

Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society

Brackenthwaite Buttermere Embleton Loweswater Mockerkin Mosser Pardshaw Whinfell Wythop

www.derwentfells.com

High Lorton Village Walk – August 2013

These two walks cover the history of the properties and people of villages of Low & High Lorton from the C12th (1101-1200). The text accompanies an annotated map based on the first Ordnance Survey of 1863.

The walks are on good public paths, though there can be mud on the Low Lorton path to the north after rain. Much of the route is directly on the public highway, unavoidably, and so please take great care of the traffic, ensure you can be seen and keep a look out for vehicles. The Stations for gathering and observation have been chosen to minimise the risk, but risk remains.

Lorton origins

When we speak of Lorton we usually mean the township of the Lorton, the civil area of administration which became the civil parish in the C19th. One boundary was the Cocker, over which was Whinfell. To the north was Embleton, starting at Shatton, to the south Brackenthwaite starting just after New House Farm. And there was a detached part of Buttermere at Swinside. The township of Lorton has contained two separate rows of farmsteads at Low and High Lorton since the twelfth century, and we do not know of any earlier form. Low Lorton has the feel of being the earlier settlement, on higher ground near a crossing of the Cocker, and the 'ton' name suggests an Anglian settlement. High Lorton, situated along the break of slope of Kirk Fell, has more of the feel of a Norse-Irish settlement, which might date from the tenth century. By 1158 the existing settlement of High Lorton was given as a freehold manor to the friars of the Priory Church of Carlisle (uncoloured on the map). Low Lorton was also manorialised, possibly before High Lorton, but we know only that by 1230 the freehold manor of the Vill of Loreton was held, or owned, by Thomas Mariscal (yellow on the map). The boundary between the lands belonging to the two settlements was, and still is, Church Lane, formerly Crossgates Lane. Lorton had a chaplain, Michael, by 1198, and presumably a chapel at Lorton within the parish of Brigham.

After the manorialisation of Low and High Lorton other farmsteads were created from the common, such as Highside, Armaside, Gillbrow and Scales (orange on the map). These remained in the forest manor of Derwentfells, becoming part of the Honour of Cockermouth when that castle was built and the town was created, early in the thirteenth century.

High Lorton village walk

Station 1 at the poundfold

Start by Whitbeck, next to the famous Lorton yew tree in the pound fold, which was where stray stock were impounded or pinned. Storms have greatly reduced the tree in size and spread. The girth of Lorton's oldest living female, measured in the C19th, suggests an age over 1000 years, as old as High Lorton. Perhaps the yew was planted or retained in a meeting place by the first Norse-Irish settlers.

Let us leave brewing and textile industries on Whitbeck to the end and start with the medieval agriculture. Opposite the poundfold entrance is the start of the leat which ran south to Lorton High Mill, which was grinding oats and barley before 1158. Across the road is Boonbeck Farm, 'boon' in this village meaning 'above', the only High Lorton farm above Whitbeck. Boonbeck was held by the Stubbs family for centuries, though farmed by tenants in the C19th. The yew tree was on Boonbeck land, and the property of Robert Stubbs. Boonbeck formed the end of the row of farmsteads which extended to Conkey's Corner, probably once about ten farmsteads of roughly equal size, many of which became sub-divided through time. From the eighteenth century their use gradually changed as High Lorton changed, much assisted by the turnpike road, and now there are no working farms left. The land is now farmed from the peripheral farmsteads. When we walk north along the old highway we will use the main divisions between farmstead in 1649, to see how they have developed. The basic layout has not changed. We can still use this annotated first series 25 inch Ordnance Survey map of Lorton, surveyed in 1863.

Station 2 outside the Mill

The Mill was here before 1158, by which time, or shortly before, it was given to the Priory Church of Carlisle together with the miller, his wife and their children, in true feudal fashion. This was the only true Lorton corn mill, which operated, with some gaps, until the 1880s. The present mill was built in 1801 and has been recently restored with a new wheel, but no water. Outside of this mill we are on the Highway to Brackenthwaite, but the continuation is a road just to Swinside, which was a detached part of Buttermere. To experience the continued original medieval highway, take the pleasant footpath just past the mill, which was, in 1649, the highway to Hopebeck, and experience its walled narrowness where it parallels Ellerbeck. Then return to the Mill and back to Graceholme, noting that all the land to the left was open arable land belonging to High Lorton in the C12th.

As you approach the village, notice an exceptionally long and narrow garden between the road and the beck. This belongs to the semi-detached cottages known as Yew Tree View (for obvious reasons), which was one of a number of builds by Mr Burns, on odd pieces of land.

Station 3 outside Graceholme

We are now on the king's highway towards Cockermouth, Lorton's market town. Looking along the highway the buildings are on the right and on the left is now Lorton Park land, behind its wall. Originally this was the medieval open arable land used to grow the main cereal crops for the village, oats and barley. In High Lorton the public highway developed along the headland used for ploughing, and not between the two rows of buildings of each farmstead, the barns generally nearer the road and the long houses further from the road. Each farmstead, in the C17th, had an arable plot, or garden, called 'boonhouse' in another row on the Kirkfell side.

Graceholme illustrates the general pattern. In 1649 this was split between two Watsons, but by the late C18th it was held by William Nicholson, a locally wealthy dealer in property. Most of these longhouses of dwelling, byre, ox house, stable, will have been rebuilt in the second half of the C17th, during the great rebuilding, and it is likely that William Nicholson in the late C18th turned it into a smart house, roughly as we see. The barn has been much reduced, both in height and in length by Corner House in 1809, which was probably a C17th farmstead and was later owned by the Nicholson family. The name Graceholme dates from the 1940s, after the passing of Grace Musgrave. It was Beckside in the C17th and The Cedars in the C19th.

Yew Tree Cottage marks the boundary of the old Beckside farmstead, and the next clear boundary is in the terrace between Causey cottage and Kent Cottage. This area represents the major development for houses and trades through the C18th, becoming a sort of village centre. In 1649 it contained four farm tenements, mostly owned by Thomas Peile and his family. The properties nearest the road were sold off early, in the late C17th and early C18th. Moving on towards Smithy Fold, notice that Yew Tree Cottage was built in the late C18th as a house and small barn by Old Tom Crosthwaite, quarryman and parish clerk 'a tallish, slenderish man, and was rather lame ... a good-tempered jolly fellow'. Dale House was built in its present form in 1891 for Mr Burns, the local builder, who had a joiners' shop adjacent. We will see his houses on the walk. Dale House hides two late C17th houses, called mansions in the deeds, which date to the late C17th, and which were falling down when Mr Burns acquired them. In the first one Mary Borrowscale had a dame's school in the 1830s, teaching reading, knitting and sewing.

Station 4 inside Smithy Fold

Enter Smithy Fold and note the wooden bungalow. This covers the site of Mr Burns joiner's shop and, on the corner, an old block, owned in the early C19th by Martha Pale, who kept a back room – for informal drinking. 'An elderly body ... The front door was paved with rammels and when the lads ran over them old Martha used to wait for them with her long-shanked malin'. Today she would have to wait some time for children to pass, but in 1841, for example, there were 160 inhabitants of High Lorton street, including 50 children (14 years or younger). In 1921 the corner plot became the site of George Scott's first temporary garage workshop and then filling station, which moved to Midtown in 1935. The bungalow has its origins in a bungalow which replaced the joiner's shop in 1925, and then a redevelopment once the garage had moved when the present bungalow took the whole site, in 1938.

The row of buildings furthest from the road was retained for farming after the front row had been sold off. Therefore Smithy Fold developed as a formal access in the C18th. In 1796 Thomas Burnyeat, formerly of High Swinside, sold half of the row to James Sargison for a blacksmiths' shop and dwelling, which became the Blacksmiths Arms (later the Horseshoe), being a classic small house of the mid C18th. These businesses were taken on by John Lennox in the C19th. The Horseshoe closed in 1990. The remainder of the row was sold to John Robinson of Hexham in 1803, and became the property of Peter Robinson, the joiner. Number 1 was the Post Office for a time in the C20th.

Beech and Causey were a cottage and its small barn, built well before a sale which is recorded in 1730. Beech was owned by Anne Wilkinson when she married John Jennings in 1811. This was their home before the brewery was started.

Station 5 outside Kent (or straight to 5)

When we reach Kent Cottage we have moved into the next old farmstead known as Midtown, for obvious reasons. Kent is a smart small house of the late C18th (excluding the garage) with original six over six double hung sash windows. It is unusual in having internal partition walls of brick, rather than stone or timber. John Bolton, the Lorton schoolmaster in 1875 who gave a lecture on Lorton as it was in 1811, lodged at Kent. In 1775 the land was purchased by Joseph Crosthwaite for Kent to be built. Joseph lived here, his brother Tom built Yew Tree Cottage at the other end at about the same time, and their brother John, or old Jack Crosthwaite, lived at the second 'mansion' which became part of Dale House. Their father Richard Crosthwaite, 1702-1773, the parish clerk, had bought all this property in 1730, and he was therefore instrumental in this development of houses, which the editor of the *History of Cumberland*, William Hutchinson, considered 'too close together' in the 1790s.

Station 6 in Midtown access

Midtown farm itself was held by Michael Wilkinson in 1649. The rebuilt house front of 1678, facing away from the road, is attached to the old barn, now holiday cottages, and faces. By 1800 the farm was owned by Anthony Garnett, but in the 1830s his son, John sold the farm piecemeal and little of the land remained. In 1935 George Scott bought the farmstead and used the barn as his garage and petrol station. The 1950's bungalow, Green Close, was built for his daughter and family. They kept bees and sold honey.

The house Fellbarrow is a conversion of the C17th roadside barn of the next old farmstead, held by Thomas Wilson in 1649. Here there is just one row, probably because in 1649 the house was across the road. Also in this old farmstead are Park View and Spring Garth. Park View is a better Georgian House with a coach house (perhaps a barn conversion), occupied in 1810 by Priest Sewell of Wythop and Setmurthy Chapels. Later it became Huntingdon House when purchased by that Loweswater family.

Station 7 outside Spring Garth

Spring Garth may be hiding part of a C17th farmhouse. It predated Corner House as the shop, and Post Office by 1858. In 1810 John and Mary Turrel sold tea, coffee, tobacco, snuff and a noted mint-cake.

Little remains of the next old farmstead, containing the two Rose Cottages and the Methodist chapel of 1840. By 1840 this farmstead was redundant, but in 1649 it had a full set of farm buildings and some 20 statute acres of arable and meadow land. It was then held by a single woman, Jane Bouch, who had inherited the customary tenancy in 1635 from her mother, also Jane Bouch. It was probably rented to a local farmer, because Bouch was not a local family name in the C17th. It seems to have fallen into disuse as a farmstead quite soon after. Before the Methodist chapel was built, dissenting meetings were held at Midtown.

Station 8 outside Lorton Park

Moving on, Lorton Park was the first new gentry house in High Lorton when completed by Richard and Eleanor Harbord in the mid C19th. The fine house, completed by John Dodson in the late 1820s, replaced or incorporated parts of the old farmhouse of William Robinson, in 1649, and also incorporated a bake-house operated by Bella Thompson in the early C19th, a 'short thick roundabout body'. Those villagers who had no bread oven would bring their bread and pies here to be baked.

After John Dodgson died his sister, Mary Hutchinson of Shatton, purchased further farmland from the sale of Midtown farm. It was Mary Hutchinson's daughter Eleanor and husband Richard Harbord of Liverpool who completed the purchases in 1854 which would allow the first park to be created and enclosed with a ring of trees as shown (purple). The Harbords went on to purchase the whole of that island of old open arable land which had once fed High Lorton, up to the church footpath. The Misses Harbord lived in Lorton Park until 1925.

The two cottages next to Lorton Park appear to have been built around 1700. Owned by the Bells, in 1810 the further was occupied by two dress-makers sisters, Nanny and Becca Fisher. The adjacent stables of Lorton Park are a conversion of two eighteenth century cottages, used by Robin Hartley as a weaver's shop and Betty Bell as a girl's school in 1811. The later C19th smokehouse replaced a very poor cottage demolished by the Harbords.

Station 9 outside Wayside cottage

The double bend at Park/Wayside Cottages where the highway became Seggs Lane, was called Conkey's Corner in the mid C20th, after the Conkey family moved into No.1. The late Bill Conkey, her son, was a champion fell runner at the Grasmere Sports in the 1930s. The bend itself, and the position of properties in this area, was probably determined from a watercourse which originated from a spring at the top of Holemire Lane, and which was later diverted to serve Lorton Park. Park/Wayside cottages look like a terrace of three cottages of the early C18, but that is due to a conversion of a single farmstead by the Harbords, to match the cottages we have just seen. The building does date from 1700, but the farmhouse was at No.1 with a barn attached. This provided a branch of the Low Lorton Pearsons with a farmhouse for their High Lorton land. There was no house recorded here in 1649, when Richard Pierson of what is now Holme Cottage owned this tenement, but as this close was called Boonhouse it seems likely that there was once a medieval old farmstead here or hereabouts.

Station 10 outside Oakhill

Moving along Seggs Lane as far as the entrance to Oak Hill. This was a new gentry mansion in High Lorton in the mid C19th, and it is curious to see that while the old farmhouses in High Lorton are no longer used for farming, the closest new gentry house is now used for farming. In the mid C19th and group of families connected with Embleton, Whitehaven and Liverpool built three large houses, Lorton Park, Oak Hill and Fairfield. They provided the middle-class social leadership which the Braggs of Lorton Hall had failed to do. Dodgsons, Wilsons, Harbords, Armitsteads and Alexanders occupied those three properties, Oak Hill being

the home of William Armitstead, curate of Lorton, and then William Lancaster Alexander. He was reckoned the squire of Lorton in the late C19th, and fully deserved the title.

From this point you can see the semi-detached Fern Bank cottages, which were another of Mr Burns building projects of the late C19th. Note the footpath to the Church, which not only provided the route from this end of High Lorton, but also continued up through Highside and across the fells towards Wythop, which was part of the parochial chapelry of Lorton.

Station 11 outside Lambfold & White Ash

Return to the junction with Holemire Lane and walk up the lane to see Lambfold and White Ash. The barn which stood on the corner was demolished in 1924. In 1649 this was a single farmstead represented by the barn and the longhouse of Lambfold, and held by This farmstead and farm was later physically divided in two halves, with the buildings of either White Ash or Lambfold being created for a second family. In Lambfold in the early C19th lived Mirehouse and Sarah Key. He 'used to wear a grey russet wig, bare at the front and looped at the back'.

Halfway up the lane is a line of field boundaries and lynchets, which may well have defined the limit of the medieval village and its arable land. At the boundary there would have been a ring dyke or fence, separating the farmland from the common and providing a barrier for stock which would be on the common during the closed, or growing, season. By 1649 the enclosures had move a little higher up Kirkfell.

Station 12 Rising Sun

High Lorton must have been one of the first Cumberland villages to have a bypass and at the top of Holemire Lane we meet this. The Cockermouth – Keswick turnpike road was authorised in 1762 and completed by 1770. We have the people of Keswick to thank for insisting on a route through Whinlatter and Lorton, rather than east of Bassenthwaite as the people of Cockermouth wished in 1745. This was a new road, cutting through existing closes from this point towards Cockermouth, but from this point towards Keswick the road ran on the common and kept to the north of Whitbeck to the New Bridge and Scogill. The little settlement called the Rising Sun was created on enclosed land to take advantage of the turnpike road, and became the stop for Lorton. Holemire House is another of Mr Burns speculative late C19th house on odd pieces of land. Note that by this time, in this fashionable house the local vernacular style is lost.

For some sixty years after the turnpike road was built, both the turnpike and Holemire lane were gated here at the commons boundary, until the Lorton commons were enclosed and divided by an Act of 1826, completed by an award of 1835 (green). All the High Lorton householders had their small allotments of common along his road, and many houses were built on that new freehold land, especially the villa, Kirkfell House. Walk carefully to the memorial seat. (or take the green lonning to Tenters Lane to miss the most difficult part).

Station 13 memorial seat (or take the lonning to Station 13 avoiding this difficult road).

Between the road and the beck, outside of High Lorton manor, lay the rural industry of Lorton. The Tenters fulling mill was down on Whitbeck and was built in 1479. A water-powered fulling mill scoured and cleansed woollen cloth, which was then stretched and dried on the tenter rigs. The tenter riggs are shown on the map just over the turnpike road. A ewe was for wool first, eating later, and woollen cloth was the principal export as well as clothing the population – which is why John Peel's coat was grey. The map shows the large flax thread mill which replaced the old fulling mill in the 1830s

Station 14 Tenters cottage and house.

In the C19th these buildings were associated with the flax mill, recorded in 1835 but still a rather late extension of the Cockermouth industry Tenters Cottage is now a smart residence but as late as the 1960s was one up and one down with external stairs. Between this and Tenters House was the access to the C19th flax thread mill, which processed imported flax into coloured threads for ladies embroidery and was the largest employer in Lorton people. In 1881 the mill owned by Wilkinson Jennings, employed 28 people. He lived in Tenters House, which was recently burned down. The flax mill had been owned by his grandfather, John Jennings, but he had bought it with the profits from the brewery rather than creating it.

Going back in time to the fulling mill for woollen cloth, the mill and buildings was owned by the Peiles of Low Lorton and then the Bowe family from the mid C18th, and the good C18th house was probably their rebuild. The fulling mill was given a new lease of life by the turnpike road, and was the last to survive locally, combining to work with the Millbeck complex in Applethwaite into the late1820s. However, this was the poor and marginal end of Lorton. Opposite the house the Bell family of slate workers had enclosed land and built a rough dwelling in the C18th, which became the fuller's house when the Bowes upgraded Tenters House. Frank and Fanny Hunter had a family of girls who also had daughters without any signs of matrimony. The family would continue to provide labour for fulling, probably supplemented by child maintenance payment.

Moving swiftly on down Tenters Lane we find the Jennings brewing complex. This includes all the buildings by the beck from Brewery Cottage to the Yew Tree Hall, plus Corner House.

Station 15 Poundfold

In 1809 William Jennings purchased land and part of the barn from William Nicholson on which he built Corner house, and on which the stepped brewery cottages were built by 1828, before the brewery building. This consolidated the difficult corner which remains today. Bill Jennings was 'a fine looking old man, full of flesh, and used to wear a bottle green coat a real swallow tail with bright brass buttons. He wore knee breeches tied with tape' Bill Jennings was a maltster. A maltster prepared the barley for brewing, by steeping and germinating the grain and then stopping that process by kiln drying. When his son John Jennings established the Lorton Brewery, in the late 1820s, the kilns by the beck would have been replaced by the brewery, now Brewery Cottage, requiring the construction of a malt house, now the Yew Tree Hall. The disused malthouse was leased to the villagers in 1910 as a village hall, and later purchased from Jennings Brothers, the money being raised by public subscription, events and sale of work. Corner cottage was not needed after the brewery moved to Cockermouth, and by 1881 it had become the Post Office and store and home to John Moffat (d.1904 aged 62) family.

To finish, consider some of the people who have been here. The old highway from here goes on to Scales and Keswick. The people from Low Lorton had their commons on the fells above Scales from the earliest time and would walk through this point to get there and back. Scales developed from their huts, Old Norse *scali* on the common. This also was the main highway to Keswick via Whinlatter from the earliest times until the turnpike road was built, not Tenters Lane – New Bridge was missing. We know that in 1653 the founding Quaker, George Fox, observed his assistant, John Lancaster, preaching here with the tree so full of people that that he thought it would break. Perhaps the most descriptive account, considering that Lorton's tourist attraction is a tree rather than a lake, was made while Wordsworth was giving Coleridge his introductory tour of the lakes in 1799, before they moved here. On 11th November Wordsworth brought Coleridge to this point to see the tree. Coleridge wrote in his notebook: -

'Just over the Bridge (there the brook flings itself down a small chasm of rock) – a field on the Right Hand a yew prodigious in size & complexity of numberless branches flings itself on one side entirely over the river, the Branches all verging waterwards over the field it spreads 17 Strides - - On its branches names numberless carved – some of the names being grown up appear in alto relievo...'

Acknowledgements

The above is partly based on the work of other historians who have studied Lorton: -

John Bolton 'Lorton as it was 80 years ago,' 1891

Angus Winchester *Landscape and society in medieval Cumbria*, 1984

Ron George, *A Cumberland valley: a history of the parish of Lorton*, 2003

More information is available through the website of the Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society www.derwentfells.com. The wider area is covered on www.cumbriacountyhistory.org.uk

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