

The Journal

Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society

Brackenthwaite Buttermere Embleton Loweswater Mockerkin Pardshaw Wythop

www.derwentfells.com



Members of the Society's landscape archaeology group examine wall features with Jamie Lund of the National Trust (2nd from right)

The Journal

Welcome to issue 42 of the Journal, which this time has twenty pages of contents. The interest in house history, engendered by our House History Group, has perhaps led to the substantial article by Sheila Stayte on Low Stanger Farm based on a remarkable surviving collection of title deeds. These are now in the Whitehaven Record Office, but we have a CD of copies in the archive for those interested. Low Stanger is on the footpath that goes from Lorton to Cockermouth along the river; a route well worth walking.

The cover shows one of the three groups involved in the Historic Landscape Survey with the national Trust. This has already resulted in an interesting talk and a successful exhibition. I look forward to people taking some of these and other sites further, perhaps combining archaeology with the historical records and offering an article for the next issue of the Journal.

Derek Denman, Editor

Visit to Arkleby House Farm 13th September

The visit to Arkleby House Farm near Plumbland, and the Ward Hall lime kilns, which had to be cancelled last year, is now fixed for the afternoon of Saturday 13th September. Starting there at 2pm, visitors will see the eighteenth & nineteenth century buildings of this progressive farm, and the lime works once owned by the Dovenby Hall Estate. Limited to twenty members, with no charge. Please call Ted Petty on 01900 85264 to book your place. Some walking is involved.

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A message from the new chairman

By any standards, the Society has been extremely successful in promoting interest and involvement in the local history of our area. In the past year alone, in addition to the regular programme of talks and visits, we have participated in a National Trust archaeological survey of parts of Loweswater and Buttermere, we have published the book *Life in Old Loweswater* by Roz Southey, and we were featured in the BBC magazine *Who Do You Think You Are?* Taking over as chair of the Society, and maintaining and hopefully increasing the momentum which has been built up over the last 15 years, is a considerable responsibility. The two immediate past chairs, Michael Baron and Derek Denman, will be hard acts to follow. One of my aims will be to encourage even more members to participate in some kind of historical research. Involvement can take the form of investigating the history of your family, your house, or its former occupants, it can be digging out interesting documents from archives relevant to our area, or it can be archaeological work out in the field. To become involved, look out for notices and announcements, or contact a member of the committee. The Society is also in need of help with administration, and if you feel you can spare just a few hours per month, please get in touch.

John Hudson

The Committee 2007/8

President:	Dr Angus Winchester
Chairman:	Dr John Hudson
Vice-Chair:	Mr Michael Baron
Secretary:	Mrs Sandra Shaw
Treasurer:	Mr Derek Denman (membership & publications)
Committee:	Mr Ted Gilbertson (talks) Mrs Sally Birch (house history) Mr Ted Petty Mr John Scrivens Mr Alan Airey
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Low Stanger Farm, Embleton 1635 - 1958

by Sheila Stayte

I have been researching the history of Low Stanger Farm on behalf of its current owners for the past year, aided in the last few months by their outstanding collection of title deeds which give a continuous record of ownership from 1635 to the present day. My investigation of related documents in the Cumbria Record Offices is far from complete as I am based in London, and I am sure that members of the Society may notice omissions. I would be delighted to receive suggestions and corrections. The title deeds have now been deposited at Whitehaven Record Office (YDX 480) and material from the research, with full references, will be placed in the Society's archives for others tracing Embleton history.

The story of the farm's owners and their families is not one of grand events on the national stage but it reflects something of life in Cumberland over the centuries and also has many of the facets of family life: financial success and failure; devoted wives; emigration; an illicit affair with a secret hideaway; a Court of Chancery inheritance dispute reminiscent of Dickens' Bleak House; even an attempted murder. For reasons of space, this account might best be described as 'edited highlights'.

Early Background

Stanger is a small hamlet two miles south-east of Cockermouth, currently consisting of eight closely clustered properties with surrounding farmland. The name is said to be Norse in origin, from 'stangir', the plural of 'stong', meaning pole, or 'stong-ra', a boundary post. References in early documents date back at least to 1298. The hamlet is usually described as being in the manor of Embleton, though the Hesleyside Charters include the 1369 transfer of "the seisin of the manor of Emelton except the land and holdings called Schaton and Stangere", so presumably Stanger's position within the overall pattern of manorial ownership varied over time.

17th Century Origins of the Farm

From the nature of the buildings and information in the title deeds, it would appear that what is now Low Stanger Farm was originally three small properties which were brought together as a single freehold farm early in the 1700s by one Francis Benson, a Quaker, whose descendents owned the farm until 1835. Prior to this, these three "messuages" were held by customary tenant right, also known as border tenant right. Said to have been associated with an obligation on the tenantry to provide armed service for their manorial lords in the Anglo-Scottish border wars, this was a particular feature of the Northern counties of England. It was a system of land-holding which gave tenants a considerable degree of independence in the use of their property and the freedom to buy, sell and devise their holdings at will. The annual rents payable to the Lord of the Manor were fixed rather than arbitrary (i.e. subject to variation by the Lord) further enhancing the tenants' security. That it was particularly advantageous to the tenant farmers is attested to by the fact that, following the 1603 accession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne and the end of border hostilities, attempts were made by the lords to replace the system of customary tenant right with leasehold. The tenants sought legal redress and, in Cumberland and North Yorkshire at least, were upheld by the courts. Many sources (e.g. Winchester, Collingwood) state that this system of land tenure in the north gave rise to strong, stable societies of small owner-occupiers, with firm control of local decision-making, and formed the foundation of the yeoman farming dynasties. The northern communities were "a race of highly individualistic, capitalistic farmers and craftsmen" (Scott) and "strong, independent and tenacious of their rights" (Macfarlane).

The early Stanger deeds give the individual names of the fields, with their use as arable, meadow or pasture and the inventories of related wills itemize corn, oats, hay, cattle, sheep and horses. However, most of the tenants appear to have been artisans as well as farmers, only beginning to acquire the designation 'yeoman' in legal documents towards the end of the 17th century. Francis

Benson himself was a tailor; at least two of the neighbouring Peile family were shoemakers; other occupations mentioned are those of joiner and millwright; and one of the properties had “a [work]shop formerly a smithy”. Clearly diversification in the interests of economic survival in a rural setting is not a new concept.

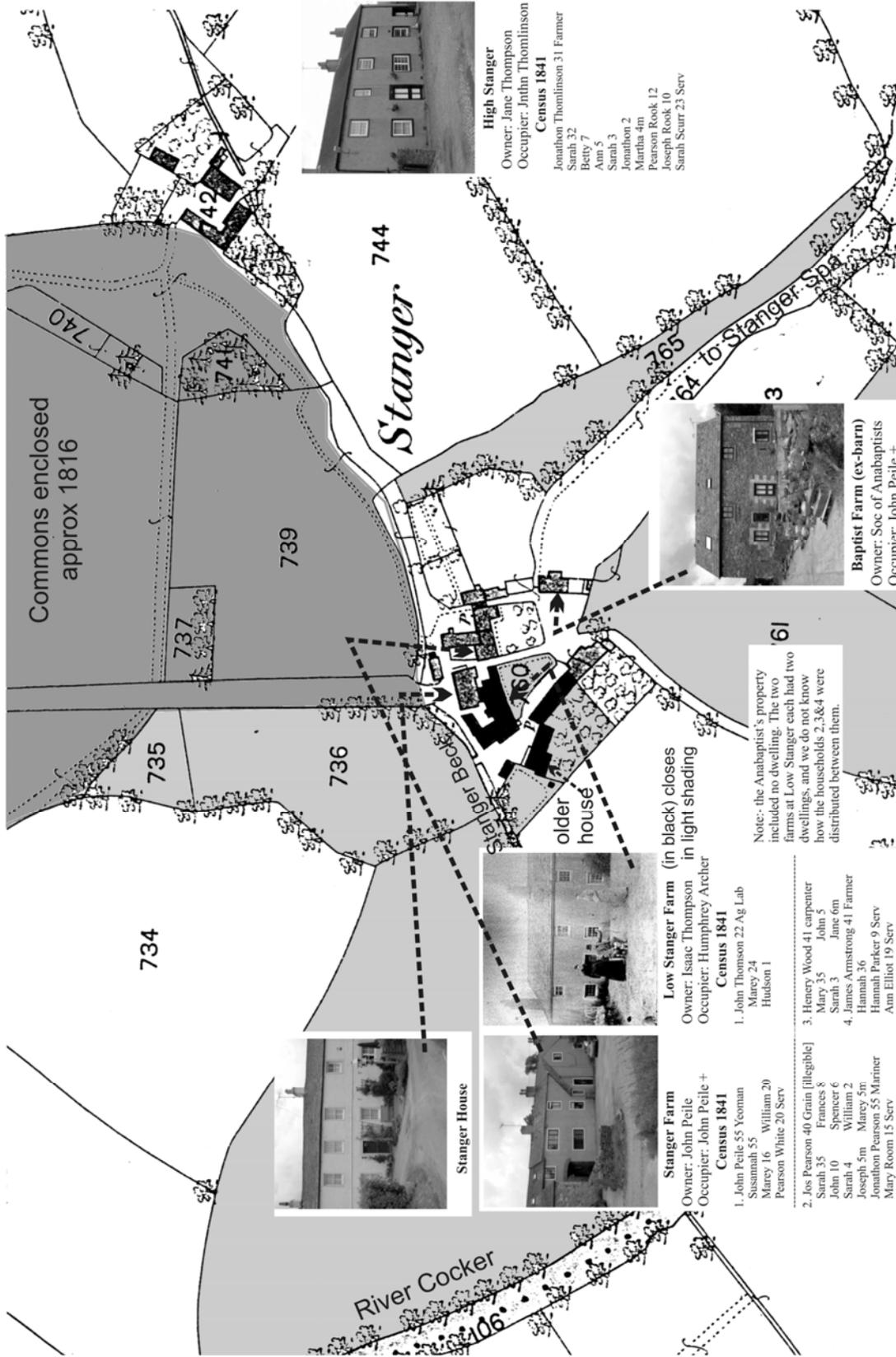
From this collection, and the related Peile documents (CRO: YDX 230), borrowing and lending money against property seems to have been common. The lender is often described as “gentleman of Cockermouth”, but loans between tenants also occurred. It has been suggested that farmers raised loans at lean times of the year, redeeming them when their income picked up. However, at least from the Low Stanger and Peile documents, there does not seem to be such a clear annual cycle. Possibly lending money became a regular part of the local economy, providing additional income for the lenders from the interest earned, and was a feature of the ‘capitalistic’ and entrepreneurial yeomanry. The Manor of Embleton itself was mortgaged in 1684 for £1000, by the then Lord of the Manor, John Gunter (a lawyer and minister who had once been chaplain to Oliver Cromwell). In the 1690s it was bought from his son, Humphrey Gunter, by a consortium of nine Embleton yeomen who, in 1698, began to sell the freeholds of local customary messuages to their tenants.

Three of these newly enfranchised properties were subsequently bought by Francis Benson. The first had been owned, from at least 1635, by the Westray/Fletcher family, lost by mortgage default in 1666 to Henry Bouch of Cockermouth, and then owned by John Watson from 1670 until his death in 1695. Shortly before he died John ensured it would pass to his wife instead of to his nephew, the nearest male heir, by conveying it in trust for her. A touching line in the indenture says that this was done “as well for his great love and affection towards Anne Watson his perfect wife, as for also in recompense of her extraordinary dutyfull affection and care over him duringe the time of his sicknes”. Anne remarried, a William

Jenkinson, and having bought the freehold from the consortium, they sold it to Francis Benson in 1702. Another of the properties enfranchised in 1698 and bought by Francis in 1708, had been in the Wheelwright/Wren family from at least 1679. The third belonged to the Thompson family. At his death, intestate, in 1716, Jeremiah Thompson owed £161 10s in mortgage debts on his Stanger farm and also on land in neighbouring Lorton. His son and heir, John, after failed attempts to raise the money from relatives, relinquished all the mortgaged property to Francis Benson who paid off the debts. With an earlier (1711) purchase of a barn and more land from his neighbour, George Peile, this completed Francis’s consolidation of his property at Stanger, at a total cost of £550 12s 6d.

The layout of the current farmhouse suggests that an ‘infill’ was built connecting two of the three houses and in this part of the house there is a date stone over a blocked up doorway, now in an internal wall, incised with the letters F B A and the date 1722, indicating ownership of the newly renovated property by Francis Benson and his wife Anna. The current owners recently discovered the original door in one of the old barns as part of a byre. It has now been reinstated, an exact fit, in what was once presumably the external doorway and main entrance. The third small house is on the end of a run of barns, beyond the cobbled farmyard, and apparently long in use as an outbuilding.

The registers of St. Cuthberts, Embleton, include an interesting view of the local community at the end of the 17th century. Seemingly the church wardens completed annual questionnaires to report back to the Bishop’s officials. According to these records, not only was the minister “studious, unblamable in his life, no frequenter of taverns, no common gambler and no swearer or quarreller”, and the curate and sexton assiduous and diligent in their duties, but also all the residents appear to have been paragons of virtue. “We have none that lives in our parish under suspicion of adultery or fornication...no divorced people or people married within the prohibited degree of relationship....nor do we have any common



Properties at Stanger based on the 25 inch OS map of 1839, occupants in 1841 and ownerships from the tithe commutation 1839

drunkards". All the congregation conducted themselves soberly when in church, paid their Easter offerings, contributed to church repairs and refrained from working on the Sabbath. On the other hand, "none in our parish hath bequeathed anything to the poor" and there was no hospital, practitioner of "physick or chirurgery", midwife or school, though a later report adds that "the school at Cockermouth is free to us". Interestingly, given the number of Quaker families in the area, religious dissent seems to be played down: "We know of none in our parish who under pretence of liberty of conscience neglects wholly the publick worship of God" and "We have no assembly of Dissenters in our chapelry that we know or lately have heard of" and "No one marries in private houses or without banns or licence". This despite the fact that the registers include occasional records of the births (though not of course baptisms) of the children of Quakers and of the marriages of parish residents "in a Quaker house". The Friends' registers also have an earlier (1657) record of the burial of a Margaret Peile in a field at Stanger. Possibly the churchwardens felt that as the local Friends attended the Meeting at Pardshaw Hall, away from Embleton, they could be a little economical with the truth in this regard.

The Benson/Rooke Family 1702 - 1835

FRANCIS BENSON m Anna Gill

1. JOHN BENSON m Mary Burnyeat

1. Mary Benson m Joseph Rooke

2. JOSEPH BENSON

1. JOHN ROOKE

Francis Benson's background before establishing himself at Stanger is not yet known. At his 1701 marriage, aged 37, to Anna Gill, he was "of Salt Coate, Holme Cultram" in the north of the county. When he bought his first property at Stanger a year later, he was "of Pardshaw Hall". However, a document with the title deeds reveals that he had a brother living locally, Matthew Benson "of Swinrigg, Lorton". Numerous Benson families appear in both Society of Friends and Anglican registers in Holme Cultram but there are also records of Bensons in Lorton, Embleton and

Cockermouth dating back to 1547 and as yet no record of both a Francis and a Matthew born to the same parents has been found in either place. Francis seems to have been mobile but his starting point remains unknown. Presumably he must have been at least modestly well off to have made three such purchases and also renovated the buildings, all within a relatively short space of time. He held the farm at Stanger until his death in 1752, aged 88, and during this period there is little evidence of financial or family problems. The Bensons' continued ownership of land in Lorton as well as Stanger is shown in their occasional appearance in the Lorton manorial court records, usually for infringements of the local 'customals', such as failing to clear ditches. Francis and Anna's four daughters married into the Tyson, Bacon and Harrison families and a Harrison grandson emigrated to the Quaker community in Philadelphia. (In a nice instance of continuity, one of his descendents now has a farm in Oregon).

In 1752 the farm passed to Francis's only son, John. Nine years later, with John Peile of Stanger and Isaac Fearon of Shatton, he bought the lease of a plot of land next to the Cockermouth Quaker Meeting House which became the burial ground. He also acquired more land in the Stanger area and his wife, Mary Burnyeat, inherited half of a property at High Abbey, Embleton, further extending their holdings. John's daughter Mary married a joiner, Joseph Rooke, and she and her husband lived at Stanger with John, farming half of his land as "under-tenants". Her brother, Joseph, inherited the High Abbey property from their mother. In 1769 he transferred this to his sister Mary, in exchange for which their father conveyed to him, for a notional sum, the half of the Stanger property then being farmed by the Rookes. That the Rookes may not have been happy with their move to High Abbey, and may have perceived additional reasons for resentment, is indicated by later events. The Cumberland Pacquet of 15th March 1777 has the following report:

A daring attempt to rob and murder was lately made in the house of John Benson at Stanger....A person, in the night-time, broke in....went up

stairs, entered the room where Joseph, the son of John Benson, lay in bed, and demanded his money: on being answered he had none, the villain then seized him by the hair, dragged him out of bed, snapped a pistol at him, which flashed in the pan, but happily did not go off. The young man, by calling out murder, alarmed his father and several of the neighbours, but the villain escaped without being discovered.

The villain was in fact Joseph Rooke and the incident and its consequences are described in "The Diary of Isaac Fletcher", the Quaker lawyer. On 11th March Isaac had taken instructions from Joseph Benson on the drawing up of his father's will. On March 24th he notes: "A very bad story going, about J.Rook making an attempt upon his brother-in-law Joseph Benson by breaking into the house, presenting a pistol etc." And the entry for April 3rd reads: "Went this morning to Stanger to endeavour a reconciliation between Joseph Rooke and Joseph Benson but could not get same effected on any account without JR quitting the country. Agreed that Joseph and Mary (it being her estate) should convey their estate at High Abbey to trustees for uses." The minutes of the subsequent Pardshaw Quaker Meeting reveal that "though...[Joseph Rooke]...now seems to be greatly penitent, in much agony and distress of mind, lamenting his unhappy situation and condition, yet the Society cannot in the least palliate or countenance so wicked and atrocious a crime...[and]...hereby deny and disown him...sincerely desirous he may come to unfeigned repentance for his misconduct." Isaac Fletcher duly signed "a paper of denial" against Joseph Rooke for "falling prey to covetousness".

Joseph Benson indeed appears to have been a man of substance. At his death in 1786 he was owed "some £1000" in outstanding loans. In addition to numerous family bequests, he left money to the Quaker poor in Cockermouth, the poor of Embleton and the recently established Quaker School in Ackworth, Yorkshire. Although he married twice he had no children and despite the dispute with the Rookes he left his half of the

Stanger farm (a house and 35 acres) to his nephew, John Rooke, the son of his attacker. When his father, John Benson, died six years later, the other half of the farm (the second house and 20 acres) also went to John Rooke, so that by 1793 the Stanger farm was again in one owner's hands. If the Bensons had anticipated that the farm would continue in the family in the same stable way it had for most of the 18th century then they would have been disappointed by subsequent developments.

The marriages of John Rooke's siblings are recorded in the Quaker registers. (A sister, Jane, married Wilson Robinson of Whinfell Hall and was the grandmother of John Wilson Robinson, the pioneer rock climber discussed by Prof. Waller in the Feb.2008 issue of the Journal.) However, John must have broken with the Friends Society as, in 1794, he married Hannah Bolton at St. Cuthberts, Embleton, and their 11 children were baptised at the Independent Congregational Church in Cockermouth. Enclosures of the common and waste land of Embleton added 30 acres to his land, bringing the total to 85 acres, and Parson and White's 1829 Directory describes him as "Yeoman. Owner of Stanger Spa". This saline spring, situated in Well Meadow on the farm and housed in a small stone building, is mentioned in a number of histories of the area. Said to be a strong aperient and also "efficacious in treating diseases of the skin", an 1819 chemical analysis found it comparable to Cheltenham spa water and the farm was a popular destination for Sunday walks for Cockermouth residents, to 'take the waters' at 6d a glass. (It is also said to have been bottled and exported, though I can find no definitive source for this.)

Despite this further diversification, the reality was that the farm was heavily mortgaged. Between 1795 and 1825 John had taken out a series of six loans and by the late 1820s he had borrowed £900 of which he had repaid only £50. Around this time, and now a widower in his late 50s, he stopped farming, sold off his stock and equipment and let most of the property to one of his sons, retaining only one of the two houses and a garden for his own use. A later affidavit by his neighbour, John Peile, states that the farm was by now run

down and in bad repair. One can only speculate as to the reasons for this state of affairs. Perhaps the development of the Spa (with an attempt to export?) was a failed business venture. Possibly the reported slump in the price of farm produce after the Napoleonic Wars played a part. Whatever the causes, when he died in 1831 he left his executor and trustee, John Bolton of Jenkin, Embleton, the unenviable task of letting, selling or mortgaging the farm as he saw fit, in order to pay off the debts and meet the provisions of his will. By this time his eldest son had already died; the son still living and farming at Stanger then also died, within a month; and the remaining nine children were married and/or living away from the farm or were underage.

With the agreement of the Rooke family, the farm was put up for auction, to be sold at the Old Buck Inn, Cockermouth on January 24th 1832. The notice advertising the sale in *The Cumberland Pacquet*, as well as commending its value as a farm, also extols its position: "beautifully situate on the banks of the River Cocker...[with]...commanding views..." and adds further that "there is also upon the estate a valuable medicinal spring known as Stanger Well...justly famed for the cure of inveterate scorbutic diseases and which might (by a proper arrangement for the reception of invalids, for which there is ample space), under a spirited proprietor, become a source of great emolument". Perhaps they were hoping to appeal to the new wave of purchasers from beyond Cumberland or entrepreneurs looking to exploit local resources for the developing tourist trade. If so it was not to be. The highest bid being only £2600, it was withdrawn from auction and John Bolton entered into private negotiations, agreeing to sell it for £3220 to Isaac Thompson of Workington, who in fact was the holder of the outstanding mortgage debt, having inherited it from his parents' estate.

A planned August handover did not take place and by November 1832 proceedings had been started in the Court of Chancery in London. Isaac Thompson had disputed the legal title of John Bolton, the

executor, to sell the estate and this had then been superseded by an action brought by several of the Rooke family against the remaining Rookes, John Bolton, Isaac Thompson and "their confederates when they are discovered". Those who have researched Chancery Court cases will know just how prolonged and tortuous these proceedings were, (matched only by the researcher's task in tracing the multiple records at the National Archives, including many which are now stored in a disused salt mine in Cheshire!) The jewel in the crown of this set of records is a long and meticulous report by the Master of the Rolls assigned to collate the evidence and draw up the accounts, which has a wealth of details even down to the level of the cost of John Rooke's coffin and the name of the coffin maker. An account of the proceedings would constitute an article in itself. Suffice it to say that the case continued until 1835, by which time three more of John Rooke's adult children had died - without receiving their legacies. Judgement was given that the sale to Isaac Thompson should proceed and in September 1835 the Stanger farm finally changed hands, for the sale price minus the mortgage debt owing to him.

The Thompson Family 1835 - 1958

ISAAC THOMPSON m Sarah Marsh

1. GEORGE THOMPSON

2. ARTHUR THOMPSON

3. Mary Thompson m William Kay

1. FREDERICK KAY

With this sale the farm became the property of an absentee landlord. Isaac Thompson, born 1796, son of a mariner, was a solicitor in practice with his brother in Curwen St. Workington. In the 1841, '51 and '61 censuses, he is listed as "solicitor", then "retired attorney", and finally "landed proprietor and magistrate", and it is clear from his will that over his lifetime he acquired a considerable amount of property in Workington and the surrounding countryside. The census records all have him as "unmarried", living with two spinster sisters in Pow Street in Workington. However, his 1865 will names "my dear wife Sarah" and four children, Mary Ellen, George Frederick, Sarah Elizabeth and Arthur Edward. Further investigation revealed that Sarah was in fact Sarah Marsh, a servant in the Thompson



The Rothery family at Low Stanger farm in 1891

household in 1851, who subsequently registered the births of all four children, as listed above but with no father named. She is recorded in the 1861 census as living with the children in the house of a farm bailiff in Little Clifton, the bailiff's wife being described as her "assistant". In 1865, following the death of the last of his sisters, Isaac duly married Sarah Marsh and she and the children moved into the Thompson family home. Presumably their long-standing relationship had not met with the family's approval and had been discreetly conducted away from polite society in Workington.

For the thirty-five years that Isaac owned the farm it was occupied by a series of tenant farmers and it is during this period that the name Low Stanger begins to appear. However, as the censuses usually refer to every property in the hamlet simply as Stanger and there are few other definitive records, a full picture of these tenants has not yet emerged (research ongoing). The Peiles still owned the neighbouring farm and in 1845 Isaac took over a £1500 mortgage owed by John Peile, acquiring some of the Peile land when this was redeemed in 1852. He also bought a parcel of land in Blindbothe from Lady Mary Senhouse, intriguingly "for

the purposes of straightening the River Cocker opposite my land at Stanger". When

Isaac died in 1870 his children were underage and ownership of the farm passed to the trustees of his will, including his widow Sarah, who also received the annual rent of £60 for Low Stanger. From the 1870s to the 1890s the tenant farmer was a Joseph Rothery. During this period William Alexander, the philanthropist who was responsible for many important local projects, initiated an extensive land drainage scheme in the area. (The present owners have the original documents and plans and hope to write a separate account of this for the Society).

By the 1880s the Thompson family had truly become absent landlords, having moved away from Cumberland and settled in Hampshire and Kent. The eldest son, George, named as heir in Isaac's will, would have inherited on becoming 21 in 1877, though to date no records have been found to confirm this. When he died at his mother's house in Greenwich in 1879, letters of administration, which describe him, rather bluntly, as "a Bachelor, a Bastard and Intestate", were granted to the Treasury Solicitor, a procedure normally adopted in the absence of relatives. (Again research ongoing). By 1889 the owner's

name on documents is that of his brother, Arthur Thompson, a bachelor, who lived in Alton, Hampshire and was "of independent means" - presumably the rents from the Cumberland estates. On his death in 1907 he left the Stanger farm to his nephew, Frederick Kay, a clergyman, who was, variously, curate and vicar in Bromley and Strood in Kent.

Following the Finance Act of 1910 a comprehensive mapping and valuation of property throughout the country was carried out, described as the largest land survey since 1086 and the Domesday Book. The records for Stanger show that there were at that time three properties in the hamlet. The Peile holding, which had been in the same family from before 1631, was now reduced to a house, two gardens and some outbuildings and had recently been sold for £100 by William Peile of Whinfall Hall. The second property, a farm of 72 acres with a house, cottage and garden, had a resident owner, Isaac Brown. The third was Low Stanger, with 82 acres, a farmhouse, an unoccupied cottage, outbuildings and garden, for which the tenant farmer, Isaac Fearon, paid £85 p.a. rent. The state of the buildings in the hamlet ranged from "very poor repair" to "only moderate repair" though the land was "of fairly good quality" - a judgement later repeated in the 1941 Farm Survey.

Frederick Kay died in 1937. Under his will the property was to go to trustees with instructions to sell or retain the property and establish a trust, the income of which was to go to his widow, Agnes. The trustees included the firm of Carlisle solicitors which the Thompsons had continued to use despite their move away from Cumberland. The other trustee was a Constance Bartlett, who appears at the same address as the Kays, but whose relationship with them remains unclear (possibly a housekeeper) and who was named as beneficiary after Agnes' death. Agnes died in 1942 and shortly afterwards Constance became the owner. In 1958 Low Stanger finally moved back into the hands of owner-occupiers when she sold it to the tenants then farming the land and it was from

the descendants of this family that the present owners bought the farm in 2006.

In a final intriguing reference back to earlier times, Constance's 1990 will left the bulk of her £290,000 personal estate to a range of charities and included a bequest to the Helena Thompson Museum, Workington, with the instruction that it be used to further the research into the history of the Thompson family "particularly in relation to William Thompson's connection with the Boston Tea Party". This may refer to Isaac Thompson's mariner father, William (1724 - 1796), as the storming of the three British ships in Boston Harbour took place in 1773. However, to date no link has been found and this may simply be a family myth, handed down and growing, like Chinese whispers, with each generation.

This has largely been an account of the families connected with Low Stanger but of course the most constant character in the story is the land itself. It is remarkable that the pattern and names of the fields seem to have remained much as they were in the 17thC. And now the land is starting on a new phase in its history with the development of an organic smallholding. I like to think that the past generations of tenants and owners would applaud the farm's survival and wish it well.

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My thanks to:

Peter Kerr, Michelle Hughes and Naomi Kerr for their hospitality and access to the title deeds.

The staff and volunteers at the following archives: Whitehaven and Carlisle ROs; the National Archives; the Society of Genealogists; the Family History Centre, Hyde Park; the Helena Thompson Museum; and the LDFLHS (Michael Baron).

Dr. Winchester and Prof. Waller, for their helpful replies to my queries, Ian Sanderson for guidance in negotiating the intricacies of the Court of Chancery records, Derek Denman for the figure on page 5, Neville Ramsden, whose Index to the Copeland Wills is an invaluable resource and one which helped me identify Francis and Anna Benson from the date stone - and so set the whole research project in motion.

Lorton welcomes cyclists

by Walter Head

Like many inventions, exactly who invented the bicycle is open to debate. However, a sketch of a bicycle from 1493 attributed to Giacomo Caprotti, who was a pupil of Leonardo da Vinci, is now generally accepted by most people to be a fake.

It is more probable that, like the aeroplane, more than one person was working on the concept and certainly among the front runners were the Baron von Drais in Germany, the Michaux family in France, Henry Lawson in England and Kirkpatrick Macmillan from Scotland.

Kirkpatrick MacMillan, a blacksmith from Coathill in Dumfries, manufactured a bicycle for his own use in 1839. This machine, which allowed him to ride without touching the ground with his feet, incorporated two smallish equal sized wheels with the rider sitting between them, a front wheel which could be steered and a rear wheel drive which was achieved by two rods connected to treadle type pedals. An 1845 version of this type of bicycle is on display in Dumfries Museum.

The "penny farthing" machine with a large front wheel appeared in approximately 1870.

The first cycling club - the Liverpool Velocipede Club was formed in 1867 using the imported French front wheel peddled velocipede. Serious production of the bicycle in England in 1870 was by the Coventry Machine Company. By 1884, Harry John Lawson was manufacturing a bicycle driven by a chain to the rear wheel.

By the late 1880s, the cycling craze had taken off in Britain and on 5th October, 1891 the 100 mile road race was won by S Sharp who was presented with a silver teapot and in 1892 J W Cox won a 15 carat gold medal as first prize for cycling 25 miles on a penny farthing bicycle. 1895 saw the first round world trip by a woman on a bicycle.

The coming of the bicycle gave the ordinary working man and woman greater flexibility as they found it much easier to take

up longer range jobs and so increase their chance of better paid employment. The popularity of the bicycle and the demands placed on leisure time by the long working week Monday to Saturday, meant that most cycling activities took place on a Sunday which brought the cyclists into conflict with the established church. In 1893, a cycle race started in Cockermouth main street on a Sunday.



National Cyclists' Union, Cumberland and Westmorland rally at Lorton - 17th September 1950

Lorton parish was at the forefront of reconciliation and at the invitation of Rev W M Cockatt, vicar of Lorton, 150 cyclists from Cockermouth, Keswick, Maryport and Flimby attended his church on Sunday, 31st August 1899. The service was conducted by Rev W Copeland, vicar of Buttermere. No longer was a stigma attached to cycling on the sabbath and 1899 saw the shaking of hands between the local church and cyclists.

In 2004, Lloyd Scott travelled 2,700 miles from Perth to Sydney in 50 days dressed as Sherlock Holmes riding a penny farthing bicycle to raise money for charity,

Today, Lorton is on the Coast to Coast cycle route and still welcomes cyclists.

Sources:

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Myths and Milestones in Bicycle Evolution by W Hudson

Before and after the Lorton turnpike

by Derek Denman

It is well known that the Whinlatter Road formed part of one of the early and most important turnpike routes in Cumberland. It was authorised by Act of parliament in 1762 and completed in time for Thomas Donald to survey, in 1771-2, for the first accurate county map of Cumberland.¹ But what we do not have is any detailed map of the local roads before the turnpike was constructed, and that has always been a problem – for example for our Roman Roads Group which in 1998-9 tried to determine the route of the Roman road over Whinlatter, the results of which have been published in CWAAS Transactions for 2007. This article gives some general background to the turnpike road and then reconstructs the earlier roads – essentially the medieval roads – that existed in and through Lorton before the turnpike.

Turnpike roads in Cumberland

Before the turnpikes the roads in Cumberland were in a bad way. The responsibility to keep the highways in order rested with the townships, such as Lorton, Loweswater, Embleton, etc., and was controlled and paid for by the vestry meeting through their appointed surveyor. The county maintained only the principal bridges as county bridges. There was of course no overall planning of roads in England, not since the Romans, and so roads met local needs, and longer journeys meant a progress from place to place on local roads – or across open countryside from bridge to bridge if the traveller was a man on horseback. The growth of industry and commercial society in the eighteenth century found the roads inadequate for commerce. In Cumberland it was the growth of Whitehaven through the seventeenth century and early eighteenth century, to become the third largest port in England by tonnage for a while, which drove the need for better communications inland.

Most of Whitehaven's trade was coal to Dublin, and much of the rest went in and out by coastal shipping, but it was in Whitehaven in 1739 that the first Cumberland turnpike trust was inaugurated, to take control of the roads in and out of the port of Whitehaven. Turnpike trusts were empowered to improve roads by the use of private capital, the investment being repaid by the receipts from toll gates for 21 years. The turnpike system effectively provided the first opportunity to build a national road network in England since the Romans left.

Figure 1 extracts the local routes given by James Ogilby as strip-maps of in his *Britannia* of 1675, before the turnpikes.² The main routes follow the Roman routes, except that between Keswick and Cockermouth the main route was along the east side of Bassenthwaite and over Ouse Bridge, rather than the most direct, and probably Roman, route over Whinlatter, which Ogilby called 'the worst way'. Whitehaven was now growing but Workington was a small harbour and Maryport was yet to be created. The main route from Whitehaven to Kendal, the gateway to the South, passed through Cockermouth, but there there was a much shorter route, indicated as a branch by Ogilby through Loweswater, Hopebeck and the Whinlatter Pass, the importance of which grew as Whitehaven grew.

When the turnpike routes through the mountains were established, Cockermouth was an important industrialising market town and node in the road network. The Cockermouth-Workington turnpike trust had been created in 1753, and then in 1761 trusts were formed for Cockermouth-Penrith and Cockermouth-Keswick-Kendal. The Cockermouth-Penrith road ran via Ouse Bridge and took the direct route over the fells via Heskett Newmarket, off which there would also be the link to Carlisle via Caldbeck.

The Cockermouth-Keswick Turnpike

The main Cockermouth to Keswick road had previously taken the long route via Ouse Bridge and the east of Bassenthwaite Lake, but a

¹ *Thomas Donald historic map of Cumberland, 1774*
CWAAS Record Series Vol. XV 2002

² Ogilby, John. *Britannia, volume the first, or, an illustration of the Kingdom of England and dominion of Wales...* London 1675 p. 308

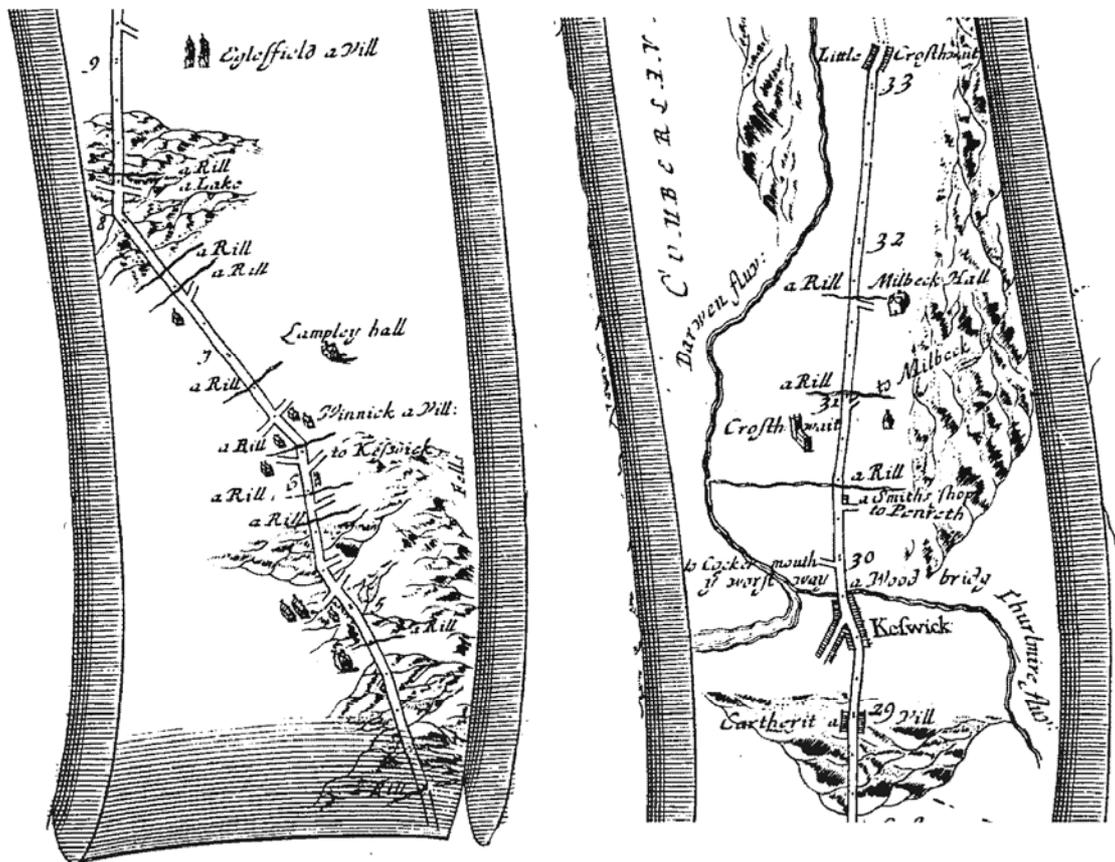


Figure 1. Extracts of John Ogilby's strip maps of 1675. On the Keswick - Cocker-mouth map on the right, *to Cocker-mouth the worst way* indicates the Whinlatter Pass. On the Egremont - Cocker-mouth map on the left, a branch south of Lamplugh indicates a route to Keswick via Loweswater and the Whinlatter Pass.

decision was taken to take the new Cocker-mouth-Keswick-Kendal turnpike over Whinlatter. This provided the shortest, though most difficult and expensive, route to Keswick but it also had the benefit of improving the direct route from Whitehaven to Keswick via Loweswater and Hopebeck. Figure 2 uses a part of the Hodgkinson and Donald map to show the relevant area just after the completion of the turnpike. Shading has been added to this map to show the unenclosed commons, which at this time were very extensive.

The route of the Cocker-mouth to Braithwaite section of the turnpike via Whinlatter has not changed since the 1760s except that after starting in Kirkgate at the toll gate, the road took the old route and crossed Tom Rudd Beck via Skinner Street. After Tom

Rudd Beck the road was on the unenclosed common. Turnpike engineers liked commons because they could choose their route and build to the required width without having to buy strips of land and rebuild fences, which they had to do to improve the narrow roads through villages and enclosed land. They probably followed the old line through Cocker-mouth common, past the barn at what is now Rose Cottage, onto Embleton Common, past Round Close at Four Lane Ends and then back into the enclosed lands of Embleton at High Shatton.

The Turnpike through Lorton

The section of the Whinlatter turnpike in Lorton township runs from the Embleton boundary at Low Shatton to the start of the

Whinlatter forest, at the roadside car-parking space (formerly the Whinlatter toll gate) about 100m west of the visitor centre access. The route today is exactly as it was constructed in the 1760s, apart from the surface and commons allotment fences, and in some places it follows the old medieval highways, widened as necessary. But in other places it takes a new route. The major change, of course, was that they decided not to go through High Lorton village, which must surely make the village one of the first to have a bypass. Before the turnpike the highway from Cockermouth to Keswick came along Seggs Lane to the corner where a farmhouse has been converted into the blue and white Lorton Park Cottages. There the highway crossed a stream before continuing along High Lorton Street to the five-way junction near the famous Lorton Yew Tree. From this point there was the highway to Low Lorton and the highway to Hopebeck via Lorton High Mill, plus two highways to Keswick. This we know from the parliamentary survey of 1649, which is far enough back for this article.³ The two highways to Keswick, as today, ran either side of Whitbeck. One crossed Whitbeck, originally by a ford, and went past Boonbeck and Scales, then across Lorton commons and via Blease Bridge to the Whinlatter Pass. The other highway to Keswick ran up Tenters Lane, entering Lorton commons near the top of the hill, passing the tenter riggs on the common, and continuing on the commons, outside of the enclosures by Whitbeck, to the old quarry at Graystones and then up Blease Brow before joining the other road.

The turnpike builders chose neither of these two ways through Lorton to Keswick. Instead, they bypassed High Lorton by building a new road branching off from the old highway before reaching Lorton village and by cutting across existing closes to reach Holemire Common at what became the Rising Sun. From the Rising Sun they could stay on the common and choose their own route. In this way they avoided the complexities of improving the roads through High Lorton, they avoided the steep hills of Tenters or

Scales, and took the shortest route to Keswick. The small settlement at Holemire and the Rising Sun Inn dates from the completion of the turnpike. The price they paid for taking this route, however, was New Bridge. It is called New Bridge because it was built new for the turnpike and does not appear to have replaced a previous bridge. Before the turnpike, the county bridge surveyor never listed more than one county bridge on Whinlatter, and in 1759 he listed 'Bleaze Bridge upon Whinlatter' which, if it crossed Blease Beck, indicates that the only county bridge on Whinlatter was not on what we would now consider the main road to Keswick, but on the branch at the sixth milestone that runs through Scales to Boonbeck.⁴ With no New Bridge and with Blease Bridge being a county bridge, it seems that the main route from Keswick to Lorton before New Bridge was constructed would have gone through Scales and Boonbeck, and over Whitbeck Bridge at High Lorton, where 'High Lorton Bridge' was also a county bridge in 1760-1.⁵ The highway to the north of Whitbeck, entering Lorton via Tenters Lane, seems to have been a lesser and more difficult route. This conclusion is supported by the fact that the shortest route to Whitehaven by Loweswater would also have taken the Blease Bridge fork and passed by High Swinside to Hopebeck, by what is now a gated road but then was a road on the common with only the one fell gate at Hopebeck. The importance of Blease Bridge, on the shortest route inland from Whitehaven to Keswick, becomes apparent, even before the popularity of Swinside Terrace with tourists from the late eighteenth century.



New Bridge from Spout Beck

³ CRO/C/D&C/8

⁴ CROC/C/QAB/2 Bridges order book

⁵ CROC/C/QAB/2 Bridges order book

Notes and legend

The two Turnpikes at Cockermouth have milestones from Penrith via Heskett Newmarket and to Keswick via Whinlatter. A dotted road edge is unfenced, usually on the common.

Annotations:-

..... Keswick to Whitehaven via Loweswater, the short route.

B Blease Bridge on Whinlatter, a county bridge

D Deepa Bridge, later Scales Bridge, a county bridge

N New Bridge, built for the turnpike in the 1760s

— · — · — Lorton on the common via Scales:- not shown by Donald and less important since the turnpike and New Bridge were made, but a highway to Keswick in 1649 and re-made on enclosure after 1826.

----- New part of turnpike road built through old enclosures and common to bypass High Lorton and Tenters Lane.

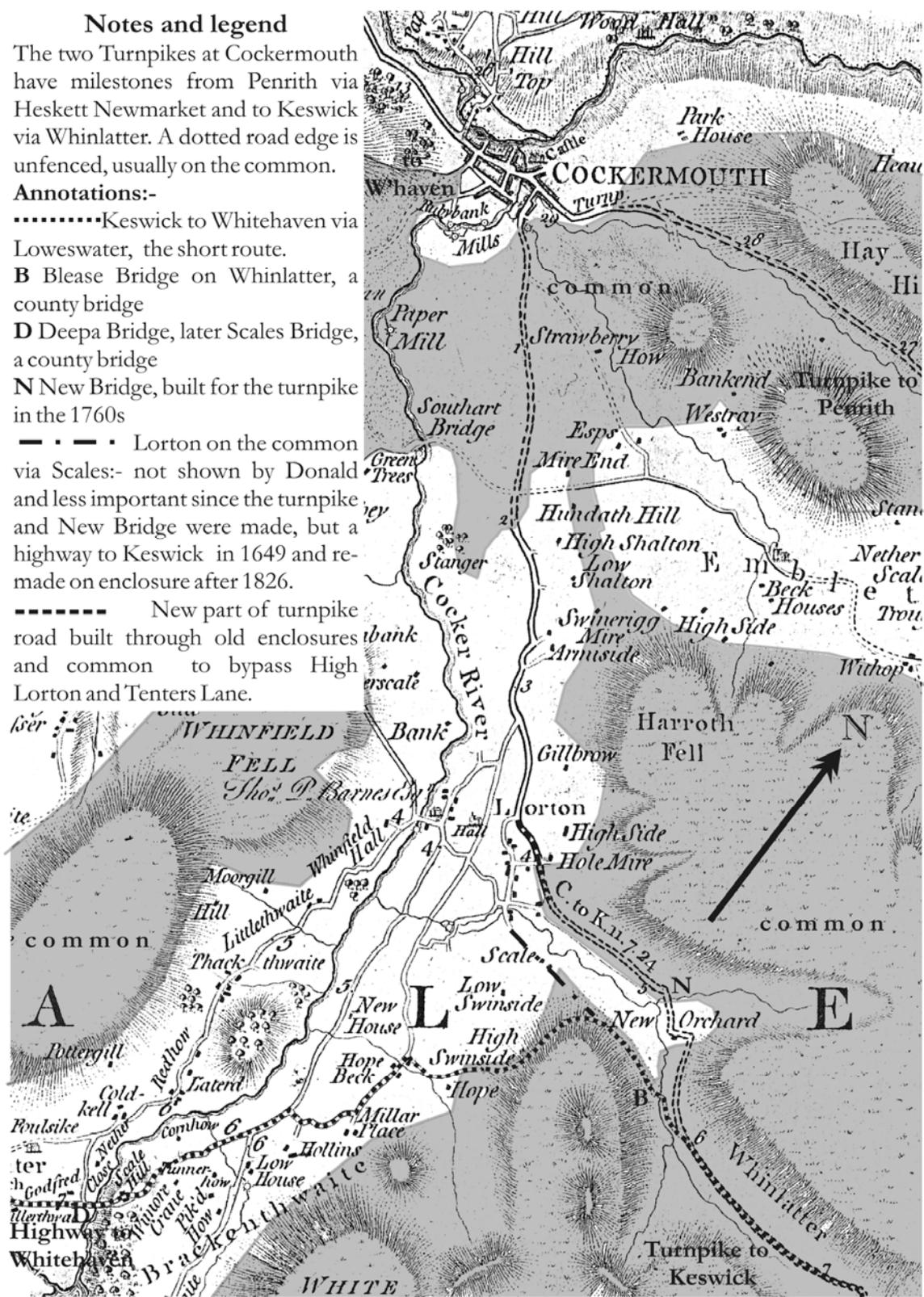


Figure 2. Roads in Lorton and Loweswater, Donald and Hodgkinson survey 1771/2

Holemire before the turnpike

The earliest map that we have of High Lorton and its closes was created in 1827-8 by the commissioner for the enclosure of the Lorton Commons, and was later used as the survey for the tithe map. This has survived in the Benson solicitors' archive.⁶ Although this was at least 57 years after the construction of the turnpike, it allows the pre-turnpike enclosures to be logically reconstructed. Figures 3 and 4 are based on the survey, but with the turnpike and later buildings removed and the pre-turnpike closes reconstructed to their likely form around 1760. This reconstruction can only be approximate, and is based on features on the ground, known records, and particularly the map-less 1649 parliamentary survey of the manor of Lorton belonging to Carlisle Cathedral – plus logical inference.

A new junction with the existing road was created at *great meadow* and the turnpike route took a fairly direct line to Holemire common, requiring several closes to be divided and fenced. Once on the common the road originally kept a little above the existing closes, requiring no fences to be built, until it briefly joined the existing terraced route close to the tenter riggs, where woollen cloth from the walk mill was pegged out to dry. Figure 3 shows Holemire and Tenters fell gates, needed until the commons were enclosed around 1830, when the turnpike was fenced. Figure 4 shows the continuation of the road above Whitbeck to Scawgill, or the Lamb Inn. The builders chose to create a new terrace higher up the fellside than the existing highway. This again left a strip of common between the old closes and the unfenced turnpike, until the gap was filled by a strip of commons allotments when the commons were enclosed. The route of the old road is still clear in many places in the allotments created. The ancient enclosures end at Sware Gill with *stockdale*, the name of a late medieval tenement in this area. From this point the land is unimproved and it becomes easier to find the remains of old roads. This is important because at one point soon after Sware Beck, above the 'k' of Whitbeck in figure 4, there is

a pinch point at which both old road and turnpike must converge, the new above the old, and it is important to find if and how the two roads diverge again to cross Spout Beck. From the remains in the unimproved pasture it is clear that there was a road running close to Whitbeck from Sware Beck to the confluence of Spout and Blease Becks at point A. At this point Blease Beck emerges from a ravine, and it is clear that the old road must have crossed Spout Beck at some point and then ascended Blease Brow to Scawgill, without the help of New Bridge. When searching for roads in the late 1990s, the members of the Roman Roads Group investigated the Scawgill land on Blease Brow above the current road and found the remains of the old road in the position shown in Figure 4 in the close *before house*. But this road appeared to merge with the current road and it was assumed that there was a crossing or ford in the position now occupied by New Bridge. However, more recent investigation has shown that, coming from Lorton, if Spout Beck is crossed next to the confluence at point A, there are remains of a road rising steeply to meet the present road as shown on Figure 4, which can cross the turnpike at point B to join with the line of the old road through Scawgill. At the crossing point the present turnpike road briefly flattens, suggesting that this old route existed and continued in use after the turnpike was built. From the point of this crossing, above New Bridge, the new turnpike occupies a steep terrace cut into the slope below Blease Brow, reaching level ground just before the remains of the farmstead of Scawgill, or the Lamb Inn. The old road, however, from where it crosses the new, kept to the top edge of Blease Brow and now runs, in remains, along the top edge of the escarpment created above the turnpike road. The two roads merge on the approach to the Scawgill buildings. As Scawgill is approached, the wall on the right is that created for the new road, but that which appears at point C on the left is that of the old road, and consequently the distance between the two walls decreases from thirty feet to twenty feet as Scawgill is reached. A good part of the old road remains in the close *before house*, and at point D elements of the retaining wall remain.

⁶ CRO/C/D/Ben 282

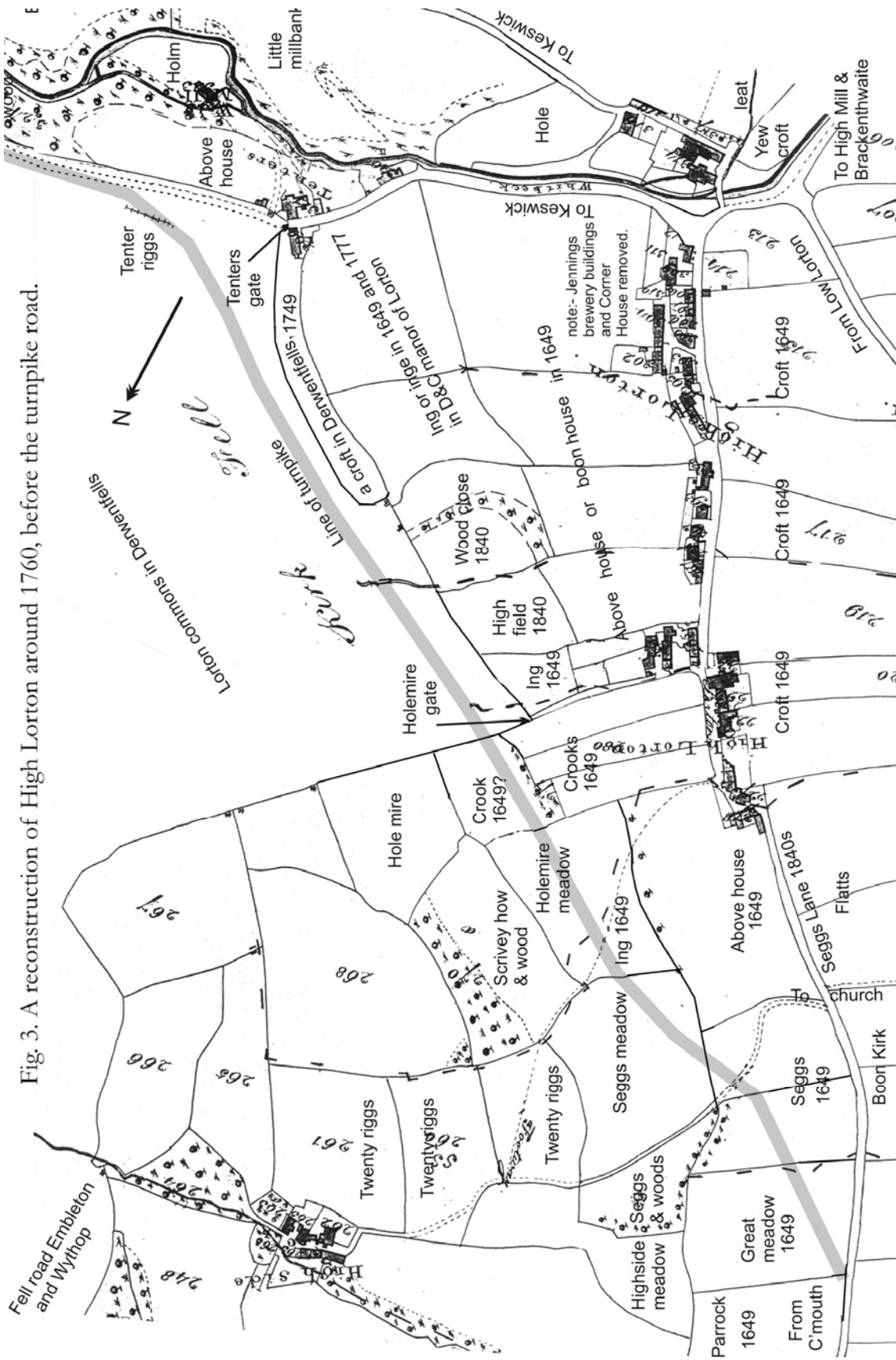
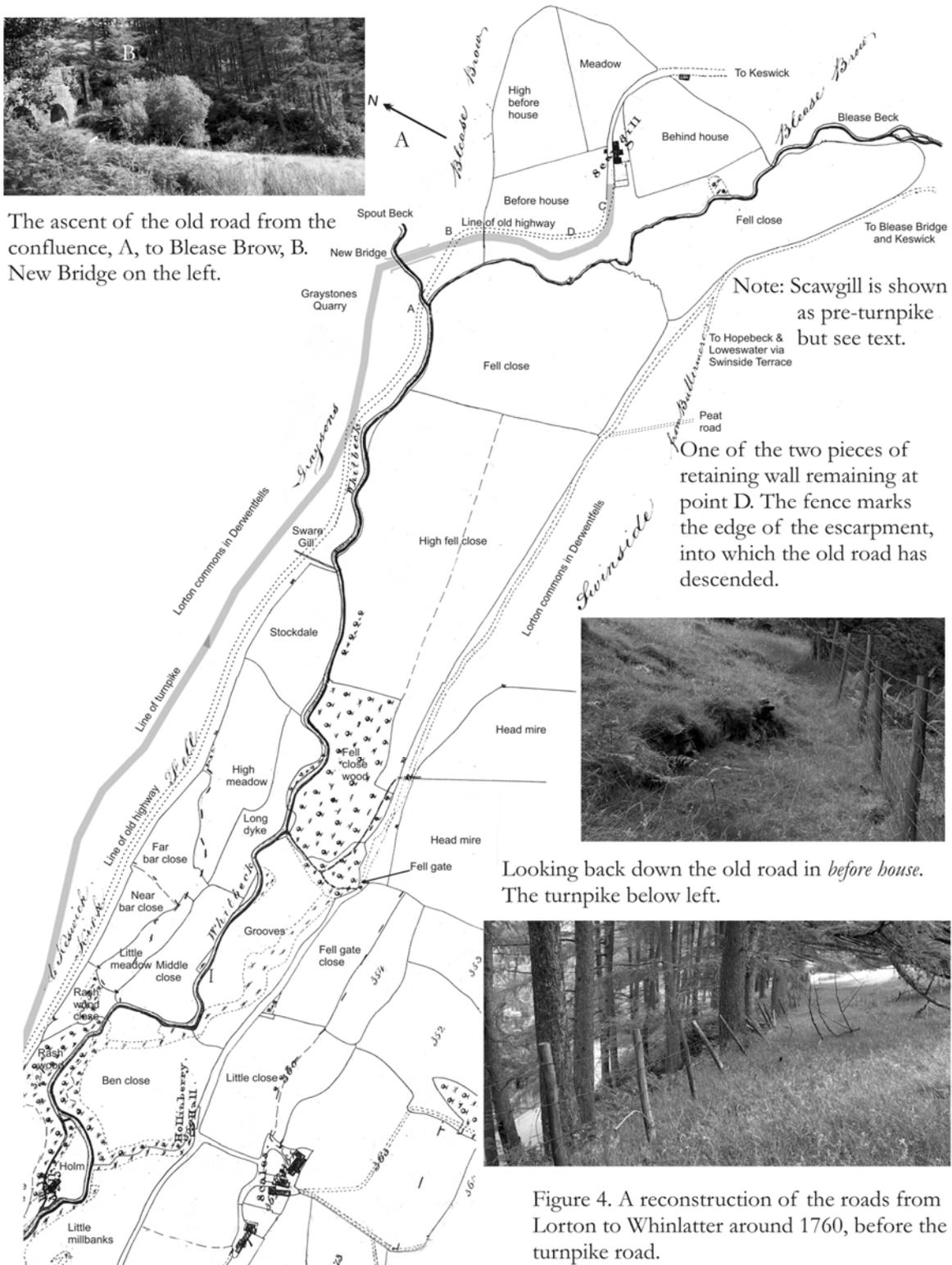


Fig. 3. A reconstruction of High Lorton around 1760, before the turnpike road.



The ascent of the old road from the confluence, A, to Blease Brow, B. New Bridge on the left.



Note: Scawgill is shown as pre-turnpike but see text.

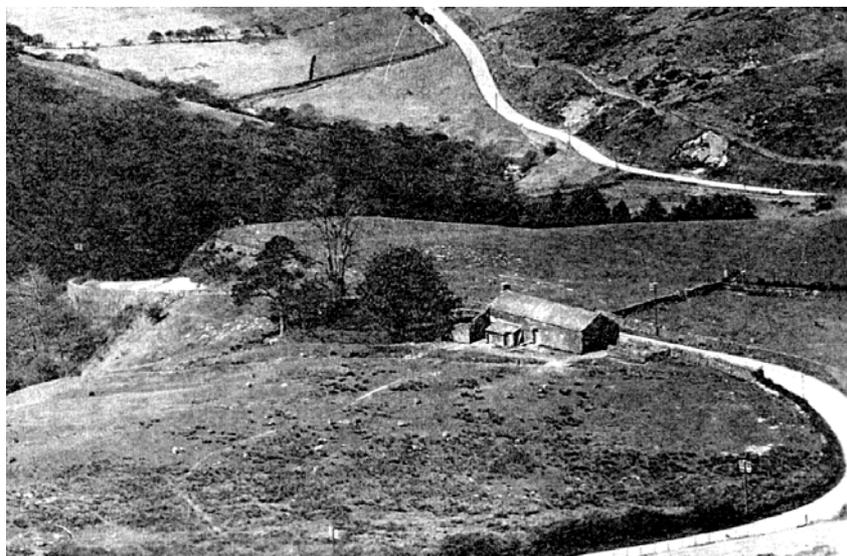
One of the two pieces of retaining wall remaining at point D. The fence marks the edge of the escarpment, into which the old road has descended.



Looking back down the old road in *before house*. The turnpike below left.



Figure 4. A reconstruction of the roads from Lorton to Whinlatter around 1760, before the turnpike road.



Scawgill and the turnpike road going towards Lorton, early twentieth century

There are some questions about the age and continuous occupation of Scawgill, which after the turnpike doubled up as a small farmstead of 17 acres plus an Inn called the Lamb. Angus Winchester considers that the farmstead at Scawgill may have existed by 1578⁷, but that name does not appear in the registers until the Gordon family moved there from High Lorton in c.1775. On the Donald survey of 1771-2 map it is shown as New Orchard, and after an existence as a marginal tenement, the turnpike certainly gave it a new lease of life. From Scawgill the turnpike probably follows the old route to Whinlatter, but I am uncertain whether, as it appears, the Scawgill buildings pre-date the turnpike.

The effect of the turnpike

In the mid nineteenth century, having a railway station could make a large difference to the prosperity of a village, as was the case with Embleton and Wythop in the 1860s. But in the late eighteenth century a turnpike road could have a similar effect. In the mid eighteenth century both Lorton and Loweswater were rural agricultural villages, but the turnpike set Lorton on a different path. Lorton's new good position and communications allowed it to develop its industry.

Loweswater's corn mills and that of Brackenthwaite went out of use around 1800, while both Lorton High Mill and Low Mill worked through the nineteenth century. Loweswater's fulling mill, at Bargate, went out of use and 'the websters from Loweswater used to bring their woollens to the Tenters'. 'In 1800-20 Lorton Mill was a very important and thriving place ... every week there was a cart-load or two of unfinished goods brought over Whinlatter and the carts took back the finished goods to Keswick ...'⁸ This same good communications was important for the Jennings businesses, to take beer to Cockermouth from the late 1820s and later to allow the flax mill to use imported flax as if it were a part of the Cockermouth industry.

Lorton was well enough connected to diversify and to increase its population up to 1851, maintaining and increasing its housing stock. In the late nineteenth century it had five inns or public houses. Loweswater gained from the turnpike through tourism, but the benefits accrued mostly to the Scale Hill Inn and its employees. When the mining ventures ceased, and arable gave way to pastoral production, Loweswater suffered more from rural depopulation and the loss of farmsteads that we all know about. The turnpike was in some measure responsible for these differences in direction.

⁷ *Landscape and society in med. Cumbria* p.149

⁸ John Bolton's lecture of 1891 p.3

The 2008 Bernard Bradbury Memorial Lecture

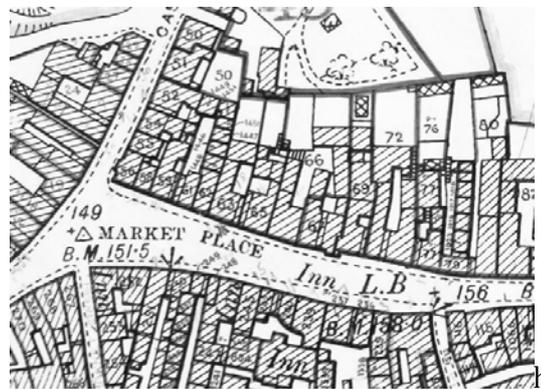
*Kirkgate Arts Centre, Cockermouth,
Friday 26 September at 8.00 p.m.*

The Buildings of Cockermouth, 1910-1913:-Insights from an unique survey.

**Given by:- Dr Michael Winstanley
Senior Lecturer in History, University
of Lancaster**

In 1910, Asquith's Liberal government decided to raise revenue by a new Land Tax on landowners. The means:- the most comprehensive land survey since 1086. Thus, 'the new Domesday'. Surveyors were sent out country-wide to record ownership and occupation of land; and to assess and deduct the value of buildings which were not to be taxed. Surveying, recording, negotiating with owners went on until 1914. But First World War politics doomed this radical project and it was never implemented. Records of the survey remain in archives, and for Cumberland are very good. Michael Winstanley will describe the process and illustrate with examples of records of Cockermouth. This is a rich but little used source for town and family history.

Dr. Winstanley teaches modern British history with a special focus on N.W. England. At Lancaster since 1978, he has



been Research Fellow in Oral History at the University of Kent and holds degrees from Oxford and Lancaster. Claiming a fairly catholic taste in terms of his research interests, he has published on the history of shops, farming, housing, radical politics, newspaper reporting and Elizabethan cartography.

This second lecture in memory of the author of the History of Cockermouth is sponsored by the Cockermouth Civic Trust, the Kirkgate Centre Museum Group, and the Lorton and Derwent Fells Local History Society. Tickets are available from the Kirkgate Arts Centre from 1st September at £3.00.

Michael Baron

The next Journal will be published for 1st February 2009. Please send contributions to Derek Denman by 7th January.

Published by Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society, Beech Cottage, High Lorton, Cockermouth CA13 9UQ

<i>L&DFLHS – Future Programme 2008</i>	
Date	Event
<i>11th Sep</i>	Talk: by Stuart Eastwood – <i>The Border Regiment</i>
<i>13th Sep</i>	Visit to Arkleby House Farm and Lime Kilns (must book, see p.2)
<i>26th Sep</i>	The Bernard Bradbury Lecture, by Dr Mike Winstanley – <i>The buildings of Cockermouth 1910-3: insights from a unique survey</i>. At the Kirkgate Centre. Joint with Cockermouth Civic Trust and Kirkgate Centre Museum Group
<i>13th Nov</i>	Talk: by Dr Rob David – <i>The abominable traffic – slave traders, plantation owners and abolitionists in Cumbria</i>
Except for the Bradbury Lecture, talks are held at the Yew Tree Hall in Lorton starting at 7.30pm. Visitors £2 including refreshments, £2.50 from November.	