

ART. VIII. *The so-called Cockpit at Monk Foss, in the Parish of Whitbeck, Cumberland.* BY W. G. COLLINGWOOD.

Read at Keswick, June 29, 1899.

WEST of Black Combe, where the steep hillside falls into the undulating shore-land, and within view of three great stone-circles, the "High Street" (supposed to be Roman) runs past a row of ancient homesteads. Three of these were known in last century as Hall Foss, Middle Foss, and Monk Foss.

The title-deeds do not carry us far back. Middle Foss, the little farm now thrown into Monk Foss, is named in 1728; and in 1738 "Monkffoss" appears. Its owner, Mr. W. Lewthwaite, wrote the name in his will of 1807 as *Moutefoss* (*sic*)—as though he referred it to a "moat" on the premises; but the name Monk Foss occurs also in the Boundaries of the Manor of Bootle. Whellan says that it "was given by William de Meschines to the Abbey of St. Mary, in Furness, and on the dissolution of that house was granted to the Hudlestons of Millom, who sold it." But in Beck's *Annales* we find that soon after the foundation of Furness Abbey (1127), Godard Dapifer de Boyville of Millom gave the monks a carucate in *Fossa*; this being their very first holding outside the original grant from Stephen; and in 1153 the bull of Pope Eugenius III. mentions "dimidium Fosse" as belonging to the Abbey. *Fosse* is, of course, in mediæval spelling, for "Fossæ." Then in 1242 Adam de Mulcaster exchanged Brothirilkeld for Foss; and in the Taxation of Pope Nicholas no Foss appears among the Abbey's possessions.

This seems to relate to Monk Foss, because (a) the Lord of Millom gave it, (b) the Lord of Muncaster got it,
and

and (c) the name of Monk Foss, as opposed to Hall Foss, must denote their "dimidium Fosse."

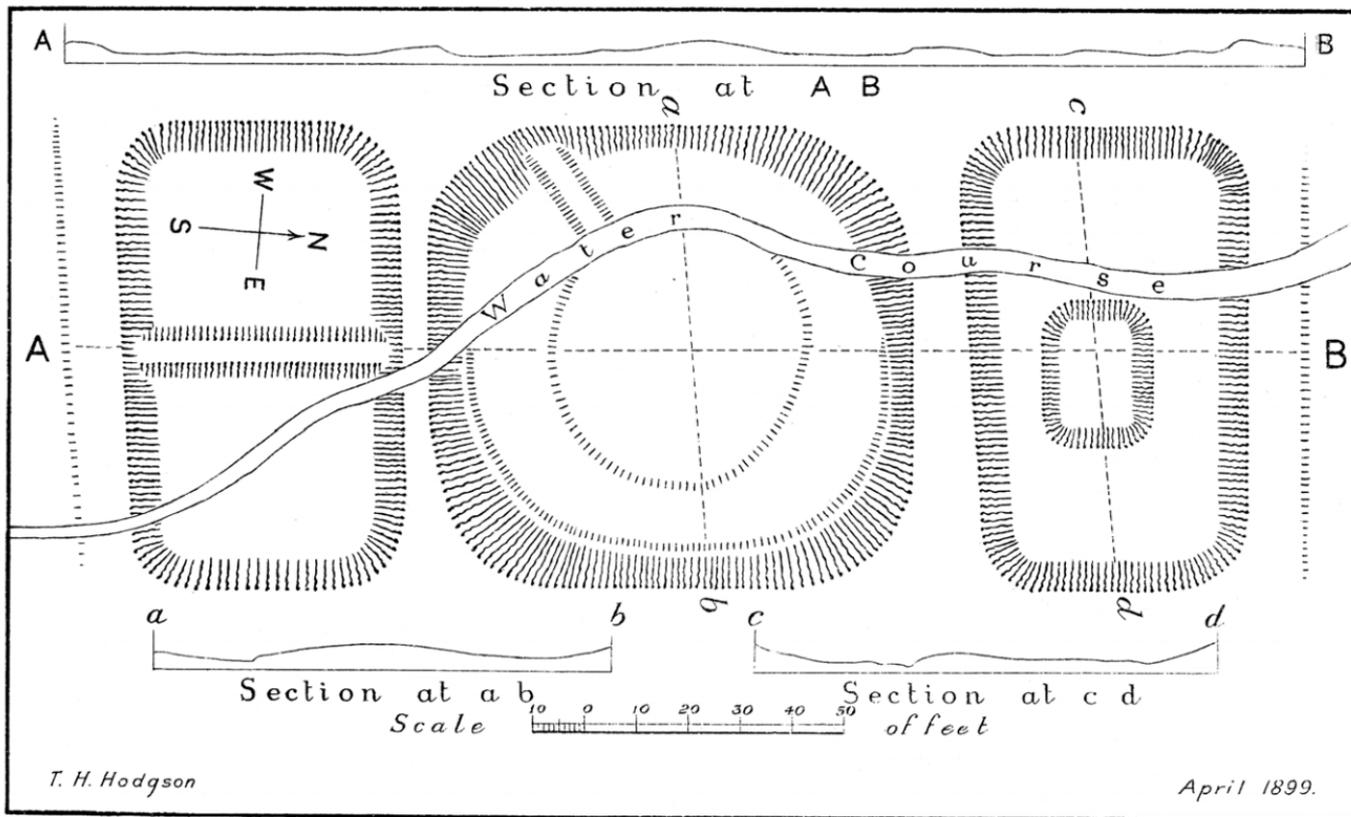
Another Foss was given with Little Urswick in exchange for Crivelton (Newton) in the time of Abbot John (who died about 1175); the bargain being concluded in Abbot Jocelin's time, about 1185; but this must have been a different place (*Coucher Book*, p. xxxvii.).

It seems, then, that early in the 12th century there was an estate between Bootle and Whitbeck called *Foss*. The name might possibly be the old Norse *Fors*, "a waterfall," now "force" in the Lake District dialect, and *foss* in Icelandic and Norse, for there are several gills with forces in them coming down from Black Combe. But local tradition is against this meaning; and when our attention was called to the "Cockpit" by Mr. J. A. Banks, of the Ordnance Survey, we thought that this, and its associated remains, might be the Fossa, or dug-out place, which gave name to the estate.

With permission from the owner, Mr. Francis Barratt, through the kindness of Messrs. Arnold & Greenwood, his agents, and with help from Mr. Henry Crayston, the tenant, we dug a series of trenches in April, 1899, to see if there were any remains of building.

The spot seemed a likely one for an early settlement. It is a little dell or lap of ground, between a long esker or glacial mound and the steep side of Black Combe, sheltered from sea-winds, supplied with the best spring water in the neighbourhood, and just the site for an early settler. There seemed to be remains of stone walls at *c* and *d* and *b* in the accompanying plan, drawn by Mr. T. H. Hodgson from his most careful original survey; and the analogy of the lower moat at Aldingham suggested the possibility of some ancient moated dwelling.

But we found that the walling at *c* was only the support of a cart-track that runs beside the ditch *c d*; and the great stones at *d* and *b* had never formed part of a wall, but had merely been rolled aside to clear the basins *c d* and



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MONK-FOSSE.

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and *a b*. In the platforms that stand up in the middle of the central basin (the "Cockpit") and the northern basin, as well as in the dykes that contain them, there were no traces of building, nor even remains of wooden structure. The whole had been thrown up with the spade to form three water-tight ponds, which, it happened, could be easily formed, because this lap of peaty ground was overlaid with a bed of stiff blue clay, 18 inches thick at the northern end of the area covered by the plan and thinning out to nothing at the southern end, where the ground is slightly higher.

From a point 400 feet south of the south basin, a stream has been diverted and brought to the south-east corner of the highest pond. This channel is now continued irregularly through the whole of the basins in the "water-course" which partly drains them; but in former times they might have been kept full of clear water, perhaps for fish. The southern basin has a slight causeway across it, which does not seem to be anything more than a strip of ground that has been left not dug. The central basin, called the Cockpit, has a round platform in the middle, made like the dykes by throwing up the clay and peat out of the ditch, and there is a slight appearance of a causeway leading to this platform from the south-western side. The northern and lowest basin has a similar, but oblong platform, and is contained by the strongest of the dykes (B).

We found no relics, but our digging showed that the place was not a homestead. Nor was it made for a Cockpit, being too large and too wet, besides being associated with remains that would have been useless for that purpose. It looks like a set of fish-ponds, and *Fossa*, in mediæval Latin, had that meaning. But this hardly gives the origin of the 12th century name of the estate, if it be the *dimidium Fosse* given by Godard de Boyville to Furness Abbey. We can only put our diggings and survey on record, and hand the question on.