

HAPPINESS IS A HAMLET CALLED SCARGILL

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From JEAN RITCHIE, Scargill, Co Durham

FOR a few hours at least, the grand dream of the man now leading the miners into battle was to become Baron Arthur de Scargill of Scargill Castle.

It was here in this tiny hamlet in one of the prettiest parts of Durham that the man nicknamed King Arthur came to claim his throne!

He stood near the crumbling ruin of 12th century Scargill Castle and told farmer Bobby Barker that he was sure he was descended from the de Scargill family.

The family — landowning capitalists to a man — died out years ago.

But 5,000 acres of grouse moor and farmland, owned today by the widow of a racehorse owner and trainer, are still called the Scargill Estate.



Is Arthur the moors baron?

Happy

And in the middle is the little cluster of farms that is Scargill, a one-horse settlement with many thousands of sheep and fewer than 40 human inhabitants.

It's so small that you have to drive out of it to find a phone box.

This is a happy place where the passing seasons are the only change the locals remark on.

There may be ancient Roman shrines on Scargill Moor, but the main interest on the moor nowadays is grouse shooting.

The gentry tramp across comrade Arthur's ancestral home every summer, guns in hand and game in bag.

Horror

At Scargill Lodge, a beautiful seven-bedroomed house that in days gone by was the shooting lodge for the estate, 72-year-old Mary Bayley shakes her head in horror at the mention of Arthur's name.

"Don't talk to me about that man," says

Mrs Bayley who has lived for 30 years in Scargill.

"We came here because we love the place. It is horrid to think that nowadays all everybody thinks of when they hear the word Scargill is him.

"I don't believe in anything he's doing or agree with him in any single thing.

Ruins

"I'm not the only one who doesn't think much of him, but he certainly thinks a lot of himself.

"He said he came from here. I bet he didn't — this place would be wasted on him."

Farmer's wife Margaret Barker, who has lived at Castle Farm with the ruins of the ancient castle in her farmyard for over 30 years, says: "It was before Arthur Scargill was

famous that he came here.

"It was a few years later we recognised him on telly.

"We get perhaps a dozen visitors a year to see the castle, but he is the only one who has ever told us that he felt he must be descended from the original family.

"He's certainly made a bit of a stir and he's the sort of person who shouts a lot. Ours is a country way of life and we don't go in for the awkward way he does his business.

Pickets

"He's putting men's jobs at risk and there aren't enough jobs as it is."

Down the road at Low Scargill farm Mrs Isabel Dixon tells people she lives in Barnard Castle — the nearest town to Scargill, four miles away.

"I got fed up with all the comments whenever I said Scargill," says Mrs Dixon.

Her husband, farmer Leonard Dixon, who has lived in the area for more than 50 years, says: "I'm not going to comment about him. I don't want pickets outside my farm gates!"

Fire

Mrs Dixon is worried that the name will attract visitors.

"There's nothing to see here — even the castle is falling into ruin," she says.

"It's lovely and quiet here — we don't want anything to spoil it.

"I don't think Arthur



In charge of Scargill Castle . . . Margaret Barker

Picture: KEITH PERRY

Scargill is really in favour of quiet."

It certainly is quiet. The tiny local school closed down in 1951, and farms relied on paraffin lamps until 1958, when electricity made it to the area.

And although they may not support Arthur Scargill, central heating is still a new-fangled device that will never match up to a good coal fire.

The original baron must have stuck the fancy French "de" into his name in Norman times—perhaps to impress King Edward who visited Scargill Castle in 1323.

Escape

But the name Scargill goes back much further. It's a Norse name—Scar means hill and Gill means ravine, and there are plenty of both in the wild moors of the Scargill estate.

Until two years ago there was a hermit living in a cave on the estate. Locals believed he was a Southerner who moved here to escape the rat race.

But the rat race caught up with him . . . and the police moved him on from the private land.

The tenants of Scargill hope he's the last intruder they'll see in their isolated domain.

"Arthur, please note."



Farmer Leonard Dixon and wife Isabel . . . "It's lovely and quiet — we don't want it spoilt."