles played in the local cricket match. The same hostility of Yorkshire folk is remarked on in *Mystery Mine*, with some insulting pavement banter from locals. This is curious. As far as we know, Saville had not lived in Yorkshire to experience this for himself. He may have known the 1930s autobiographical Bramblewick novels of Leo Walmsley, first world war flying hero and son of an artist in Robin Hood's Bay (the Bramblewick of his stories). Walmsley described the hostility between the locals and 'foreigners', which meant people not from Bramblewick (the Walmsleys were fellow Yorkshire folk from Shipley near Bradford). The author describes the Fosdykes. "*They were gruff in their manner, humourless, secretive, and unfriendly. As a boy I had hated them, for unlike the Sledburgh 'foreigners, they would never let you set foot in their boats, or let you watch them baiting their lines, or mending pots*". As a boy he had been beaten and ducked in a pool full of fish guts. In adult life, "*I could sense the old enmity, the unyielding hatred of the 'foreigner, in the very way they looked at you when they spoke, with a humourless smile, and a hard twinkle in their eyes, which at its kindest seemed to convey a contemptuous pity*" (*Phantom Lobster*, 1933:97-8). This was even after they had lived in the village for decades. He called it '*that Bramblewick look*', mostly given by men: he describes the women as far more hospitable. His other related books are *Three Fevers* (1931 which became the 1935 film *Turn of the Tide*), *Sally Lunn* (1937), and the autobiographical *Foreigners* (1935) about his childhood in Robin Hoods Bay. Walmsley moved to Cornwall where he became a good friend of Daphne du Maurier. Bramblewick, by the way, was the inspiration for Alan White's Yorkshire coast saga *Ravenswyke* (1980), which helped me make this connection. Cartwright, the spy better known as Jan, was arrested in London *as Mr. Bramble* (p.215). Saville's Juliet, I have to admit, received only appreciative smiles from artist and fishermen when she went down to the beach to bathe in Robin Hood's Bay.

Mr Renislau's past catches up with him and he is kidnapped by an old enemy in the Soviet secret police, "Jan the traitor, his interrogator in concentration camp, a man *"with the coldest, brightest blue eyes he had ever seen in a man"* (p.95). The term 'traitor' suggests that he too was Polish, but had joined the invaders. Of his war past we know only that it has something to do with being in the Polish resistance against the Russians – this is as much detail as we will get.



The spy's battered 'grubby' tug was *"The Pride of the Valley"*, moored near the swing bridge. The name 'Pride' reminds us of the crooks' barge in *Two Fair Plaits*, the *"London Pride"* on which Belinda was imprisoned. This is not a coincidence – criminals have pride

which comes before the fall. Jan, posing as an artist, stayed at Pride's Bridge. In contrast, the honest Mr Burton's Thames tug (in *Two Fair Plaits*) was called *Happy Days*, and the tug *The Heart's Delight* puts in an appearance; and the barges in *The Riddle of the Painted Box* were *The Flower of Brentford*, *The Flower of Southall*, and *The Heart's Delight*, all positive and sinless. The many barges named in *Young Johnnie Bimbo* do not carry a "Pride of" name. It therefore has some symbolism.

Mr Renislau realised that Cartwright, the missing researcher at the secret base was Jan the spy who had had access to Eagle Hall's secrets.. Recognising Mr Renislau, Jan intends to take the composer back behind the iron curtain, if only to prevent his own exposure; so Mr Renislau is held in a shop in Rosemary Court, Whitby (reminding us of Rosemary Lane in *Two Fair Plaits* a few years earlier).

Without knowing it, Juliet Buckingham meets Jan in Robin Hoods Bay posing as an artist named Mr. Bramble - even drawing her picture on a pad of yellow paper. The youngsters, walking home, take refuge from a 'sea roke' in a cave which turns out to be the spy's refuge, finding an impression of a message on a similar writing pad on which,



though not understood, mentioning a meeting by a clock. The walk from Robin Hood's Bay via Fylingthorpe to Goathland is described in some detail, and may be a walk Saville himself did (the endpaper map gives the route). The story having an unexpected finale in London when the three youngsters

are invited to stay unexpectedly with Uncle Joe Buckingham and experience the Festival of Britain South Bank Exhibition and Battersea Festival Pleasure Gardens. Shoehorning these into a Whitby story was no easy matter, and this surprise family visit is a little forced. Of the Festival and Pleasure Gardens I have written elsewhere in *Acksheley!*

The Lone Pine story, *Mystery Mine* (1959) brings back the Sparrows from *Lone Pine London* and Harriet Sparrow is formally made a Lone Pine Club member. The story hinges on the fact that the shop and land that Mr. Sparrow is buying has a derelict mine on it which may contain uranium. The story starts in Prospect Way, Whitby, a drab shop, a woman in dirty coat and hair rollers with a smouldering cigarette hanging from her lips. (There is a Prospect Hill in Whitby. The *Prospect of Whitby* is a pub in London that Saville describes in *Come to London* and *Two Fair Plaits*; and there is a nearby Prospect Farm between Blea Wyke and Hayburn Wyke.). Charles Warner is introduced as strange-looking, shabby, a wild gleam in his eyes, horn-rimmed glasses and fingers stained with nicotine, with a very poor relationship with his boss "The Doctor". Later he is called Robbie, so even his name is false. He is listed in the dramatis personae as John Robens. All is not well with thieves, and there is no love lost.

The scene shifts to Jon and Penny arriving from Rye to stay with the Mortons in London, with Harriet Sparrow arriving. All were invited to her grandfather's new antique shop in North Yorkshire, and. Jon and David try the journey from Whitby first by bus, and later on foot, only to be caught in a heavy sea fog. The wildness of the local features are described in the journey Jon and David make from the main road at Lilla Cross across the

moor to ‘Spaunton’. Getting thoroughly lost, their discomfort is a warning to all readers to explore sensibly, a message actually given by the bus driver who dropped them off. The story also carries warnings about messing around near old mineshafts. The children’s first glimpse of the young crooked geologist Warner/Robbie/Robens comes at the mine on this journey.

Another mineralogist, Philip Sharman, befriends them and gives free, honest advice, though he is the object of some early suspicion with the youngsters. He says that he has recently been working in Crackpot mine in Swaledale, near Tan Hill which has the highest pub in England. Crackpot mine was the focus of *The Secret of Buzzard Scar* (1955) in the Nettleford series where on the frontispiece map the deserted mineshaft is marked as close to Tan Hill. In general the Swaledale mines were worked for lead deposits. Tan Hill is mentioned only for its pub but had in fact supported a coal mine until 1929. It may have seemed less incredible then for the government to be scouting for uranium, which scarcely exists in Europe: the nuclear power industry was relatively new and fast developing, viewed in those enthusiastic days as a cheap source of unlimited energy. Uranium was therefore highly sought after at a time when Britain’s empire was in disarray. The musical piece *Farewell to Stromness* by Peter Maxwell Davis was a eulogy on the death of the Orkney town once a planned uranium mine was established (in fact it never was). In our story, considerable uranium is discovered, so the land owners become wealthy (both Mr Sparrow and the vendor agree in a gentlemanly fashion to share the proceeds).

Robert Smart³ noted that ‘Spaunton’ as described on two levels is modelled on Goathland itself. Goathland railway station, now on the preserved Yorkshire Moors Railway, is the location where the twins disrupt a meeting between the crook (“The Doctor”) and his argumentative mineralogist minion Warner. The Doctor had arrived from Pickering, had his (interrupted) chat, and then boarded the train back to Pickering. My post-war (1947) Bradshaw railway timetables shows Whitby departures for Pickering and Malton at 07.05, 09.30, 11.45, 15.20 and 18.45 with an additional 7.48 terminating in Goathland. The service from Pickering ran at 05.46, 11.27, 14.45, 16.20 and 18.19. This, when

compared to the 19 passenger departures a day in each direction in 1937, was a skeleton service. Had ‘the Doctor’ arrived at Goathland from Pickering at 11.55, he would have taken the 12.13 back to Pickering; or arriving at 15.18, his return train would be 15.49. This later train with almost half an hour available, best fits the action in the story. The preserved railway now begins at Grosmont, beyond which the line connects with the Whitby to Guisborough main line. Through trains are common today. There is an old Victorian railway trackbed through Goathland leading to an old incline, abandoned when the line was improved, which makes a pleasant walk.



Another story venue is the supposed roman road at Wheeldale, south of Goathland. Robert Smart describes a circular walk to it via Mallyan Spout waterfall. The children walk with Philip, now mostly regarded as safe, up to the roman road, of which Saville wrote in the foreword: *“I have walked myself along the Roman Road where the Lone Piners were taken by Philip Sharman and you can do the same, realising that you are treading where the Roman legions marched north from York.”*

Actually this roman road leads to Malton first, and then Brough near Hull on the river Humber, both military forts (York was the legionary headquarters) – though it is true that a branch went to York. Malton serviced the coastal signal stations, so roads went to Filey, Scarborough, Ravenscar, and our road through Wheeldale to Goldsborough via the river Esk at Egton Bridge. Since raiders could use the river Esk as a highway, Goldsborough was one of the first stations to fall when the Romans retreated around 400 AD and this whole area would have suffered turbulent times. The Romans were experienced at building bridges, using stone columns to support arches, but the Esk crossing was insignificant, shallow and 3 metres width perhaps, and easily forded. – no sign of a bridge has been reported. There seems to be no Roman road northwards beyond the river.⁴ The roman road was also called Wades’s Causeway: an old legend claimed it to be built by the giant Wade and his wife Bel. Another Wade, George, who built military roads in Scotland, was a governor of the Coram Street Foundling Hospital (see below, chapter 2).

Beyond this in the story lies the deserted village of ‘Coram Street’, (actually the repositioned Wharram Percy from south of Malton some distance away, Saville’s preface admits), near a railway and a quarry. Wharram Percy is discussed in some detail by Patrick Tubby (Whitby Gathering Souvenir Programme 2000:6-9 and 2006:31-38) and Mary and Keith Hanson (Whitby Gathering Souvenir Programme 2006: 12-19). I discuss this more fully below in chapter 2.

Both stories have similar features. Each story balances scenes in Whitby with a description of the countryside, and each points out the dangers of sea rokes. The fictional village of ‘Pride’s Bridge’ west of Goathland had an inn/hotel called ‘The Yorkshire Rose’ and an inn of the same name features in ‘Spaunton’ in *Mystery Mine*, a mile north-east of Goathland. Pub names tend not to change much: two pubs called ‘The Yorkshire Rose’ appear in an internet search, one in Driffield, south of Malton, the other in Guiseley near Leeds (not remotely in the vicinity). The main plot clusters around the Pickering to Whitby main road, on which he might have driven from Harrogate; but Driffield is too far south, so whilst it is not impossible that he drove this way at some time, the pub name is obvious enough to have been made up. Whether it referred to the Goathland Inn (of TV fame), or Mallyon Spout Hotel, near the roman road, or even the Goathland Hydro near the railway are open questions.

Septimus Bland is the chief crook in the Buckingham series. Sometimes Saville research produces moments of great excitement. One was the discovery of a real Septimus Bland in Goathland. A republished OS large-scale map of Goathland³ has the 1905 entry of Kelly’s Directory on its reverse. The first name in the Goathland residents list is Septimus Bland. Checking further, the 1891 census makes him 46 years old (dob 1845) with a wife Sarah (nee Wright) and four children Ada (21), William or Walker (15), Effie (Ethel) (12) and Ada W. (9) living at West Mount, Goathland (the second child Herbert, born 1873, was missing). His occupation is listed as plumber and glazier, and his place of birth as Scarborough. However, a Septimus Bland worked as plumber and glazier from 82 Bar Street, Scarborough in a Directory of 1890, and was still there in 1909⁴, and from

birth dates this was clearly the same man, living in Goathland and managing a business in Scarborough. He was perhaps well-off: his 21 year old daughter did not have to work, unlike other village girls, and his 15 year old son was still at school. No other Septimus Bland appears in the censuses, except one born 1896 in Scarborough. Bland was a common name in Scarborough. Our Goathland Septimus appears in the 1901 census, but not 1911. By the time of Saville's post second world war visit, the Goathland Septimus would have been long in the graveyard, but I haven't had chance to locate the headstone yet. An alternative, or complementary, suggestion is that Saville may also, in the guidebooks, have come across John Septimus Bland, a developer, made abortive attempts to develop Ravenscar in the 1890s . An implication is that Saville planned his Goathland story at the same time as writing the undeserving plumber (or perhaps the more deserving developer) Septimus Bland into *Master of Maryknoll*, his first Buckingham book..

Footnotes.

1. Calder, J (2000) Whitby Gathering Souvenir Programme, pp. 37-8 quotes a webpage on the history of Ravenswick (there spelled Ravenswyke) which is no longer online, though I have seen it. He also gives interesting details of the Children's Hour cast.
2. Letter from Saville to 'John', 11.1.61, reprinted on the back cover of the 2006 Whitby Souvenir Programme. A reader called John appears to have found a farm named Ravenswyke on a map. Without confirming or denying, Saville chides John for having written twice.
3. www.alangodfrey.com.
4. <http://www.scarboroughsmaritimeheritage.org.uk/greatwar/s10-france-summer-1917.php>.

Sources:

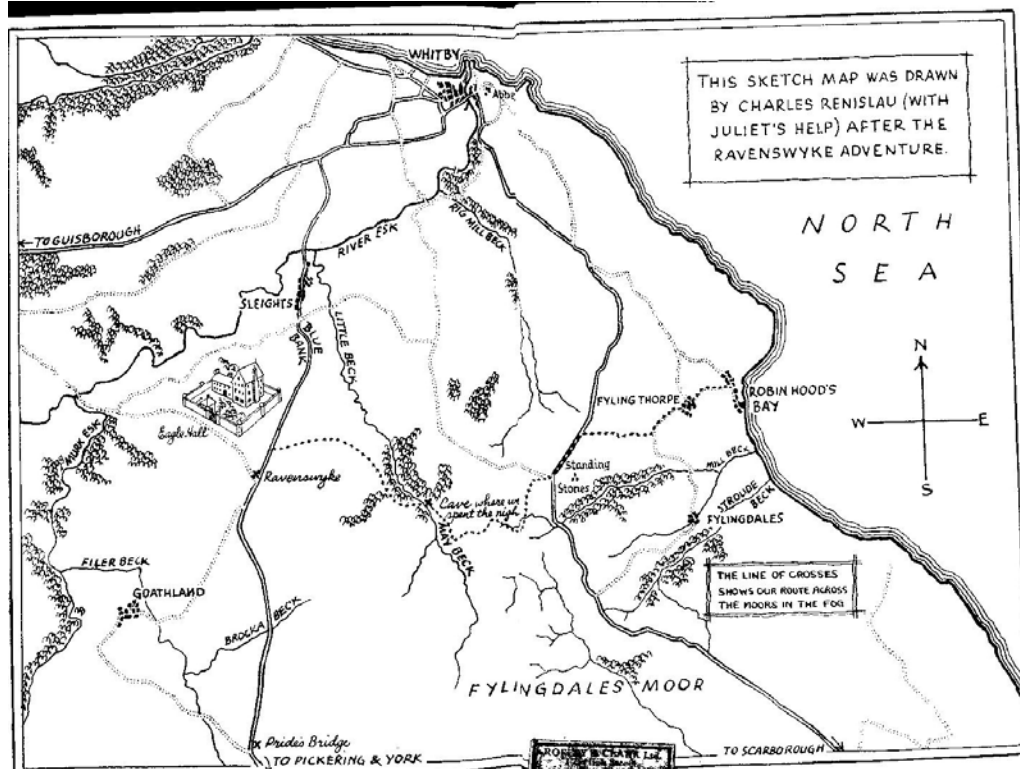
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Shppard Frere, *Britannia, A History of Roman Britain*;

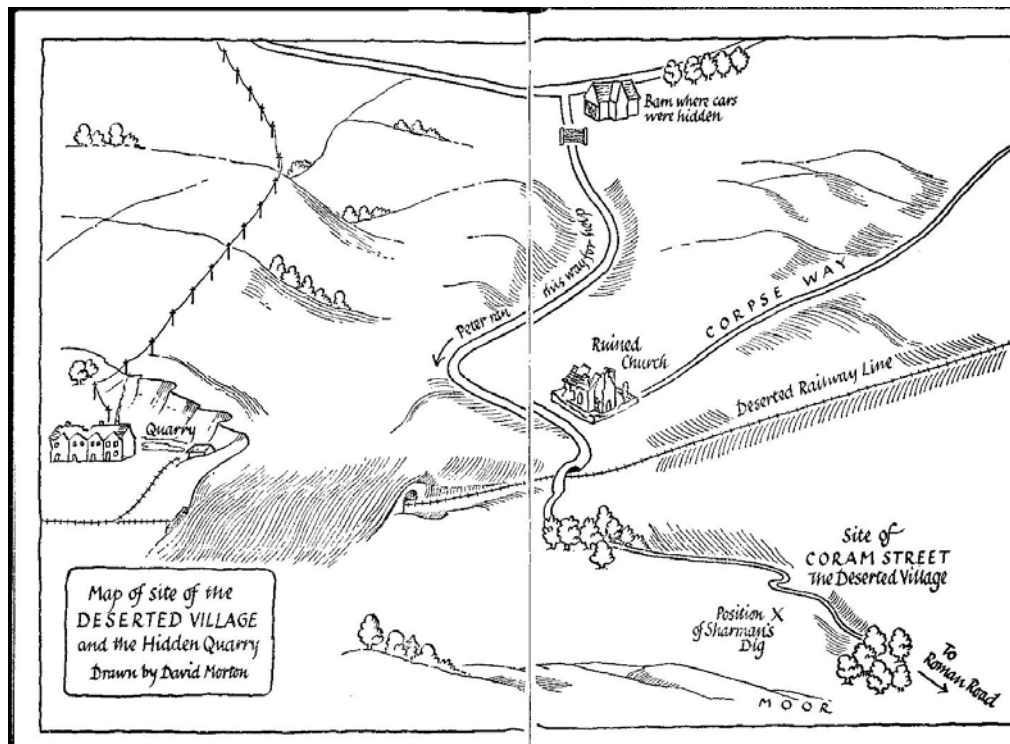
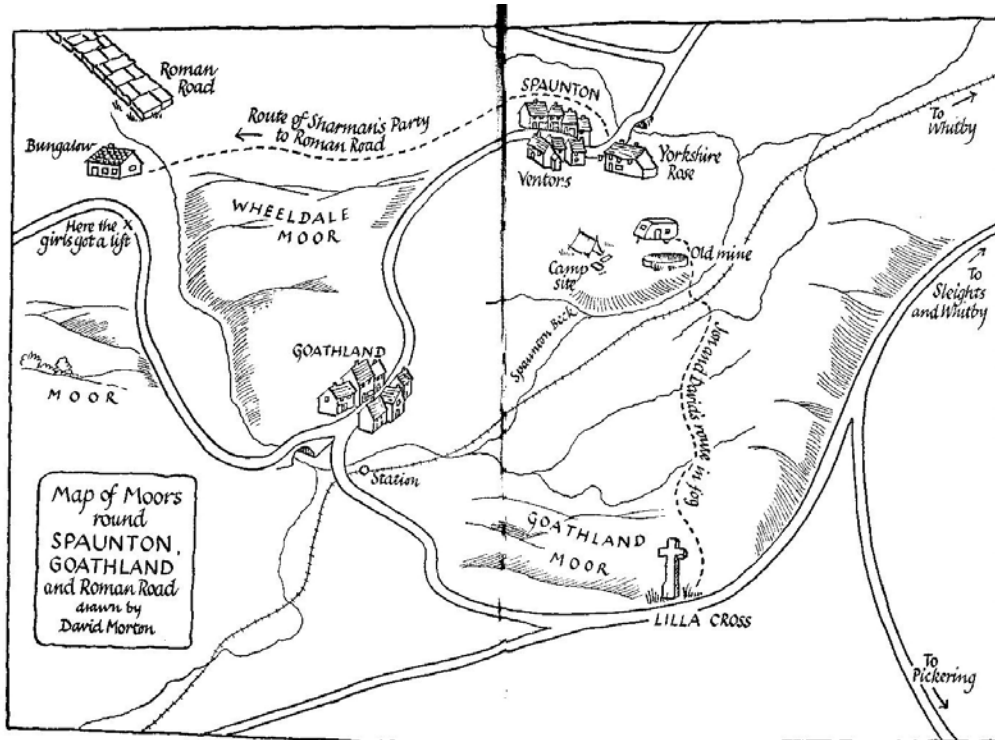
Raymond Chevallier, *Roman Roads*

Smart, Robert, (2000) *A Walk to the Roman Road, Whitby Gathering Souvenir Programme*, pp.10-12

Map from *The Buckingham's at Ravenwke, and Whitby Abbey*



Maps, Mystery Mine



Malcolm Saville in North Yorkshire: Chapter Two

A Deserted Medieval Village: Coram Street as Wharram Percy in *Mystery Mine*.

Mystery Mine (1959), set in fictitious Spaunton, north of Goathland, near Whitby, refers to the Goathland railway station and the roman road on the moors. It also includes a deserted medieval village named 'Coram Street', situated beyond the roman road. The endpaper map situates Coram Street beyond the roman road., and therefore close to Pickering. The Foreword tells us that Coram Street deserted village is really Wharram Percy deserted medieval village to the south, between Malton and Driffield, which was beginning excavations in the 1950s. Its formal period of public opening came after 1970 after the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works took it over (now English Heritage); in the 1950s it was clearly accessible, since Saville suggests that readers can like him go to see the ruined church and grassed-over building foundations; but it was not *easily* accessible, since the access footpaths are more recent. The story suggests that excavation trenches are covered with corrugated metal sheets. The story and map suggests that a disused railway line lies between village and church, crossed by a bridge, on which a tunnel gives access to a quarry to the north containing a row of four workers' houses, with a clearly marked telephone line since the cottage has a telephone in the story.

Coram Street is actually in Camden, London WC1 on the route from Euston/Kings Cross to Southampton Street, home of publishers such as Pearsons and Newnes. Malcolm Saville would have passed the street many times going to the office. The names Wharram and Coram are close enough to suggest the alias, but there may be a more subtle symbolism. The street is named after the Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital orphanage, established by the ex-sailor Thomas Coram to rescue children of London's poor unfortunate women (children who would otherwise die). It is close by a small park called Coram's Fields. This orphanage was London's first art gallery, as the rich and famous wanted to be seen supporting this charity and artists were invited to exhibit there. George Frederick Handel the composer was a leading supporter. There is now a thriving museum

here, well worth a visit. The kidnapped children in Saville's story were 'found' here, in Coram Street, a twist on the notion of foundlings.

The layout of Saville's 'Coram Street' is detailed in the end papers, as a deserted village being excavated. X somewhat vaguely marks the spot of Philip Sharman's 'dig'. A Corpse Way leads to the church from the south. A gated road leads down from a barn where cars were hidden; a note says "Peter ran this way for help", pointing to Coram Street.. Philip Sharman describes the scene thus (p.204):

Below them lay the forgotten valley and they could see the derelict railway line and a little stream beside it far below.

He points out the Corpse Way, an ancient path for coffins to be brought to the church "until the old church was deconsecrated a hundred years or so ago". A clump of trees hid the bridge over the railway. They spot another track, the one Peter was to run down later:

That track is a very ancient road and leads up to a little used lane about three-quarters of a mile over the hill. It must have been the only road to the old village, but it isn't in use now.

A telephone line comes across country to the quarry cottages, to explain the phone connections. In the 1950s, a telephone line alongside the railway; today, another comes down alongside the hollow way from Bella Farm (the current footpath) to the railway and village. As they lifted the corrugated sheeting protecting the diggings, a sudden rainstorm drove them to shelter in the trench. They thus were able to see what Malcolm Saville himself had seen on his visit, though somewhat illegally. They explored in the gloom: but when the covers were down, it would be pitch black inside. They spot a "gypsy-looking" woman near the church, then Peter running towards them..

I find the endpaper map utterly confusing. Comparing this endpaper with the equivalent OS map of Wharram Percy, the gated road leads from Bella and Bella Farm, dropping down to a railway bridge, then on to the ruined church on the left (i.e. *after the railway*), and the deserted village uphill on the right. Today this is the route from the car park to the medieval village. The railway footbridge is closed today and the path goes down to the track-bed and up again. Saville's church is before the railway. The railway tunnel has

also moved: it is to our right in Saville's bridge, but is to the left in real life, clearly marked by the line of air shafts marked on the OS map. The blocked entrance is now covered with vegetation and invisible, but it runs down to Burdale quarry, where the entrance is visible. There is a former chalk quarry (now a wildlife reservation with a lake) hidden away at the Wharram end of the mile long Burdale railway tunnel, which contained quarry houses for workers, and other industrial buildings, the most noticeable being a chalk crusher, still standing. However, the Wharram quarry was even in the 1950s overgrown and derelict, whereas the Burdale quarry beyond the tunnel was still in use, its workings and houses clearly visible from the road, and is still a gash of white in a green landscape. The trip down the tunnel was described as long, i.e. its full mile, so the quarry in question is Burdale to the south. Coram Street is thus a composite, with the quarry placed north-east of the village instead of south, and placed between the church and the houses.

The Excavations

Wharram Percy in Drue Dale was discovered in 1948 when aerial photographic surveys were conducted by the RAF. As a general interest had developed in deserted villages around the country, excavations soon began, as are depicted in Malcolm Saville's story. These excavations were at first amateur rather than professional, a group of keen diggers coming a few weeks each summer to work with the University of Leeds history lecturer Maurice Beresford, whose books and articles later charted its progress. His early description 'Lost Villages' (as in his 1952 book title) was replaced by the word 'deserted' as the 1950s progressed. A Deserted Medieval Village Research Group was set up in 1952. Wharram's excavations were to last decades, unlike the brief 'rescue' digs that we often find today. Abandoned villages became overgrown, tumbled down and covered with soil, many becoming grazing land. In dry summers, their shapes show up as bumps, shadows and different colour grass, visible in aerial photographs. None has been excavated as fully as Wharram Percy

The English Heritage handbook, *Wharram Percy, Deserted Medieval Village* by Maurice Beresford and John Hurst (1990) notes:

“As visitors descend the hollow way that was once the road along which coffins were led from Towthorpe for burial, a footbridge takes them for a moment into the overgrown disused railway cutting and then, as they follow the track towards the English Heritage ‘Welcome’ signboard, the earthworks of the village and the top of the church tower come into sight” (p.131).

We have here many of the ingredients for this episode in *Mystery Mine*, except that this coffin path is not the one marked on the endpaper, but the path Peter ran down. Philip Sharman’s description of the coffin path sounds very similar:

“That’s the Corpse Way,” Sharman explained. “That path has been there for hundreds of years, and until the old church fell out of use and was deconsecrated a hundred years or so ago, coffins were brought over that hill for burial from villages without a church.” (p.204).

The old church at Wharram Percy was St. Martins. The church was used by the nearby villages until 1869, long after the ‘deserted’ village was gone, so locals would have a long walk to the church and churchyard for worship and for burial. When the new Thixendale church was consecrated in 1869, the Wharram Percy church became largely obsolete but saw its final service as late as 1948, after which roof gradually disintegrated and the tower partially collapsed in a storm of December 1959. It was not deconsecrated in the Victorian age.

In *The Secret of Buzzard Scar* written a short time before this, Malcolm Saville describes another ‘Corpseway’ in Swaledale, this time many miles long from Keld to Grinton, “the cathedral of t’ dale”. It was the route from small communities to the nearest churchyard with rights to bury the dead, miles away along which bodies had to be taken in procession from where they died. The bus driver Charlie in that story describes Corpseway “with evident relish”:

“’Tis said that those who carried ‘em on their last journey used a special way over t’ fells called the Corpseway” (p.56).

This is not the only reference to *Buzzard Scar* in *Mystery Mine*: Tan Hill and Crackpot Mine also occur, so the connection is not coincidental. The study by Mary and Keith Hansom (Annual Gathering 2006) of burial arrangements is quite accurate, that villagers

from nearby villages essentially paid a death tax to the church. However, just as they had to make their own way to church services, so they each had to find different ways to bring bodies, a few a year, to Wharram to be buried. These were tiny village populations. There was no Corpse Way: this idea was borrowed from Swaledale. There was simply a footpath from each village. The last burial took place in 1906.

So what would Saville have seen in 1958? The story describes trenches 4-5 foot deep, covered in corrugated iron for weather protection. The early excavations simply identified the walls by stripping off the turf. John Hurst, a real archaeologist, gradually took over control after 1952 introducing 'open-area excavation', stripping down areas rather than simple trenches. Although the diggers initially thought they were looking at peasant houses, they came across an ancient manor house (13th century) which they uncovered in 1956 and 1957. This was unusual because the bottom floor was actually a basement ('undercroft', in their descriptions), created from the excavations of chalk to build the rest of the building. In other words, underneath the archaeologists' weather boarding, there was a large area for the children to shelter in, ten foot or more deep, not 4-5 as in the story. Possibly Saville saw the covering sheets and had no idea what lay beneath. Excavations after 1955 under Hurst first confirmed the complexity of the site, a point made by Sharman: "We think Coram Street started to die at the time of the Black Death in 1370, but what makes it so interesting is its age before that. That's what I am trying to show you" (p.207). Excavations have been as much about Iron Age and Saxon remains as medieval. This assessment shows up-to-date knowledge.

All of the excavations then in progress were close to the church, although considerably higher in altitude. The map does not give us a true idea of the contours: the church is in a valley, at the bottom of which is the railway line leading to the tunnel. For the village you have to climb a steep slope and look down on the church and the (reconstructed) fishponds. Beyond the church is an estate house and evidence of barns, probably dating from the Victorian era: the brickwork uses the same bricks as in the railway station, and uses the same 'bond' (English Garden Wall Bond, see picture) – three rows on long

bricks, followed by one row end-on tying the inner to the outer wall. At the bottom of the back wall is evidence of an earlier building built of stone.

If Saville met any student volunteers, they would likely have been Geography students from University College, London, a suitable profile for Sharman being a geologist. Later, as fame spread, a broader mix of volunteers applied. Of course, a real archaeologist would not allow children to interfere with the site, or put them in danger in a trench that might collapse. The manor house excavated is one of two mentioned in the Domesday Book and included extensive kitchens and barns, even a grain drying facility. The comment 'started to die' is apposite: the village survived the plague and struggled on, abandoned around 1517 when the remaining cottagers were cleared away to make room for sheep pasturage, a point known and publicised before 1950. Today, only the ground-plan of two houses are exposed, and these would be the 1956-7 excavations referred to by Philip Sharman. The ten-foot undercroft has been leveled; the other trenches have been backfilled and reseeded.

The church has been described as the most researched church in Britain, though all excavations here were done after 1958. Even the bodies buried in the church were exhumed with special permission and due respect, and studied. The villagers were poorly nourished, and therefore much smaller than modern people. There was high child mortality, only half surviving disease and starvation to reach adulthood. This was not untypical, and possibly better than city slums with 40% infant mortality alone: at least animals could be reared, potatoes and other vegetables grown and wild fruits collected, so poverty was a little ameliorated. The church is a mix of styles and ages, at its largest in the 16th century when it served the wider area, but then losing its side-isles and apse. The pillars to the side-isles are still visible, filled in with rubble stones, and then presumably plastered and painted, although there is no evidence of this today.

The Railway

The Malton and Driffild Junction Railway ran through Wharram, close to its summit marked by the mile long Burdale Tunnel, closed in 1958 and bricked up in 1961. The

line, planned as a direct route from Newcastle to Hull, never managed to be more than a branch-line carrying farming produce, quarried chalk and a few people. A service of three passenger trains a day was typical throughout its existence. Wharram quarry was at its peak in the 1920s, followed later by the Burdale quarry at the other end of the tunnel: the white gash of the latter stands out, though the weathered chalkface of the former is more hidden by trees. The line was closed for scheduled passenger traffic in 1950 (there were some excursions) and closed for all traffic in 1958, the last train being on Saturday October 18th. There is an excellent history and description of the line by Warwick Burton a former Wharram excavator (1997, published by and available from ApperleyBridge@gmx.co.uk) who revealed that the students used to drive their cars through the tunnel. Beresford and Hurst again in 1990 note:

“The tunnel entrance is bricked up and disappearing under a forest of undergrowth. Among the former sidings, which are grassed over and beginning to be colonised by cowslips, the great Wharram limestone quarry is a Nature Reserve and the kilns, crusher and hoppers are tumbling into ruins”.

A point of clarification is needed here. It was a chalk quarry destined for cement manufacture, with the chalk gouged out of the hillside by a massive Ruston and Hornsby steam digger, broken up in a massive silo (still extant) to feed into railway wagons. The quarry closed for business in 1930 and its sidings were disconnected from the main line at the tunnel end. In 1938 it found a new use when lime kilns at the station end produced agricultural lime and whitewash, a pick and shovel small operation which lasted into the 1950s. This was connected to the mainline near the station to bring in coal for the kilns. When Saville visited (presumably 1958) the main line was operational until October 18th, including the tunnel. The rails remained in place until the following year, the year *Mystery Mine* was published. Saville says that the line was closed, with rails rusted (there was never enough traffic when operational to rub the rust off). The last train, he says, was a couple of years ago. He will have been told that its closure was imminent, and built this fiction into his storyline. Only the track-bed between Wharram station and the tunnel entrance now allows public access: however it comes out at the back of the station

building, not the platform side so most of the current footpath diverts on to the 'deserted' siding track-bed..

Harriet and Mary's journey to imprisonment was on 'a workman's four-wheeled trolley' (p.198) which worked by working the lever 'to and fro' so moving the trolley forward. The squeaks, rumbles and clanks all make the journey vivid. We have to wait a chapter for the journey to finish, but get the impression that it is a long journey. Amy the villain has not done this journey before, and screams most of the time. Water drips from the tunnel ceiling. Finally Edith Wildblood was able to stop working the lever as the trolley kept up its own momentum. This means it was travelling downhill, which means that the trolley was travelling from Wharram east to Burdale quarry, a downhill gradient of one in 165 from the lines summit of 410 feet above sea level at the north (Wharram) tunnel portal. The points went off to the right, and the quarry cottages, which would be true of Burdale. Of course, we don't know whether Saville knew about gradients, or even knew the Burdale quarry – though this seems very likely. The endpaper map has simply repositioned the tunnel and the quarry to the north instead of south.

Burton's railway history reveals another problem: platelayers were reduced as a cost-cutting exercise so one team looked after the track west of the Burdale tunnel, another covered the tunnel and the eastern section. To get around they used three wheeled velocipedes (bicycles for one with a third stabilising wheel to the other rail). There is an example in the York railway museum (see photograph). He notes that these were plugged in to the electric signalling system, so when they were unplugged, the signals allowed no other traffic onto the section. The larger 4-wheeled trolley may have existed; but these were beloved of comedy films, and needed in the storyline to hold four people; it has every chance of being a figment of Saville's creative imagination.

The theme of 'deserted' and other lost/found references pervades *Mystery Mine*. The boys start the book lost in a sea fog; the mine is deserted (but will be reopened); the village, railway and quarries are deserted (but are rediscovered); Harriet and Mary are lost and later found in 'Coram Street' quarry, like the real Coram Street foundlings. The

setting is part real and part altered. Spaunton is actually Goathland in description, but depicted to the north of Goathland, near where Beck Hole now is. (Similarly in *Buzzard Scar* 'East Gill' is Muker, but positioned on the road to Keld). The real Spaunton is on Spaunton Moor near Kirkbymoorside. Although there is a deserted village and also a deserted quarry and a tunnel about to be closed, their positions in Saville's story and map have been linked together into a creative collage.

We can leave a final world to the opposition in the book. First, goodies are hard to tell from baddies – this is recurrent in Saville. Philip Sharman is doubted for a long time. The Wildblood pair are aptly named as being greedy and untamed. One is called a gypsy, a crude stereotype – but it is interesting that the river which begins at Wharram is called Gypsy Race, ending at Bridlington. The 'Doctor' represents business in its oppressive and criminal form, the young man representing amoral employees, doing a job even if it means scamming the public. Who do we trust is a big question here, and is still with us.

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Colin Hayfield, *Wharram Remembered: a social view of 40 years of excavations at Wharram Percy, East Riding of Yorkshire*, Spring Hill Publications, 1990.

Mary and Keith Hanson, 'The Corpse Way', *MSS Whitby Souvenir Programme*, 2006.



The church viewed from the excavations, showing it to be in the valley.



The church interior, showing the filled in pillars with two 16th century windows. Notice to the left, top, a filled in circular window.



The church tower from the chancel. The outside of this tower is collapsed.



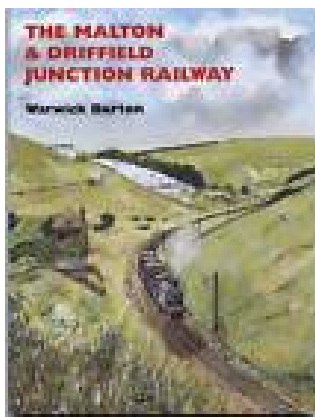
The Victorian farm buildings, with foundations of grain drying barns (the ducts for hot air can be clearly seen).



The front of the farm buildings, facing the church. The ground-plan of the old vicarage can be seen to the right. The sign 'Wharram' formerly belonged to the railway station.



Brickwork found both at the station and the farm buildings. Technically it is called English Garden Wall Bond, a weakly bonded wall as only one course in four bonded with the inner wall.



Left: Modern railway history, with picture of engine about to enter Burdale tunnel from the Driffield end, with Burdale quarry in the background; and right, the bridge over the railway at Wharram village.



The foot-bridge, from the track-bed, looking towards the tunnel.



Detail of bridge support.



The track-bed today. The bend away from the main line to an old siding can be clearly seen in the distance.



Water-tank at the station.



Wharram station, rear. The track-bed footpath comes out here.



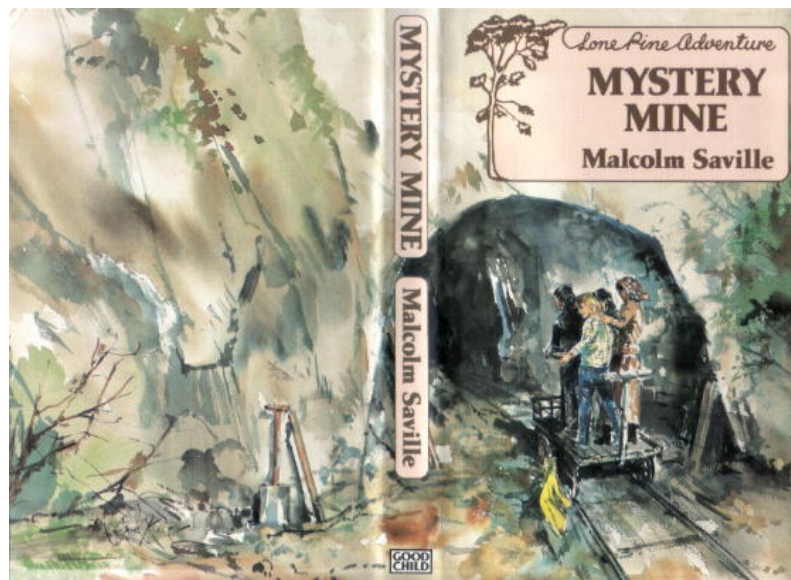
Burdale quarry, looking like Wharram quarry once did in 1930. The cottages are now gone.



Burdale tunnel entrance, the only entrance visible.



Trolley, York Railway Museum.



Trolley, cover of Goodchild edition.



Velocipede, cycle with outrigger, York Railway Museum, known to be used on the Malton-Drifffield line.