

The Mystery of Menwith Hill

by Mary Beaudoin

The North Yorkshire countryside of England with its pleasant, pastoral scenes of grazing sheep, field stone fences, and picturesque, rustic architecture could serve as a perfect setting for the classic mystery genre referred to as “the cozy.” In the genre of the cozy, the crime committed—usually murder—is “off stage” so that the gentle reader is not exposed to descriptions of graphic violence resulting in a defiled corpse.

In real life, Menwith Hill exists in such a bucolic environment, but has some more elements in common with the cozy mystery. Some local residents of Yorkshire had to take it upon themselves to act as sleuths to learn more about what goes on within the restricted-access security facility run by the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA). Aided by whistleblowers, the research of journalists and peace activists, and what court and military documents they could obtain, they were able to piece together an idea of Menwith Hill’s enormous global surveillance in support of U.S. military warfare. Antiwar activists with the Campaign for the Accountability of American Bases have held a vigil near Menwith Hill for 16 years, more recently protesting that the base is assuming a role in the Ballistic Missile Defense (Star Wars) program with its first-strike nuclear capability. The Yorkshire Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament has challenged the site through the courts and Parliament but has been stonewalled with declarations of “the need for security and counterterrorism”. In addition to these challenges, the Yorkshire group commissioned an independent report, “Lifting the Lid on Menwith Hill” (<http://natowatch.org/node/628>), which was released in 2012. It concluded that there were, in fact, dead bodies associated with Menwith Hill. But as in the cozy mysteries, no gruesome, violent scenes resulting in corpses were visible—the deaths were all “off stage”:

Menwith Hill's provision of integrated intelligence is already being used to support a range of ‘realtime’ military operations, including remote-control, drone attacks that have led to the deaths and injuries of thousands of civilians.

In contrast to the cozy mystery, the casualties of Menwith Hill are not local, but far afield in foreign lands, and the weapons are state-of-the-art intelligence-collecting technology programs designed by Lockheed Martin, Northrup Grumman, and Raytheon. In her column, Polly Mann examines the latest revelations about Menwith Hill.

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