

ART. XVI. – *A Letter by Charles Gough, 1804.*

By ANDREW F. WILSON

THE discovery of the body of Charles Gough, three months after his death on Helvellyn in April 1805, caught the imagination of the local newspapers. The *Lancaster Gazette* reported sensationally, and not entirely accurately:

On Sunday last were found, at the foot of a precipice called Cat-stee, on the mountain Helvellyn, near Patterdale, Cumberland, the remains of a man, named Charles Gough, of Manchester. He had spent two or three fishing seasons at Grasmere; was at Patterdale the 1st of May last, on his way thither, and had not been seen since. He had with him a small spaniel bitch, which had staid near him and pupped, and, by her barking at some shepherds, led to the discovery. She had only one whelp with her. The man's head was not found, and most of his flesh was gone, supposed to have been devoured by birds of prey. – He had a watch and money in his pocket, and papers in his pocket-book, which identified him. His remains were interred in the Quaker's burial ground at Tirril, on Thursday last; he having been a member of that society till about two years ago, when he was excluded for joining a Volunteer corps.<sup>1</sup>

This tragedy would probably have been quickly forgotten had it not been used later that year as the material for poems by William Wordsworth and Walter Scott. Wordsworth's "Fidelity"<sup>2</sup> did not show great fidelity to the facts of the accident – he even changed the faithful bitch to a dog. Scott's "Hellvellyn"<sup>3</sup> was perhaps more popular and it included the following explanatory note.

In the spring of 1805, a young gentleman of talents, and of a most amiable disposition, perished by losing his way on the mountain Hellvellyn. His remains were not discovered till three months afterwards, when they were found guarded by a faithful terrier-bitch, his constant attendant during frequent solitary rambles through the wilds of Cumberland and Westmoreland.<sup>4</sup>

Scott's note was much plagiarised as the standard account of Charles Gough's death and for many years it was the only indication of his character and personality, although there was no evidence to support Scott's assertions. These two accounts exemplify the two attitudes to Charles Gough's death: either horrific accident or romantic tragedy. Little was known of Gough the man until the investigations of the Rev. H. D. Rawnsley around 1890.<sup>5</sup> Rawnsley reviewed the published descriptions of Charles Gough's death and collected together a number of oral accounts. Although he revised and embellished these, they are a reflection of the continued interest in the story. The picture which Rawnsley put together of Charles Gough was rather slight: he had more success with his dog, which he identified as a terrier called Foxey.

A letter in the British Library,<sup>6</sup> written by Charles Gough to his elder brother Harry Gough in November 1804, casts an interesting sidelight on the events that brought him to notice for the glimpses it gives of his character and also for his account of an ascent of Helvellyn five months before his last, fatal excursion to that mountain. The letter also provides some insight into the activities of the early nineteenth century visitors to the Lake District.

Charles Gough was born on 18 April 1782 in Manchester. His parents were Quakers,

but he was disowned by the Society of Friends at Hardshaw for joining a volunteer corps. It is probable that he lived in Manchester, though it has also been suggested that he lived in Crosby Garrett.<sup>7</sup> That belief may have arisen from his having often visited his brother who lived there. When writing the following letter Charles Gough had clearly just spent some time with his brother in Crosby Garrett.

*Address:* Mr Gough | Crossby | Near Kirby Stephen

*Postmark:* KENDAL | 261

Cherry Tree, Wythburn Nov 6th 1804

Dear Harry

Yours of the 24th Ult with a Letter inclosed came duly to hand. I received also my trunk &c in due time. Soon after I left you the Rain began, but however I got to Burrow B<sup>8</sup> before it was very heavy. I met there with good Company (viz) three honest Yorkshire Drovers who had come that day from below Skipton, upwards of 60 miles in all; it had rained with them the whole day and they came in drenching – it was as Stormy a Night as I ever knew. I was wakened by the noise of the wind at 12 O'clock at Night and it was impossible for me to sleep, so great was the Storm. the clock struck 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 5. between that hour & 6 I got a little Sleep but was disturbed by the yorkshiremen going off before 7. I arose about 8 it was still stormy but not very heavy rain. I set off about 10 and found my way to Stavely about 2 in the Afternoon, very wet in my Shoes & Stockings but I had dry ones with me. I saw an Ambleside chaise go down to Kendal when I was dining at Stavely and during 4 hours that I waited for its return I got my Shoes &c well dried – and it rained fast the whole time. Soon after I got into Stavely I learned that there was a Lady taken ill there the Day before. Dr Briggs & a Surgeon from Kendal were attending her. I enquired who she was. they told me her name was Myers – I immediately knew her to be the wife of the late Dry fatter of that name & Daughter to the late Mr Scarisbrick. She sent for an Attorney to make her will – the Dr told me that she was in Danger & I have learned that she died 8 or 10 Days after I was at Stavely. her corse was removed to Liverpool – To proceed, the chaise came up about 6 O'clock I got to Ambleside about 8 and had the good fortune to meet there with a Keswick Chaise just going off with 3 Ladies. I got a seat with them and arrived in Grassmere about 9 O'clock. The next day (Saturday) was with us as it was with you a most charming Day – Sunday & several succeeding days were very wet – but at intervals it was dry enough for me to go out nutting into a wood close by which I was informed was not well cleared of Nuts, and in a few days I got about 9 Quarts of the best Nuts I ever saw; I could get more but they fall off the trees and are hidden amongst the Dead Leaves which makes them rather troublesome to get. We have had upon the whole a very wet time of it since I left you. but since the New Moon has come (viz 2 Nov) we have had most delightful weather, but very cold, Not a cloud is to be seen the wind is very strong & rough upon the waters; to day it has not been near so boisterous, neither so cold, but on the contrary mild as May. At 2 O'clock this afternoon I set out to the top of Helvellyn and had a charming climb of 1 hour and a half (which is pretty Quick). The distant view was not near so clear as I have been used to see it – so that I have not opportunity of observing whether the mountain which I suspect to be Wild Boar Fell, is so or not. I could not even discern it. Cross Fell was quite misty as were all the mountains to the NE & N so much so that I could not see the Beacon upon Penrith Fell – tho' I could see the town very fair. Skiddaw and Saddleback appeared as well as ever I saw them, so did most of the great mountains in Borrowdale & Buttermere. Ullswater & Bassenthwaite water to N & NE were clear. Winandermere, Esthwaite & Coniston waters were not to say very clear. the Bay of Morecambe I could barely distinguish, and the Sea off Whitehaven & Maryport I could not see at all, nor Solway Frith – how ever I was well

satisfied with my excursion. the top of Helvellyn is covered with a light Snow which fell on Saturday evening. Skiddaw had also some Snow on its Summit on Sunday but I saw no remain of it to Day. At 25 minutes past 4 I began to descend and reached the bottom at 5 precisely. (pretty quick again) I am now writing at the foot of this immense Mountain,<sup>9</sup> where I have been since Saturday when I left Grassmere for a few days. I have paid visits to most of my friends in these Parts where I am well received. I have been 3 times to Mr Greens the Artist.<sup>10</sup> 1st to tea 2nd to dinner & tea 3 to tea. he pressed me much to stay a few nights with him. he has had a very good Summer, the best he ever had. he has sold upwards of 160 Drawings many of them 4 Guineas each but none under 10/6 – besides a number of engravings. I bought of him 7 colored engravings price 1 at 5/- 1 at 4/- 5 at 2/6 – but as they had been picked thro' he let me have them lower the 5/- at 3/6 – the 4/- at 3/0 – the 2/6 at 1/6 – but it is to be kept secret besides he made me a present of 4 others. On Friday afternoon I took him a Copy of one of his Sketches, which he will finish into a 1-11-6 drawing. I had a note from him this morning inviting me to stay a week with him, and he will find me work to copy se[veral] of [his] Sketches. I am not determined whether to accept his invi[tation or] not. Our Parson Mr Brougham has been playing the R\_\_\_\_.<sup>11</sup> [For] he got £10. from a Stranger for a draught on his Father (on Monday) & on Saturday he had only 15/- left to carry him to Kendal as he said and he promised to return at Night, I thought he was deceiving us and so it turns out. we had no duty done on Sunday. I believe he has taken himself out of the way' till he knows whether the Bill be paid or not. most people think he will never return & indeed I am of the same opinion – he has been very riotous lately. I am going tomorrow (Wednesday) to Buttermere, Crommack & Lowes Water I go by invitation from Old Robinson<sup>12</sup> the father of Mary. The Lord of Wythburn<sup>13</sup> has offered me one of his horses to ride I shall be away 3 Days. I shall be glad to see you in this Country now the weather is fine, and if you do come you cannot come a better way than I came – (i.e.) from Burrow Bridge you must go to 2½ miles from Kendal and thro' a gate on your right hand thro' a wood, do'nt mistake the Gate as you may easily do – for before you come to gate in question you will find one on the same side of the Road with a Lock on it (perhaps) in this form  go past this gate about ¼ mile and you will find a gate shaped thus  that is the staves downwards instead of across the annotated plan or Map will guide you onwards.<sup>14</sup> you pass Doddin Green and come into the Penrith Road not far from Mint Tavern. turn up said road on your right hand 150 Yards, you will find another gate on your left shaped I think like the last the Map will guide you to the Kendal & Ambleside turnpike about a mile from Stavely it is about 4 miles across the Country. I found the road without difficulty – tho' it is intricate. we cannot do better in such like case, than to enquire at every house or person we meet. I think with these Directions and the Map you cannot possibly miss your road. I have popped the track you are to follow if you are inclined to come write me word soon as you get this. write at any rate, and direct to me at Grassmere or the letter will go by Penrith. If you conclude not to come I shall go to Manchester immediately so that I would have you to be particular in writing soon. The Young Roscius<sup>15</sup> is engaged at our theatre. Ned Potter is married to Miss Paterson of the Bridgewater Arms.<sup>16</sup> It is very frosty to night. remember me to Agnes.<sup>17</sup>

I am &c where I began \* \* Ch Gough

PS. If you come I shall see you back again at least part of the way. my expenses from Crossby to Grassmere were just 5/- & no more

### Acknowledgement

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### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> *Lancaster Gazette*, 27 July 1805, 3. Reports also appeared in the *Carlisle Journal*, 27 July 1805, and the *Cumberland Pacquet*, 30 July 1805, 2.
- <sup>2</sup> William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes* (London, 1807), 1, 9-13.
- <sup>3</sup> Walter Scott, *Ballads and Lyrical Pieces* (Edinburgh, 1806), 178-80.
- <sup>4</sup> Walter Scott, *op. cit.*, 178.
- <sup>5</sup> H. D. Rawnsley, "The Story of Gough and his Dog", *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Association for the Advancement of Literature and Science* (1892) 16, 95-124. Also issued separately (Carlisle, 1892). Revised version included in *Past and Present at the English Lakes* (Glasgow, 1916), 153-208.
- <sup>6</sup> BL Additional MS. 41340B.
- <sup>7</sup> Josiah Walker Nicholson, *Crosby Garrett, Westmorland* (Kirkby Stephen, 1914), 128-9.
- <sup>8</sup> Low Borrow Bridge.
- <sup>9</sup> That is, at the Cherry Tree Inn, Wythburn, at the foot of Helvellyn.
- <sup>10</sup> William Green of Ambleside (1760-1823).
- <sup>11</sup> Thus in MS. Perhaps "roué" intended.
- <sup>12</sup> Joseph Robinson, landlord of the Fish Inn, Buttermere and father of Mary Robinson, "the Beauty of Buttermere". Her bigamous husband, John Hatfield, had been hanged in Carlisle for forgery on 3 Sept. 1803.
- <sup>13</sup> Presumably the landlord of the Cherry Tree Inn.
- <sup>14</sup> There is a sketch map of the route between Kendal and Stavely drawn to a scale of "About 1¼ Inch to a Mile" at the end of the letter.
- <sup>15</sup> The "Infant Roscius" was a popular child actor. He was engaged to appear at the Theatre-Royal, Manchester, from 12 Nov. 1804.
- <sup>16</sup> "Married. On Thursday, the 4th instant, at the Collegiate church, Mr. Edward Potter, son of the late Thomas Potter, Esq. of Mosley-street, to Miss Paterson, daughter of Mr. Paterson, Bridgewater Arms". *Cowdroy's Manchester Gazette*, 6 Oct. 1804, 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Henry Gough, aged 23, and Agnes Lambert, aged 19, were married by licence at Crosby Garrett on 1 July 1804. *The Parish Registers of Crosby Garrett 1559-1812* (Penrith, 1945), 77.