

**Exploring Isaac Fletcher's world; from Pardshaw Hall to Mosser and back**

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 by Sandra Shaw**

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**About This Walk**

This walk starts at the Quaker Meeting House in the hamlet of Pardshaw Hall, goes across fields, over Black Beck in the bottom of the valley and steeply up the other side to the tiny Fell Church at Mosser. It returns by road via Mosser Mains before pulling back uphill to Pardshaw Hall and the Meeting House.

The distance is about 4 kilometres and includes 100 metres of ascent. Parking in Pardshaw Hall is limited, so care will be needed. The outward route follows public rights of way but NOT a made-up path, so expect rough ground, boggy in places, long wet grass, and nettles.

There may be cattle in the fields. Please be sure to leave all gates as found. There are several styles and three are steep with a very high step up. Some ascents are quite steep. The steepest ascent can be avoided by taking a short cut after Underwood, missing the Fell Church and returning by road via Mosser to Pardshaw Hall. It is also possible to see the highlights by road and the gated track to Underwood and Paradigm.

The route is shown on the map on the centre pages, which uses the first series Ordnance Survey map surveyed in the 1860s.

**Isaac Fletcher**

So, who was Isaac Fletcher, the person who is central to this walk? He was a

remarkable man, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1714 to 1781). From 1756 until shortly before his death he kept a diary which has been published; edited by Professor Angus Winchester. The diary contains much about the goings on in the local area, but also of his wide range of interests. He was a Friend (in the Quaker sense), yeoman farmer, surveyor,



lawyer, businessman and partner in a stocking factory in Cockermouth. He tried mining for lead locally, he imported plumbago, he carried out legal work for the community, often using

Kirby (passed later during the walk) to meet his clients. Much of his work (wills, indentures etc) can still be seen in the Archive Centre in Whitehaven. Isaac Fletcher was active in the local Quaker community, attending weekly, monthly and annual meetings, and other Quaker business besides. He also recorded lots of small details about life in general – the weather, the mail and what he read in the newspapers. John Wordsworth, father of the poet, steward of Sir James Lowther is mentioned.

**Meaning of the names Pardshaw and Mosser**

The earliest incidence of the name Pardshaw is to be found in 1203 in the *Registers of the Priory of St Bees*, where

it is recorded as Perdishau and Perdshaw. It was still being written with three syllables well into the C16th. It is thought that the first element is from the Old English personal name Perdi or Preed, with the second element being the Old Norse word haug pronounced how, meaning hill. Mosser is much easier. The moss element refers to the boggy land in the valley. The second element ergh being Scandinavian for the shieling ground, or summer pasture used when livestock was routinely moved between winter housing on lower ground near the farm, and summer grazing on higher land, further away. Over the course of time, these summer pastures became permanent settlements.

### The Carriage House (1)



The walk starts at the carriage house opposite the meeting house. This was built in the late 1870s on land gifted to the Quakers and designed to house ten carriages, two in each partition. From 1932 to 1938 it operated as a youth hostel under the newly formed YHA. During the war it became a meeting place for Young Friends, (many of whom were conscientious objectors) and a residential facility for work parties. A kitchen was installed in the old school room opposite. A photo taken in 1942 still shows the doors, which were bricked up in 1961. With a little effort, it is still possible to see, through the windows, the hinges on the inside. In the early 1950s the building was refurbished as a cheap holiday venue. Electricity and mains water were installed in 1978 along with a septic tank

for waste. In the 1980s, The Young Friends Centre was moved into the larger meeting room, which was converted into a hostel. Showers were installed in the stables, and a flush toilet added.

The walk returns to the Meeting House later.

Turn towards the main village of Pardshaw which lies to the south-west. The first property you pass is modern, having been built in the 1970s on a former orchard. The older properties in the hamlet lie ahead of you. One has an inbuilt parlour cupboard dated 1682, with the initials WHA. There is a general problem learning about when properties were built and who occupied them, as they were not separately named until the 1940s to 1960s. All references were to people resident at 'Pardshaw Hall', meaning the hamlet as a whole. You will soon see a lonning, or lane, to the left, which you should take. The property facing you on the far side of the lonning is Fieldside Cottage, first named in the 1945 electoral register. In the 1940s it comprised two separate dwellings, named Fieldside Farm in 1948 and Fieldside Cottage since 1967.

### The Old Hall (2)

This is very likely the site of, if not the original Pardshaw Hall that gave the hamlet its name. A photograph can be found on the map in the centre pages. It is almost certainly the oldest stone building in the area; part of the great rebuilding of 1660s. There are a couple of features that may be older; namely an internal blocked arched doorway and the possibly medieval stone window surround that can be seen. In 1714, the new Bishop of Chester asked all his parishes - 'what do you look upon as the most antient seats, halls and granges in your parish?' Dean Parish replied that Pardshaw Hall was among them. [Notitia Cestriensis]

When the property was bought more recently, in 1972, it was understood to have been unoccupied and used as agricultural storage for about 150 years. Planning consent was granted

in 1974, to renovate it for residential use and some work was carried out. Following a further sale, the rest of the work was carried out by the family who still live here.

Continue past the Old Hall, between it and Dower House, and once past, look on the right for a water feature.

### Jacob's Well (3)

This was a natural spring, now contained, and overgrown since the image (see map) was taken. The second edition, 1899 OS map shows a line of wells at the rear of all the properties in the hamlet. This is a feature of the limestone topography and is probably the reason the hamlet developed here in the first place.

Continue along the lonning, which can be very muddy here. It takes a 90-degree bend to the right. Follow this and go through a gate. The designated footpath is straight ahead but is so wet as to be almost impassable and easier ground is through the field at the left of the footpath. Eventually a crossing back onto the track must be made. Although this is marked as a track on the original (surveyed in the 1860s) OS map, it is now a footpath.

Stop at end of track just before it turns left by hedge and look back towards Pardshaw Crags. These are part of the limestone that covered the area before it was pushed up by great dome of older rocks from beneath. All that remains is a circle round the fringes.

### Isaac Fletcher's Limekiln (4)

Towards the left of the crags, is Isaac Fletcher's limekiln, which used to be more visible from here than it is now. From the mid-17th century, lime began to be used in agriculture as a soil conditioner and a means of reducing soil acidity. Before it can be used, lime must be treated, and this is known as lime-burning.

The basic process is to use a fuel, such as wood, charcoal, coke, or coal to heat the limestone (calcium carbonate) to a sufficiently high temperature

(900°C) to drive off carbon dioxide, leaving quicklime (calcium oxide). Quicklime is unstable and over time, will reabsorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, returning to limestone. When used in agriculture, the quicklime is spread on soil, where moisture causes it to be 'slaked' producing calcium hydroxide, rendering it more readily used in the soil.



Lime had been burnt on the crags before this limekiln was constructed in 1759. Isaac Fletcher leased a plot of land for 21 years, marked it out and began work that summer. The first firing was in January the following year. It produced a steady supply of lime for his own use and local sale. His diary records information about the construction, early firing attempts and subsequent operation of the kiln. He used the product as 'plasterers lime', 'lime for whitewashing' and for 'liming the ground'.

There is no reference in the diaries after 1780, the year the lease was due to expire. The 'kiln' can be seen on the 1860s map, but by 1899, it was marked 'old limekiln'.

Turn left at the end of the hedge and proceed forward. The track has clearly been improved here and an old hedge-line can be made out on the left. This would have been Isaac Fletcher's route from his home to the Meeting House, so was worth spending time and effort to make it passable. Continue downhill on an indistinct path, heading first for a style standing on its own, and then for a double style to cross Black Beck which runs in the bottom of the valley. While going down, take the time to glance to your right, where drumlins can be seen (raised grassy mounds).

These are a legacy of the retreat of glaciers that carved out the valley and dropped their load of gravel and rock as the ice melted at the end of the last ice-age.

### Black Beck (5)

Black Beck (known locally as the Sough, pronounced sow to rhyme with cow) marks the boundary between the civil parishes of Dean (Pardshaw) and Blindbothel (Mosser). It is also the boundary of the Lake District National Park and historically separated Pardshaw and Mosser Townships. Originally Mosser was in St Bees Parish, rather than the more logical Brigham. This was confirmed, following a dispute in 1220. Under the terms of the agreement then reached, the rector of Brigham Parish subsequently took the tithes, paying a pound of incense yearly to St Bees. After the reformation, Mosser was considered a chapelry in Brigham Parish.

Cross the footbridge and go ahead in a continuation of the raised trackway by the side of the beck which flows into Black Beck. Take care; there are often cattle in this field and the track is becoming undercut by the beck. It looks as though the footpath should go straight ahead between the two properties, Underwood and Paradigm. For reasons which are not clear it has been rerouted to the left, through what was obviously



the garden of Underwood and involves two very steep stiles. After the second stile, turn left and go through a gate.

The property on the left is Underwood where Isaac Fletcher lived and wrote his diaries. On the right, is Paradigm, where Mark Weir, the entrepreneurial businessman lived, commuting between here and Honister slate mine by helicopter. Sadly, he died in a helicopter accident in poor visibility, on his way home from the mine in the dark on 8 March 2011. After the crash, Paradigm was targeted by burglars on a number of occasions. By the time the final group of three appeared in Court in 2019, Mark's partner, Jan, had left and Paradigm has been turned into a courtyard of holiday lets.

Pass between the two properties, turning left over a further steep stile, then round the edge of Underwood's courtyard, keeping to the right, and through a gate. Climb up and onto the track. Turn left for a short distance, to gain a better view of Underwood.

### Underwood (6)

This was the home that Isaac Fletcher occupied, with his wife Susanna, having been brought up here, inheriting it from his mother. It is the typical home of a yeoman farmer; a farmhouse and various additional agricultural buildings, such as can be seen throughout the region. The back door has a lintel with the date 1742 carved on it, possibly reflecting the date it was built. It is not visible from the footpath. An outbuilding has a further date of 16[66] (the final two digits are hard to read) on a lintel.

This view of the front of the property shows the porch which Isaac Fletcher had built in June 1756. His diary records 'John Usher sett out porches'. Immediately above the porch roof is a lead plaque which combines Isaac's initials with those of his wife (Susanna Harris).

The Underwood property comprised two holdings in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the second (now named Paradigm) having belonged to Susanna's family. It was

bought by Isaac Fletcher in 1764 when his brother-in-law was in financial difficulties. From the first meaningful census in 1841, later censuses and the 1939 register just one household is shown. There is little information apart from the occupants' details. They were all farmers with their families. The only additional information is that in 1851 there were 107 acres and 152 in 1881. In 1911 the house had 8 rooms. Until Mark Weir bought it, the neighbouring property, just like the Old Hall, was uninhabitable, used for agricultural purposes.

The walk can be cut short here by continuing along the track to rejoin the public roads at (9), turning left to pass Gill Brow and Mosser Mains. The track is unfenced and there are often cattle here. This avoids the steep pull up to the top road but does rise towards Mosser. If continuing on the longer route, retrace your steps towards Paradigm and turn left up the property's drive towards the road. This is quite steep. Facing you on the other side of the road, is Beech Hill.



### Beech Hill (7)

Beech Hill (also known simply as Hill in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century) was home to the Robinson family, early converts to Quakerism, from the 1660s or before. The Robinsons, being the Fletchers' nearest neighbours, were close friends. In the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, the property descended by will to an infant nephew John Allason and there were still Allasons listed there in the 1841 census, (Rachel

and Ann), who were probably sisters. In 1911, the property was occupied by an iron ore mine manager, Isaac Walker, but by 1939, John Walker was a sheep farmer. Today the property is a family home and the registered office of the Loweswater and Brackenthwaite Show.

Turn left along the road towards Mosser. In the other direction, lie Sosgill and Mockerkin. The road dips down to cross a beck and then rises again. Until Foot and Mouth in 2001, this part of the road was unfenced. Eventually, turn to the right, up the edge of a field to access the **Fell Church (8)**, taking care to ensure that all gates are closed behind you. The Fell Church is always open, but the internal latch can be tricky to open. The ring turns in the opposite direction to the one to the porch.

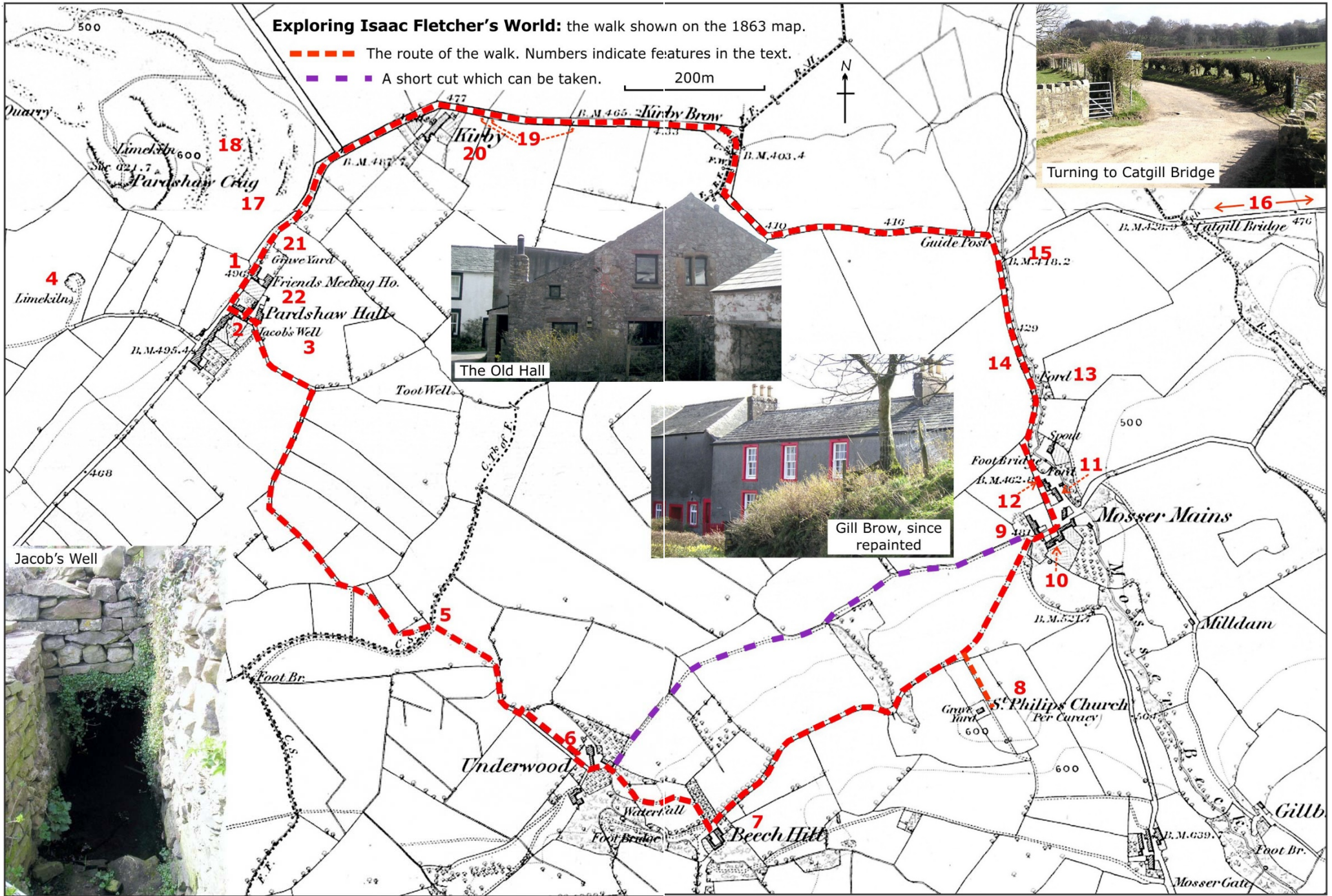
### Fell Church (8)

St Michael's Church: sometimes called Mosser Old Church or Chapel was originally dedicated to St Philip but that dedication has now been transferred to the church at Eaglesfield, by the Paddle School crossing, which is also called Mosser Church. Confusing! The church was built in 1773 on a medieval site, referred to in 1547. Isaac Fletcher says on 16 August 'They began to rebuild Mosser Chapel this day.' There was a refurbishment in 1925, which removed much of the historic appearance, as the exterior was given a cement render. There is one stained glass window installed in 1926. Although not used for regular worship, it is still in use, particularly for concerts and attracts



capacity congregations for Christmas services. It has no electricity and is lit by gas and candlelight. There are a few headstones in the churchyard, which is carpeted with wildflowers in





**Exploring Isaac Fletcher's World: the walk shown on the 1863 map.**

— The route of the walk. Numbers indicate features in the text.

— A short cut which can be taken.

200m



Turning to Catgill Bridge

The Old Hall

Gill Brow, since repainted

Jacob's Well



commemoration here, including a beacon on the fellside below, in 2018 to mark the centenary of the end of the Great War.

After leaving the church, continue down into Mosser. The road to the right goes over the fell to Loweswater, past Mossergate and High Mosser, which were separate hamlets. It is impassable to vehicles beyond, but continues as a track. The gated track to the left (9), leads directly to Underwood (6) and Paradigm.

### Gill Brow (10)

The property on the right is Gill Brow. Also written as Gillbrow in Isaac Fletcher's time, it is mentioned in his diaries. There is a photograph on the map. In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, censuses show that it was still a farm with between 50 and 60 acres. The 1911 census adds that it has 9 rooms. The property beyond is Fell Side and in 1939 both properties were occupied by farmers mentioning sheep breeding and the keeping of general stock.

Turn left at Gill Brow to pass Mosser Mains.

### Mosser Mains (11)



Mosser Mains is often referred to as simply Mosser, both in the diaries and in later censuses. In his editorial comments on the diaries, Professor Winchester notes that it contained several dwellings in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and identifies 5 holdings, including a mill. This pattern continued into 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century censuses, though it is hard to separate out Mosser Mains from Low Mosser or

just Mosser. Combined there seem to be 4 or 5 households farming about 3-400 acres.

From 1911 onwards, three households can be identified. In 1939 they were named – Mosser Lodge (a limestone quarry owner), Mosser Mains (a dairy farmer) and The Cottage, Mosser Mains (retired farmer). Mosser Mains has now diversified with the Old Sheepyard Nursery where plants can be bought.

Continue past the main building and the barn beyond and look back at the end wall. There is evidence of the barn having been widened and possibly raised in height. Have a close look at the **post-box (12)** inserted in the wall. At first glance the ER appears to be for our late Queen Elizabeth II, but closer inspection show this to be EVIIR, in reference to Edward 7<sup>th</sup> (1901 – 1910).



### Ford (13)

Continue along the road past Mosser Lodge and a gateway on the left. The road bends slightly left, and a series of reflective posts appears on your right, marking the edge of the road above the beck. Just beyond the last post, and marked on OS maps, on your right, is a ford.

When this walk was first led in 2007, the ford was still in existence, and its photograph is included here. It was swept away in one of the major floods of 2009 or 2015, that caused so much damage in the Lake District. The road was severely undercut and has now been supported on rock-filled gabions. The posts mark the



edge. It is hard now, to see that there was ever a way across here.

Continue on and look to your left a little further, where there appears to be an isolated section of wall. This marks one side of a **'dry bridge' (14)**, constructed to allow stock safe access, under the road, to the beck on the other side to drink. Photo on the right.

Shortly on the right, is the turning for the Fell Road to Low Lorton, which, from Catgill Bridge (15) follows the probable route of a Roman Road (16). This is thought to run from Keswick, through the Whinlatter pass and over the shoulder of Swinside, to Lorton. There it splits with one branch going northwest to Papcastle where there are substantial excavated Roman remains. The main route continued westwards, climbing across the shoulder of Whin Fell in a series of alignments to Catgill Bridge. From here it probably heads towards the coast.

Immediately after this, take the turn to the left and go between ponds on both sides of the road. The fight to keep the land drained has been abandoned and this is now a haven for wildlife.

The road from here allows a good view ahead, of Pardshaw quarry (17), although trees have now obscured the house, which was built there in 2007, to replace an earlier wooden construction built in the 1960s and later dismantled

for reconstruction elsewhere. Both properties were named Fox Howe to commemorate the visits of George Fox in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, of which more later.

### The Quarry (17)

There is no clear start date for quarrying here, nor for its end, but this was probably around WWII. Isaac Fletcher refers to 'quarrying stones' and to employing wallers. For example, in June 1776 he used stones fetched from Pardshaw Crag for repairing the highway over a period of 4 days. Censuses also contain hints:

The Green family at Pardshaw Hall, Pardshaw and Lea Gate were wallers and later masons up to 1901. Also in 1901, one James Anderson, a road repairer lived at Pardshaw Hall. Then in 1939, Isaac Harrison (known as Ikey) was listed as the limestone quarry owner living at Mosser Lodge. Again, in the 1950s Leslie Blackwell was a roadman living in Pardshaw Hall. Over the years, the present owners of Fox Howe have unearthed various items of industrial archaeology – bogies, drill bits and iron rails.

After the ponds, follow the road as it zig-zags and crosses a beck. A gateway just past the first pylon, makes a good place to stop and turn back to see the fell road rising diagonally up the fell towards Lorton; marked by trees. Your route now begins to climb steadily. There are good views of Pardshaw Crag ahead and a



couple of viewpoints and road-side features at which to break the pull uphill.

### **Pardshaw Crag (18)**

Also known as The Craggs, this area possibly has a long association with spiritual purposes. A Neolithic (c4,000 – 2,500 BC) stone axe, has been found, either dropped or ceremonially deposited.

On the far side of the crags, are two limestone blocks facing North, known as Fox's pulpit. These were named for George Fox, often described as the founder of the Quaker movement, who visited Pardshaw Meeting in 1657 and 1663.

In the early days of Quakerism, there was deep suspicion of the movement. Its members refused to swear oaths, arguing that their word should always be accepted as the truth, without the need for an oath. Members were severely persecuted, in part because of their failure to pay tythes to the church authorities. Initially, Friends met in each other's houses until they became too numerous. Then they met in the open-air on the crags and Fox's pulpit dates from that time. As time went on, separate Meetings were established round about to save Friends from having to travel so far. The first building is thought to have been on the crags, above where the carriage house stands now. It was erected in 1672, enlarged in 1705 and again in 1722. Nothing now remains. The present Meeting House was constructed in 1729.

### **Gate Stoups (19)**

As you continue up the hill, look out on your left for some interesting gate stoups. The first (pictured right) is a single chunky sandstone pillar, which has been bored to take wooden rails, the traditional method of stopping gateways before hinged gates became more common. There are three holes in this pillar, and just below the middle one is a surveying benchmark, shown on the map on the centre pages.



Further up the hill, almost at the top, are two pairs of slate posts. The first, closed with rails is no longer in use, but the second has a hinged gate.

These days it is unusual to find a pair of stoups, often only a single one, if any, survives, after access has been widened to allow passage of increasingly large agricultural machinery. This second gateway allowed access to the site of Kirby, which is covered next.

### **Kirby (20)**

Kirby, while not quite a public house as we would know it, was somewhere where ale was sold. Up to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century householders could supply a simple meal with tea or ale without requiring a licence. Isaac Fletcher visited here many times to conduct business.



**Painting of Kirby c.1875, attributed to Joseph Adair, part of the Jackson Collection held at Carlisle Library.**

Early documents point to a sale of the property in 1603 and its later rebuilding prior to 1742, when a will refers to 'my new house at Kirby'. A further will of 1750 mentions 'the firehouse, parlour, back room, kitchen, parlour loft, house loft and barn'. There were two farmhouses and several barns,

byres, stables, pigsties, and an orchard. Censuses tell us that the same farmer, William Hellon, and his family occupied the property from at least 1841 to 1861.

The maximum acreage was just 30 acres in 1851 and that seems to be the height of the property's prosperity, when there were three separate households. By 1871 there was just one, headed by a farm labourer. In 1881, a butcher/farmer was the occupant and that was the end of farming. In 1891 a herbalist from London had moved in and local newspapers of the time frequently advertised the miraculous cures that he could supply. The buildings were all demolished in 1896 so there is nothing left now but some bumps in the ground to show where foundations had been. The land has all been planted up with trees.

Continue left and into the hamlet of Pardshaw Hall.

The first two properties were built in the early 1970s. Kirby Side, retains the name of the place you have just left and the next, called Jacob's Lea was not named for Jacob's Well, but for the combined names of the builder/developer Jakubowska and the first owner Leathes.

The next two properties first appear in the electoral registers in the 1980s and there is a particularly good view of the Meeting House from the second.

Before moving on take a close look at the wall of The Gables, close to where the hight changes. The large corner stones of two (now blocked) entrances through the wall can be seen.

### **The School (21)**

These very indistinct remains are all that is left of what was once a second school in the hamlet. Education had taken place at the Meeting House since it was built in 1729, and in 1745 a separate building was constructed to serve as a school; you will see that shortly. Isaac Fletcher's son John was a schoolmaster in the schoolroom and his most famous pupil must be John Dalton (1766 – 1844). Although he was born at Eaglesfield, the son of a weaver, he was sponsored by a

close friend of Isaac Fletcher, Elihu Robinson (who lived at Kirby) and entered Pardshaw School in 1775. He later taught himself, before enrolling at Manchester College (later University) in 1793. While there, he was a lecturer and researcher and propounded the Atomic Theory for which he is best known. He also conducted research into colour blindness, from which he suffered himself. He died in Manchester on 27 July 1844.



**Remains of the second school**

In 1775 Isaac Fletcher records in his diary, that 'actors for the chapel' had acquired land right on the boundary of the Quaker burial ground, where they were intending to build another school. He took the view that this was being done with the deliberate intention of causing harm to the Quaker school. He, and other Quakers tried to talk them out of it, and thought they had succeeded, but on 17 August, records that building had started. It is not clear how long it operated, but probably ceased in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Continue on past the wall of the burial ground on the left, until the main buildings of the Meeting House are reached.

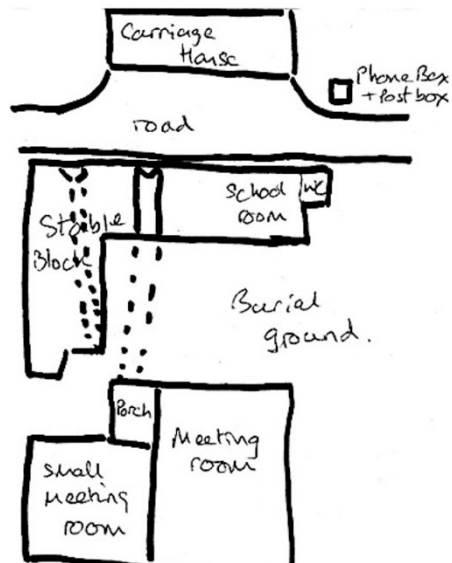
### **Meeting House (22)**

The two shuttered windows, to the left of the first green door, are the school, which now has a flush toilet at the extreme edge. That green door opens into a passage that allows access to the burial ground and the buildings beyond. The second green door leads into the stables,



which now house showers and a curtained washing area. The main Meeting House is across the burial ground.

The stables were built in 1731 and incorporate a date stone of 1672 from the earlier Meeting House from the crags; repositioned above a doorway.



Sketch of Pardshaw Meeting House, based on a plan by J Bernard Bradbury

The present Meeting House building dates from 1729 and is thought to have reused stones from the original 1672 Meeting House. It was built on a piece of ground called Guards (from Old Norse garth meaning farm, from which the word garden derives), bought for £18 a couple of years earlier.

The original building comprised a large meeting room entered via a door from the burial ground, since turned into a window, although planning permission has now been granted to reinstate this as a door. There was a smaller Women's room separated by removable screens. A porch to the smaller meeting room was added in 1740, for the benefit of the school which was then housed in the main meeting house. The carriage sheds were built in the 1870s and in 1883 both

meeting houses were reroofed. The stable block was reroofed in 2007.

The Meeting had declined by 1923 and the weekly morning meeting was closed. Until comparatively recently, monthly meetings were held and in the 1980s a number of festivals were organised by residents of the village, featuring art, drama and music. The Meeting House continues to be used for occasional weddings and funerals. Regular work parties are accommodated here, and the main meeting room has been adapted to provide basic sleeping accommodation and catering facilities. Families often camp in the burial ground and use the indoor facilities as required.

The burial ground contains the burial of John Wilson Robinson of Whinfell Hall, yeoman farmer, local government officer, estate agent, fell-walker, rock climber and founder of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club which celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. He was one of its first senior vice-presidents but died aged only 54 very soon after and was buried 20 Aug 1907. There is also a memorial stone to John Dalton, erected in 1945.

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Internet searches and commercial family history websites

Article about the Schools in The Wanderer for August 2023, available on [www.derwentfells.com](http://www.derwentfells.com)

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