

# HANDS OFF HAWESWATER

## The North West Water Authority and Haweswater Action Committee

The North West Water Authority (NWWA) was created by Act of Parliament in 1974. Charged with reviewing the available water supply, the NWWA concluded that there was insufficient to meet future needs. In 1976, it announced plans to increase the amount of water it abstracted from several sources including Haweswater. Local people feared that the NWWA would transform Haweswater into 'a vast storage tank', held back by a new, higher dam.

Potentially, the new dam might be 35 metres higher than the existing one built in the 1930s, increasing the reservoir's capacity fourfold. Additional water would be pumped into Haweswater from nearby sources including Ullswater and Stainfells.

Construction of the new scheme would be an enormous undertaking, submerging much that remained of Mardale and threatening the access road along the valley, the hamlet of Burnbanks and the Haweswater Hotel.

The NWWA presented their controversial proposals to a public meeting in Bampton Memorial Hall on the 24<sup>th</sup> February 1977. There was strong opposition and it was immediately decided to form a committee to oppose any enlargement of Haweswater. The *Haweswater Action Committee (HAC)*, a small local group, took on the large, regional power of North West Water.

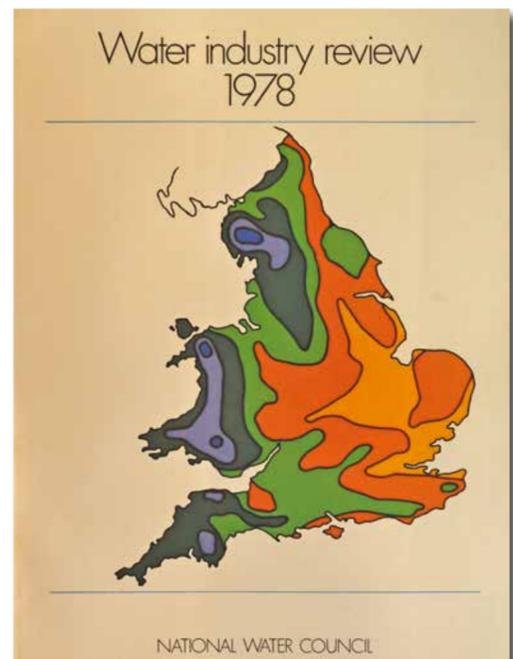
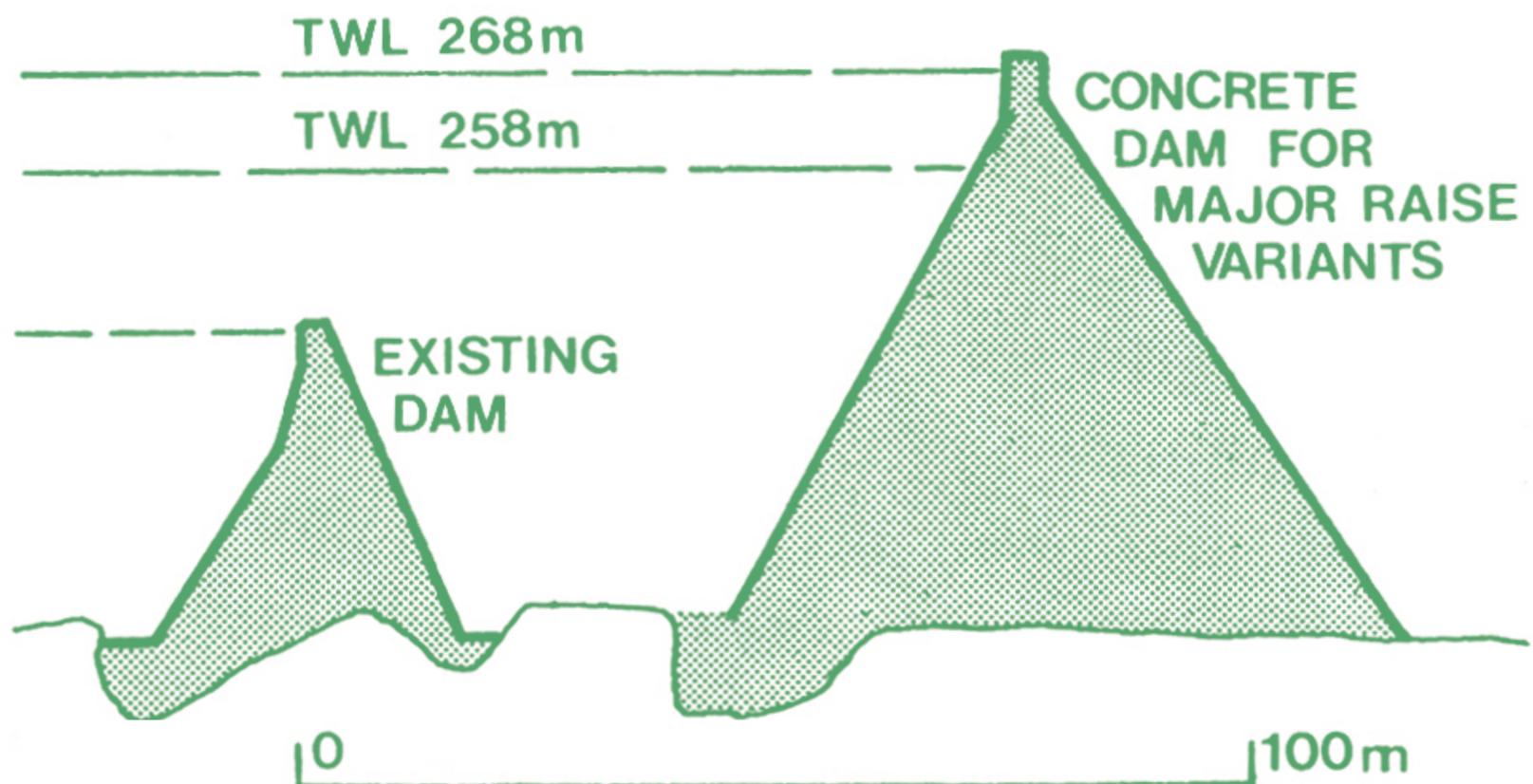


Chart of Water Resources England and Wales.

## Haweswater Dam. Approximate Cross Sections.



# SPARTANS AT THERMOPYLAE

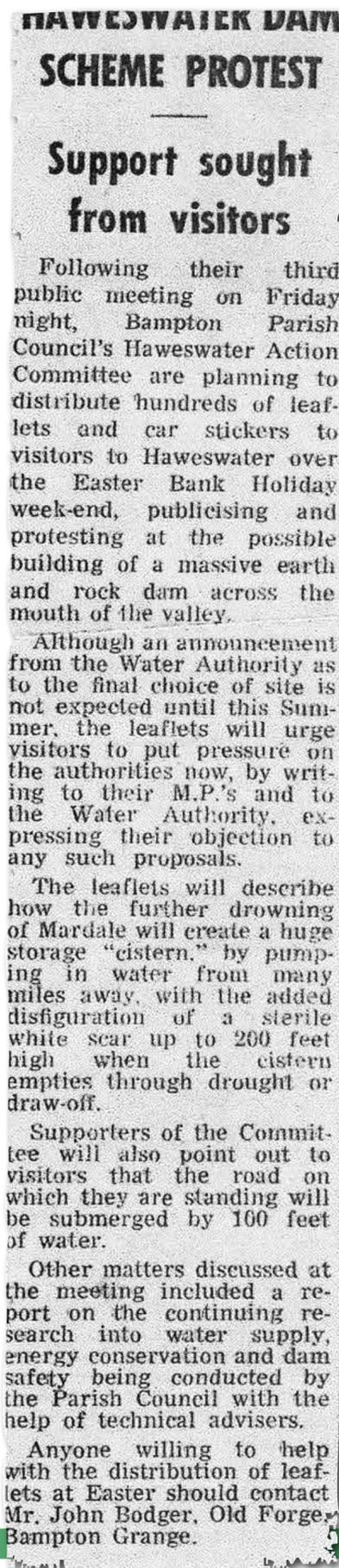
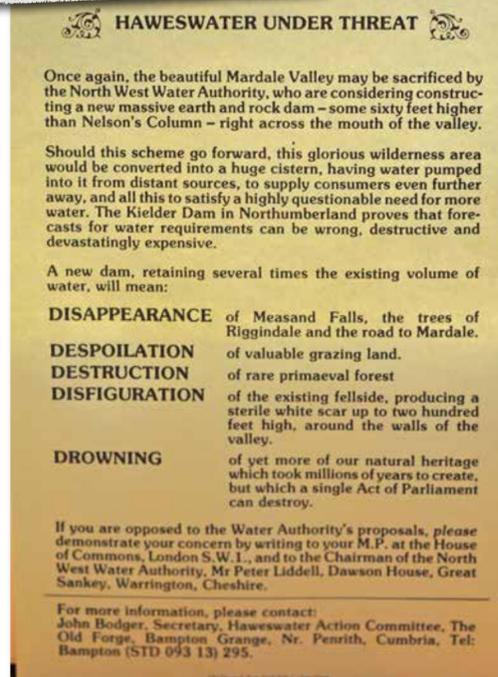
## John Stacey likened the situation to the Spartans at Thermopylae.

This small force was arrayed against a stronger more powerful opponent. He urged the HAC to 'get in early'. Specific individuals, mostly from Bampton, were invited to join the committee, which included a cross section of the community from farmers to professionals alongside some local landowners.

### The Haweswater Action Committee

- Mr G. Storey (Chair)  
*Farmer at Millcraggs, Bampton*
- Mr J. Bodger (Secretary)  
*Parish Clerk, Bampton, Architect*
- Mr E. Jones (Treasurer)  
*Parish Clerk (retired), Bampton*
- Mr G. Berry  
*Friends of the Lake District*
- Mr J. Dunning  
*Lake District  
Special Planning Board*
- Mr A. Hall  
*Businessman, Bampton*
- Mrs E. Hall  
*Teacher, Bampton*
- Miss M. Lightburn  
*Member of farming family, Bampton Grange*
- Mr J. Longmire  
*Farmer, Bampton and Shap*
- Mr R. Porter  
*Headteacher, QEGS, Penrith;  
Member, Eden D.C.*
- Mr D. Raw  
*Headteacher, Bampton Endowed School*
- Mrs N. Roberts  
*Civil servant (retired), Bampton Grange*
- Mr H. Slack  
*Solicitor, Bampton*
- Mr H. Smith  
*Retired, Bampton*
- Mr J. Stacey (in absentia)  
*Bampton landowner and London solicitor*

Representatives of Cumbria County Council and the Lake District National Park later joined the HAC by invitation as well as other landowners including Mr R. Orford who had family links with John Stacey.



# 'GET IN EARLY!'

## John Stacey quickly emerged as the principal protagonist.

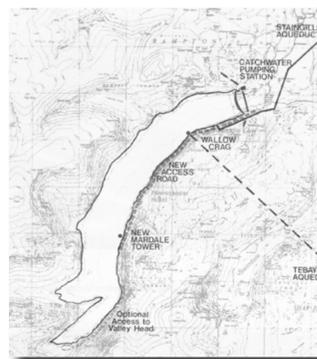
His energy and drive guided the focus of the *HAC* despite his London base. Sensitive to some local opposition, he emphasised his longstanding family connections with Bampton. His legal knowledge and metropolitan connections in fact proved to be invaluable. 'Get in Early!' was his advice.

The *HAC* needed to use the law effectively and set about gathering as much information about the planning process as possible. John Stacey researched recent planning enquiries since it was felt there would bound to be an Enquiry for the Haweswater scheme. Advice from peers and MPs was sought on procedural matters but the local MP, William Whitelaw, played no part in the campaign, nor did the Lake District Special Planning Board.

Throughout 1977 and 1978, letters were exchanged between the *HAC* and several regional water boards emphasising the need for caution over major projects to increase water supply. At the same time the *HAC* corresponded with organisations and individuals regarded as potential allies or sources of information.

Agencies lobbied were the newly formed Green Alliance, the Country Landowners Association, the Town and Country Planning Association and the Campaign to Protect Rural England. Contact, however, was not always positive. Lord Beaumont (Chair of the Green Alliance) disagreed about tactics and doubted the support the Alliance could offer. The Green Alliance seemed to think that the *HAC* was fighting a worthy but relatively insignificant battle.

Moreover, John Bodger recalls that the *HAC* was warned of significant local feeling in favour of the NWWA's Haweswater expansion scheme. David Raw, Bampton headmaster, also reminded the *HAC* that there were locals who depended on NWWA for their livelihood and others who hoped further expansion would bring additional employment to the area.



Site of new dam and reservoir.

In the view of this Council, such a dam could be described without exaggeration as a monstrous obscenity. With a height of 235 feet, a crest length of 2,000 feet and a volume estimated at not less than 4 million cubic yards, the dam would compete with the Scammonden Dam, West Yorkshire, as the highest, the most massive and the longest high dam in the United Kingdom. It would stand in front of the present dam and dominate the whole of the Bampton Valley. It would be impossible by its sheer bulk to landscape, and would be completely out of scale with the surrounding fells.

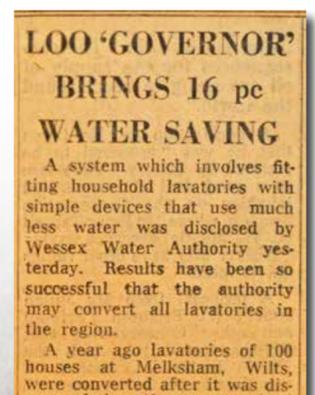
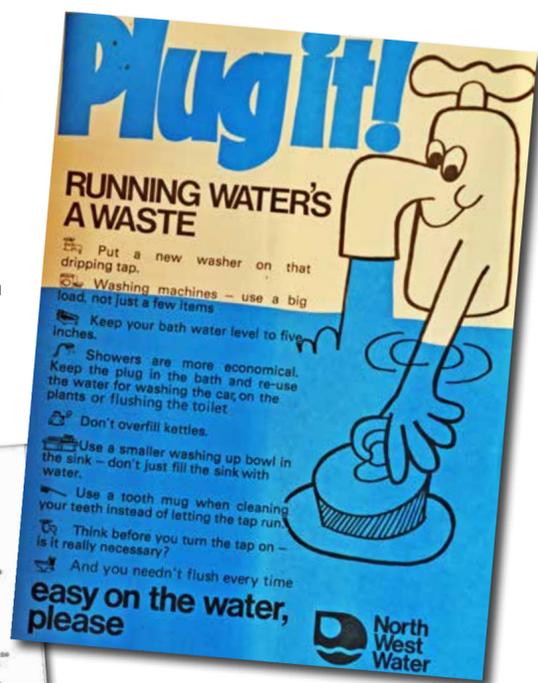
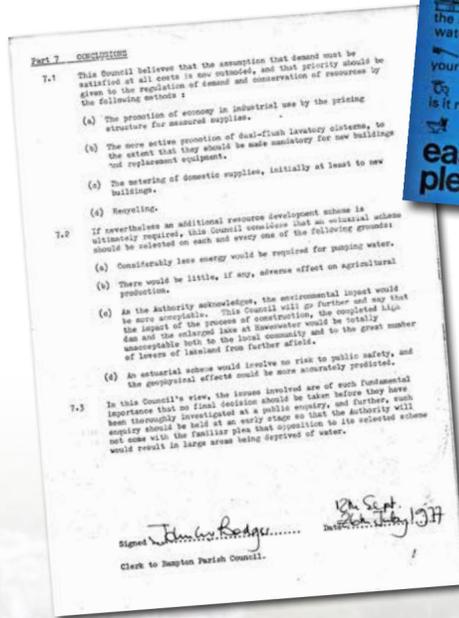
# MUST MARDALE SUFFER AGAIN?

## The HAC began to shift the emphasis of its arguments to environmental questions.

The HAC set out to assess and calculate the environmental impact of the proposed new dam and enlarged reservoir. From the outset John Bodger's view was that environmental impact would be crucial to the argument.

In 1978, the HAC produced a key document 'Water Conservation – A New Strategy: The Case for Conservation'. The HAC argued that water conservation rather than new construction was the way forward. It highlighted wastage through leaks in pipelines and stressed the need to conserve supplies as well as to control demand. It emphasised a recent National Water Council's report, 'Paying for Water' which suggested that reductions of up to 20% in consumption were possible through effective metering.

The HAC continued to stress the potential disruption to local communities and the damage to landscape and ecology any expansion of Haweswater would bring. It also commissioned a detailed study of the energy inputs that would be required to operate the proposed pumping system and maintain water levels in the enlarged Haweswater reservoir. The HAC came to place environmental impact at the centre of its campaign.



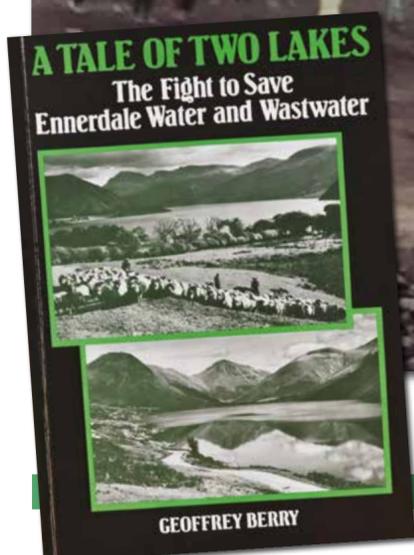
# LOCAL PROTEST TO ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGN

## The HAC began as a small protest group organised and led by local people.

Similar groups were simultaneously protesting against plans to abstract more water from other Lake District sources, but each operated virtually independently. For example, the HAC was aware of the Borrow Beck Action Group and had a copy of their 1979 leaflet 'No Reservoir in Borrow Beck' but neither group took communication any further. Some individual members of the HAC did go on to become involved in other local groups. Geoffrey Berry was one and he later wrote 'A Tale of Two Lakes' (1982), which detailed a parallel campaign to protect Ennerdale Water and Wastwater from inundation for water abstraction.

HAC records show how a local protest became an environmental campaign. The committee's use of terms such as 'environmental impact' were innovative in the late 1970s and the measured way it drew upon issues such as wastage and energy requirements was highly significant in the development of environmental decision making.

In December 1979, the NWWA withdrew its proposals to enlarge Haweswater. Its decision seems to have been influenced by a general economic decline that resulted in reduced demand for water from the north-west's contracting industrial base. There was no reference to the HAC in the NWWA's final statement but the Committee felt that it had fought a sound campaign. Responding to the decision, John Stacey wrote to Andrew F. Bennett, a Manchester MP and member of the House of Commons Environment Select Committee. He expressed the view that although it was unlikely that Haweswater would be threatened further, the cause of water conservation had to remain a key issue.



The Bampton 'Save It' campaign at Haweswater.