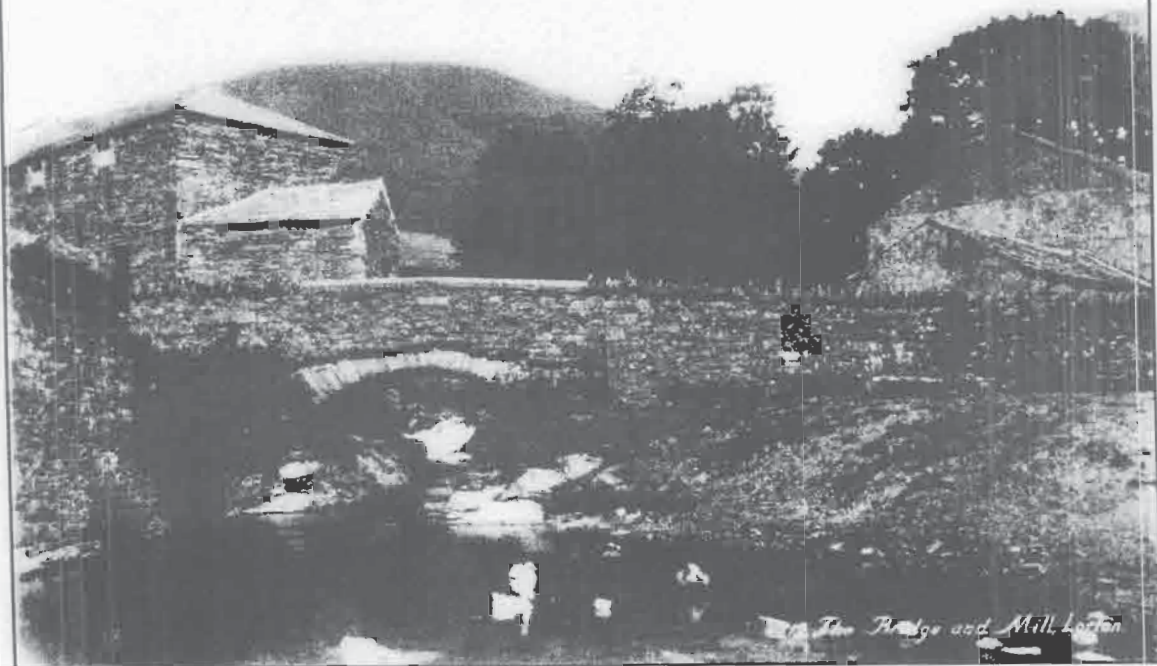


Lorton & Derwent Fells

Local history Society



Two old photographs taken from almost the same position
If you think you can date them, please me know



Secretary's letter

This issue contains an important update from the Lorton Roman Roads Group, partly because its programme is currently on hold; so it seemed a good idea to take this opportunity to show where it has got to. Quite a lot of preparation has gone on and some groundwork has already been done.

Just as a reminder, we are starting in a situation where the only authenticated bit of Roman road in our area is near the old Braithwaite railway station. This was excavated and the results published in the C&WAAS by R J Bellhouse in 1954. The alignment of this road is interesting to us because it points towards the Whinlatter Pass and its extrapolation passes just below the present-day road at the overlook at Noble Knott. So a Roman road *could* have come over Whinlatter to Lorton and then on up to the Roman fort at Papcastle; an extra possibility is that a road could have gone westwards from Lorton over Whinfell and through Dean to the fort at Moresby. It's all informed speculation and, as a start, it would be very exciting if we could prove the route over the Whinlatter. Derek Denman's report brings you up to date.

Incidentally, as a result of the legalities of getting permission to dig for the Roman road, we had to get third party insurance cover and we found the best way to do this was by joining the CBA - the Council for British Archaeology. Membership includes their magazine, not surprisingly called "British Archaeology", and Ron George and I will both get copies of the ten issues per year. The CBA has a good web site (www.britarch.ac.uk/cba/) and I have copied some of the pages; if anyone is interested in learning more about the CBA, please contact me.

We also have the next instalment in the history of the Yew Tree Hall by Walter Head - this takes us up to 1920 and through the very important purchase of the hall for the village.

I would like to mention that William and Ellen Bentsen have gone back to their home in the States. Ellen teamed up with Heather Thompson to record the inscriptions on the monuments and memorial tablets in St Bartholomew's Churchyard in Loweswater and this was covered in the January 1996 Newsletter. This was a really useful bit of local history work and it was fully written up; there is a copy in the Society's archive. We were sorry to see William and Ellen go and I'm sure that all members send their best wishes to them.

We had our AGM in June and, surprise, surprise, the committee and officials were re-elected. Heather Thompson had resigned for family reasons and we welcome Walter Head and Danny Leck on to the committee. May I thank Heather sincerely for all the help and ideas she contributed while she was on the committee. For the record, the committee is now as follows: Ron George (Chairman), Michael Grieve (Secretary and Newsletter Editor), Daphne Holbrook (Treasurer), Mary Findlay, Walter Head, Jeannie Hope and Danny Leck. Ron's annual report, which he gave at the AGM, follows below.

Chairman's report for 1998

Good evening. Once again I stand here as your Chairman to offer you my comment on the past twelve months, and to tell you something of our hopes for the next twelve. I think it has been a very good twelve months. Granted, nothing earth-shaking has happened within our ranks. Granted, nothing very much out of the usual has happened either. I'll leave our Treasurer to tell you about membership. But we have had a year of interesting items, talks and pictures to interest you, the members. Manor courts and mines, land boundaries and seaward boundaries, and potions to wash it all down. A mixed bag!

During the year the Society has done several new things. Most of you will have had a circular from the committee telling you of Dr. Angus Winchester's project to get the Cumberland Victoria History updated and enlarged. He has received pledges for the necessary initial funding to put the project forward to the national project, which went to the Lottery Funding Award Scheme. If the Lottery Fund agrees, the results at our level are not expected until well into 1999. Your Committee is strongly of the opinion that as a local history society, we should support this project financially and will tell you more about this in due course.

Under the title "The Lorton Roman Roads Group", a number of our members have been investigating the presence, or otherwise, of a Roman road over Whinlatter, through the village and over Whinfell. I would like to congratulate them on their energy and dedication to this project, which was carried out in, to say the least, not the best conditions. An initial report appeared in Newsletter 14, investigations are to continue and I understand a fuller report, possibly in the form of a published paper, may follow.

Last year I made brief mention of a Millennium Project involving cuttings to be propagated from the Wordsworth yew tree. Nothing has materialised on this at the time of speaking, but I am advised that the "tree propagator" fellow is coming here early next week. I will keep you advised - I believe one or two of you said you would like to get a young tree from this process. Perhaps you would let me know about this later this evening.

Also during the year, in the name of the Society, your Secretary and I independently dared to comment on several aspects of the Lake District National Park Management Plan. This also was commented on, briefly, in Newsletter 13.

We advertised in the Wythop and Embleton parish magazine, in an attempt to both broaden the membership and the geographical base from which it was drawn, but have not acquired any new members as a result. So once again, if any amongst you have friends in those areas who might be interested in joining us, please bring this Society to their notice.

We have acquired a small "image projector", capable of projecting items other than slides and transparencies. This is available for any of you wishing to give us a talk on your own subjects. And on the question of your own subjects, I want to thank those few, still all too few, members who have produced material for the Newsletters.

There was insufficient interest this past year to run an extra evening event in the form of a Treasure Hunt, but, for later this summer, we are hoping to organise an outing to Danny Leck's at his kind invitation. Details at the next meeting.

It will be incumbent on the new committee to maintain the standard and the interest. But they will need your help. Help in finding and proposing new subjects, and speakers, better still, your active participation in researching - even small areas or items of interest - there is so much worthy of study and report. But above all, the committee needs your help by your being here - a large and reactive audience.

Finally, I must thank very sincerely John Stober for auditing the Accounts and also those valiant ladies, and the occasional gentlemen, who help behind the scenes at our meetings, producing and serving the refreshments and washing up afterwards. We are all in their debt. Nor must I fail to thank the Committee members for their considerable help, encouragement and generally making things run smoothly. So I do this unreservedly, on behalf of all the members.

* * * * *

A few weeks later.....a PS from Ron: With regard to the yew tree project, mentioned in my Chairman's report, I am advised that the "propagator" did come the week after I spoke. I am tempted to say he came surreptitiously: certainly he gave no warning and I never saw him - 'snip', 'snip', 'snip' and he was away. The result of his endeavours is still not known - possibly because yew tree "gestation periods" are very lengthy, but we will follow this up.

The Yew Tree Hall - the early years as a village hall. Part 3: 1919 - 1920

by Walter Head

From June 1910, the premises had been held on a yearly tenancy agreement.

At a public meeting held on 7 May 1919, it was reported that Mr C L Burrows had been in negotiation with Jennings re the purchase of the Yew Tree Hall with the primary object of including the premises in a scheme for a war memorial for Lortonians. The scheme had the approval of the Lorton War Memorial Committee but the persons present at the public meeting were not in favour of the idea and it was not pursued any further.

A meeting of the Yew Tree Hall Management Committee was held on 12 May 1919 when the decisions of the public meeting were discussed. The Committee was of the unanimous opinion that it would be a calamity if the opportunity to purchase the hall was lost and the district deprived of the use of the premises. It was proposed, seconded and resolved that immediate steps be taken to secure the premises for £150 and that Mr Burrows enters into a contract to purchase the premises. The premises were to be offered to the War

Memorial Committee. If the offer was not accepted, then the Yew Tree Hall Management Committee pledged itself to raise the funds required to repay to Mr Burrows the purchase price costs and expenses at the earliest possible date. However, at a meeting of the War Memorial Committee, the views of the public were taken into account and it was decided not to go ahead with the purchase of the Yew Tree Hall as a memorial.

A follow-up YTH meeting was held on 23 May 1919 where it was explained that a draft purchase agreement had been drawn up between Mr Burrows and Jennings and that the YTH Management Committee would be given the option to purchase the premises from Mr Burrows up to 6 months after the conveyance to Mr Burrows. If the option was not exercised within that period, it would continue until Mr Burrows gave 3 months notice of cancellation. This course of action was agreed by the Committee. Following this meeting and discussions, Mr Burrows proceeded to sign a contract with Jennings for the purchase of the premises.

A meeting was convened at 7.30pm on Monday, 29 September 1919 for the purpose of:

1. Considering the desirability or otherwise of taking the opportunity which now occurs, to purchase the Yew Tree Hall for the use of and benefit of the district of Lorton.
2. If the purchase be decided upon, to consider details incidental thereto.

This meeting of 12 named persons, plus others, opened with Mr Pearson in the chair who stated the object of the meeting and then proposed that, because of the poor attendance probably due to the inclement weather, the meeting be adjourned to a later date. By a show of hands, it was agreed to adjourn the meeting until 7.30pm on Friday, 3 October 1919. The adjourned meeting was recommenced on 3 October and was attended by 28 named persons, plus others. Mr Burrows gave a detailed account of his negotiations for the purchase of the hall but said that he had no wish to be the long-term owner. He was now offering the hall to the people of Lorton and district for the sum of £150 plus all costs incurred by him in the purchase. The furniture and loose fittings in the hall were deemed to be the property of the people of Lorton. The following proposal, moved by Mr G Oglethorpe and seconded by Mr B R Burfield, was agreed unanimously:

"That this meeting of the inhabitants of Lorton and district is of the opinion that the opportunity now occurring to purchase the Yew Tree Hall for the benefit of the district of Lorton should be taken advantage of and each person present pledges him or herself to use their best endeavours to further the purchase so that the same may be completed at an early date."

Messrs J D Pearson, Joseph Jackson and G Oglethorpe were appointed by the meeting to be representatives and agents of the inhabitants of the district, with full power to enter into contracts and agreements with Charles L Burrows to conclude the purchase of the Yew Tree Hall. On completion of the purchase of the hall by the people of Lorton, the existing management committee would resign in order that a new management could be decided upon.

In 1919, Rev Lewis made allegations of improper conduct and immorality on the part of persons attending dances or entertainment held in the hall. He was asked by the committee by letter to provide evidence of this or withdraw the allegation. I have no record of the final outcome of this matter.

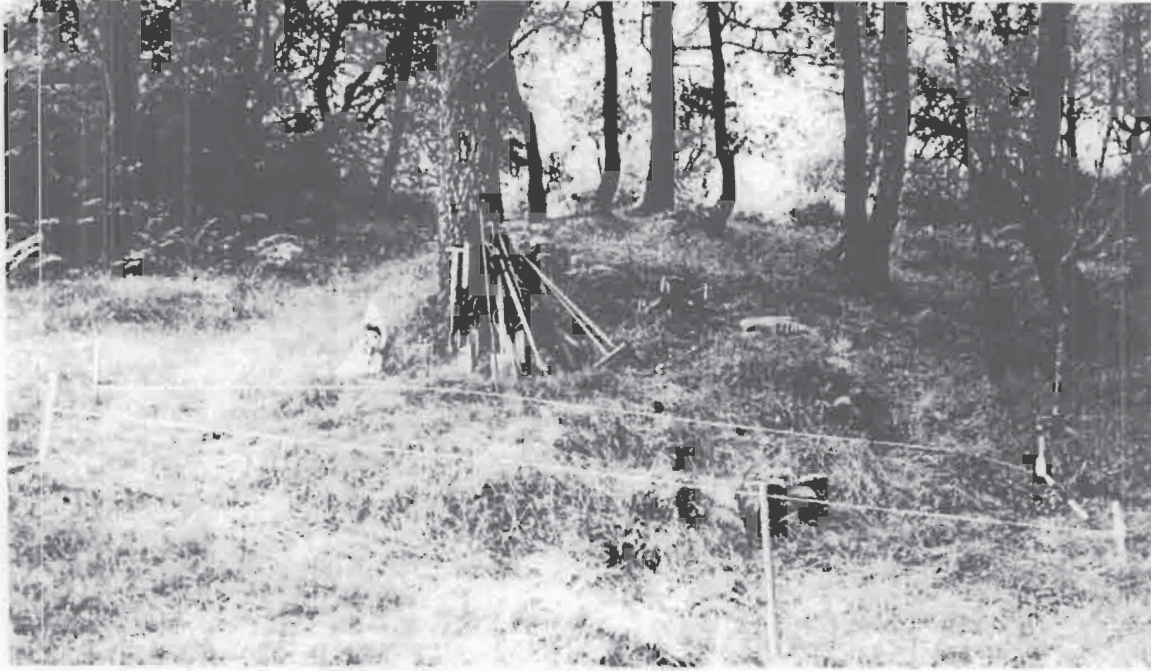
At a meeting held on Saturday, 20 December 1919, it was agreed that the building and contents should be vested in the Parish Council of Lorton in trust for the inhabitants of the parish, but with no powers of control, management, disposal or financial responsibility. It was also agreed that to raise the necessary funds, a Sale of Work would be held and a committee of 34 was appointed to oversee this. The Sale of Work held in June 1920, with a second one in September 1920, produced a sum of £484-12-2 after expenses. A description of these Sales of Work was given in the last Newsletter.

Legal difficulties arose on the proposal that the premises should be conveyed to the Lorton Parish Council as trustees and it was decided at a Conference in December 1920 that the conveyance should be made to the following as trustees: G Oglethorpe, J D Pearson, J Jackson, R Wigham and J D Mitchell.

The purchase of the hall was completed and the premises conveyed to the trustees by a Conveyance dated 29 December 1920. The Deeds and documents relating to the hall were placed in the custody of Waugh and Musgrave, Solicitors.

If anyone knows where any of the War Memorial Committee documents (Minutes etc) can be found, Walter would be very grateful to hear from them.

The Lorton Roman Roads Group - an update by Derek Denman



Everything ready, with the excavation area marked out

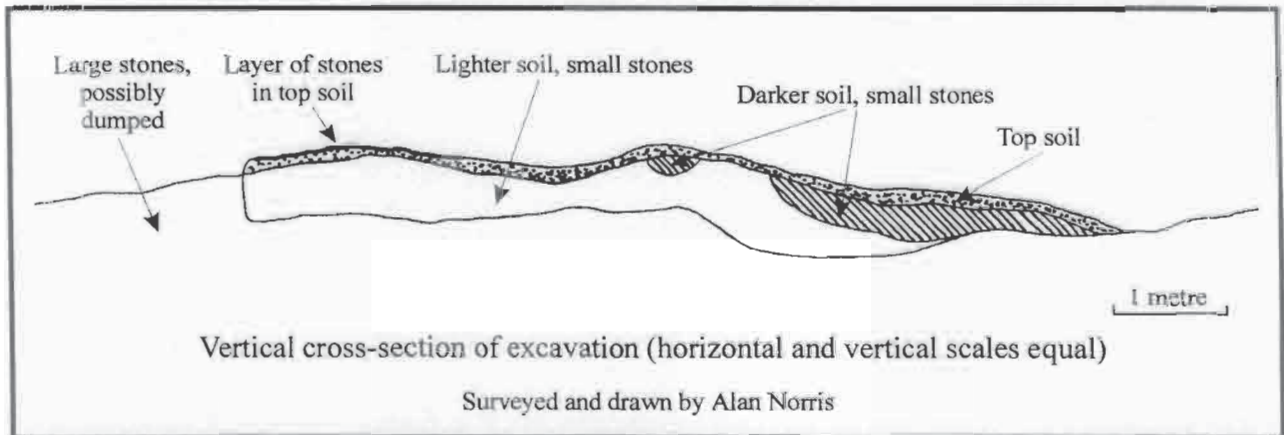
In the last Newsletter I reported that the group had learned a great deal about Romans and their roads but had found little or nothing in Lorton so far. Well I now have to report that the group has made its first excavation in pursuit of a Roman road, admittedly not in Lorton but just in the Derwent Fells which someone wisely attached to the Society's name.

After a lack of success on Whinfell, the group decided to visit a definite stretch of Roman road near Braithwaite ex-railway station and to follow the suggested route (given in "The Roman Route Across The Northern Lake District" by Martin Allan) up the fell alongside Masmill Beck. We were accompanied by Dr Alan Richardson, of Penrith, who has a long record of enthusiastic and successful tracing of Roman roads. We did find the proven stretch at Braithwaite, but the route suggested across the farmland to Hallgarth Farm seemed entirely speculative and from that farm onwards the route proposed was under the modern byway alongside Masmill Beck. It seemed that we would not be able to find evidence of the road going up the fell side towards Lorton. However, as we started to move from Lanehead Farm to Hallgarth Farm, the farmyard was blocked by a large flock of sheep gathered for some process of animal husbandry, and rather than interfere with ritual, this we decided to detour by the public footpath through the woods to find Masmill Beck. As we approached the byway and beck, an agger-like mound was spotted and traces of an old road could be followed up the fell, some fifty metres or so south of the modern byway. Excitement! We had found our first undiscovered Roman-like roadway!

A rough survey has shown that the width of the road and the possible alignments with the Braithwaite section and the Whinlatter Pass all suggest that this is likely to be the Roman route. To help decide if a road is Roman, it is usual to cut a section through it and record its structure, looking for a metalled agger and side ditches. The group obtained permission from the landowner, and after proper research into methods, cut the first section on 5th August. This being our first experience we chose a place where the work would be easiest and we could learn and practise the techniques. We also had a chance to experience what it must have felt like to be a British slave labourer. Unfortunately it was not the best location for finding a metalled agger intact and little was found other than natural soil and stone. However it is very common for little to remain of large stretches of a Roman road and the group will make its second excavation higher up the hill on more level ground, where we will have a better chance of finding a structure. Unfortunately, this must await a detailed survey, which is being prevented by mile-high bracken, and it will be October before the shovels come out again. If the road has been there for 1900 years, it should still be there in October.

So we are much more confident that a Roman road crossed the Whinlatter Pass to Lorton. Where to next? Traditional Roman scholars have always considered the next stop to be the fort at Papcastle, this being a reasonable distance from a fort, yet to be found, at Keswick. From Papcastle, a proven road ran to the fort and Roman port at Maryport, where troops might embark or disembark. But no trace of a road from

Papcastle to Lorton has been found in the past. The group has spent some effort following up the theory by Dr Allan that a road ran from Lorton over Whinfell and then to the Hadrianic fort at Moresby. The foundation for this theory is largely based on the straight roads found on Whinfell. Research has shown that these roads are straight because they are specified to be built straight in the enclosure of 1825. The theory also requires a fort to be built on Whinfell because the distance between Keswick and Moresby is too great for a day's march. Nothing of this route or fort remains on the ground and the reluctant conclusion must be that there is no evidence for a Roman road over Whinfell. The group will next concentrate on the Papcastle option.

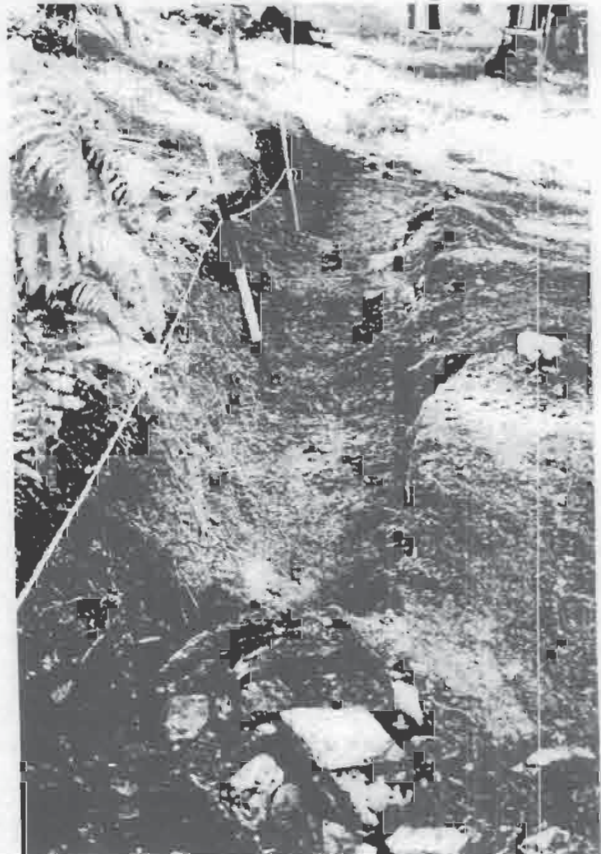


One benefit of this kind of work is the interesting peripheral information which is gathered. At the group's latest meeting, Daphne Holbrook gave a short presentation on Roman signal stations, a shadowy subject not covered in any surviving text, but surmised from the remains of the towers that once existed. As well as hilltop bonfires for simple alarms, it appears that the Romans constructed closely spaced signalling towers along some frontiers, eg Stainmore. These were capable of allowing complex messages to be sent quickly and techniques were believed to exist which allowed Latin text messages to be transferred. Roman technology was quite advanced!

We hope to have a full report on the Whinlatter excavations for the next Newsletter.



Some of the group with root problems



The final trench - the photo doesn't do it justice

Lorton District War Relief Committee

by Walter Head

A Lorton District War Relief Committee, which included Loweswater, Mockerkin, Buttermere and Brackenthwaite, was formed in August 1914 under the chairmanship of Mr George Oglethorpe. It was registered as a charity on 28 October 1916.

This Committee re-emphasised the fact that it was the solemn duty of each and every one, rich and poor, who were unable to bear arms for their country, to do what he or she could do to assist those who were fighting; also to help their dependants and to alleviate the suffering and distress which it was feared would be caused by the war.

The Committee indicated that this could be done by:

- a) Lump sum, weekly or periodic payments, large or small.
- b) The making, or purchase, of garments for soldiers, sailors and the needy.
- c) The provision of hospital appliances and bandages.
- d) Men under 55 years of age forming an ambulance class.
- e) The acceptance into their homes of a convalescent soldier or sailor.

By November 1914, £66 had been received in response to the initial appeal, which was sent to 101 households, of which just under half contributed. Of this amount, £50 was donated to the Prince of Wales Fund and handed to the treasurer of the Cockermouth Petty Sessional Division War Relief Fund.

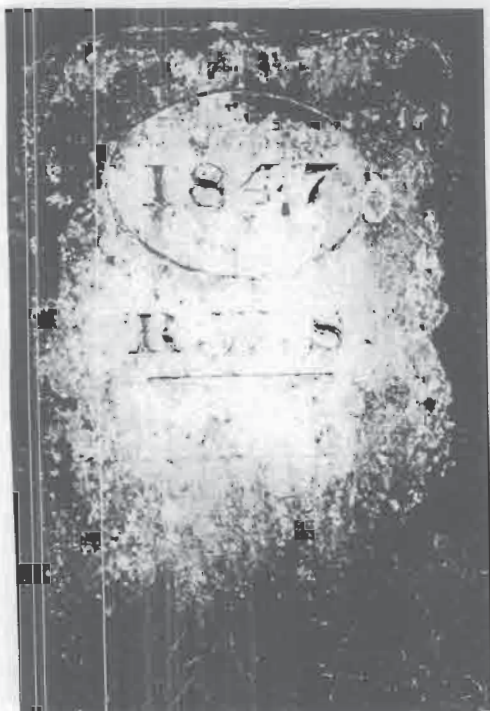
A whist drive and a whist drive and dance were held in 1916 which raised £20. This was donated to the Women's War Work Party with the stipulation that £6 should be devoted to soldiers serving from Lorton.

In May 1919, a balance of £20 was left in the fund. This was given to Mrs Walker, widow of the late John Walker of Low Lorton and the Committee disbanded.

Once again, the tale of two stones

by Michael Grieve

I'm sure that members will remember that, a couple of years ago, one of our speakers mentioned two stones which were standing near the road, near to the top of the Whinlatter Pass; he asked if anyone knew anything about them. I subsequently found one of the stones and included a photograph in the September 1997 Newsletter; but, until recently, I haven't been able to find the other. A few weeks ago, my wife Vivien caught sight of a stone at Noble Knott and wondered whether it could be the other one - and it was! It is almost straight over the road from the ice-cream van that parks in the overlook there!



Both stones have R.W.S. on them, the one just to the east of the Cottage in the Woods has 1846 on it and the one at Noble Knott has 1847 on it. Earlier, I wondered - not seriously - if the 1846 could be a distance in kilometres from Rome but the second stone knocks that idea on the head. And, for the record, the positions of the two stones are GR 21462455 and GR 22322443.



So we now have the details on the two stones that Hugh Turner queried with us. Any ideas, anybody, what they were for?

An excerpt from "The History of the County of Cumberland" by William Hutchinson (1794)

Chapelry of Lowfwater.

EXTENT.] About seven miles from north to south; and from east to west three miles and a half.

This chapelry contains many high and rocky mountains, yet has fertile vales, with several woodlands and rivers.

SOIL AND PRODUCE.] The mountains are in general rocky and dry, the inclosed land is light and gravelly, and is fertile in the production of oats and potatoes; a little barley and some wheat is grown, but few turnips, although the soil seems proper for the latter; for, notwithstanding the wild and mountainous situation, the tillage land lying low and warm, sheltered on every side by high hills which reflect the sun's rays, the climate is rendered very temperate. A great part of the inclosures are in grafs; and much butter and cheefe are made.

RENTS.] The average per acre is about 14s.

SHEEP AND CATTLE.] About 5700 sheep are kept in this chapelry, six of the fleeces will weigh a stone, which sells for 7s. 6d.—Horses are fourteen hands and a half high.—Black cattle bred here weigh about ten stone a quarter.

LAKES.] Lowfwater and Crummock; the former about a mile in length, and a quarter of a mile in breadth; and has pike, trout, bafs, and eels.—The latter lies about a mile to the south, and is nearly two miles in length, and half a mile in breadth; and has pike, trout, bafs, eels, and char.

GAME, &c.] Grouse, hares, and partridge; many wild ducks in the lakes in winter.—On the fells marts, foxes, and wild cats. About six years ago there were red deer on the hills, which probably had bred there for ages.

RIVERS, &c.] The river Cocker divides this parish from Lorton.—There are several small streams of very pure water. At a place called *Scalesforce* or *Highforce*, a brook descends from a rocky mountain in one fall near 180 feet perpendicular. It is truly picturesque.—The lands of part of the chapelry are held under the Earl of Egremont as lord of the manor, and other part under Sir Wilfrid Lawfon.

SCHOOLS.] One near the church unendowed.—At Mockerton, Mary Moorhouse, widow, a lady of an ancient and respectable family, built and endowed a school in the year 1782, for ten poor children. The stipend arises from the interest of 200l. invested in trust for that purpose.

ROAD.] From Egremont to Keswick, very dry and good.

ESTATES.] In this chapelry generally small, from 20l. to 40l. a year; two or three about 100l. a year. They are occupied by the owners.

GENERAL APPEARANCE.] The mountains are very high and rocky, several of them in some points of view appear conical, and rise from their base so rapidly, that on some sides they cannot be ascended. On the sides and skirts of these fells grow several trees and much brushwood, which afford great ornament to the landscape. The arable land is pretty level, and runs close up to the feet of the mountains. The fences are chiefly of quickwood and earth mounds, wherein many trees grow, of different kinds. The inclosures are pretty regular, and buildings are uncommonly good. Upon the whole, much of this tract affords as beautiful and romantic retirements as any part of Cumberland, or the north of England.

MANNERS OF THE INHABITANTS.] Many of the natives are people of property, of course have received a tolerable education, and have been somewhat from home; but I found a number who had been debarr'd that enjoyment, and who had seldom travelled beyond their sheep-heafs, had seen no people but their neighbours, and no country but their vales and surrounding mountains.—Their ideas are simple, and their notions confined to narrow rules of nature: yet honesty, integrity, and heart-felt happiness are no strangers to this sequestered land. The people live in harmony, and they express contentment. The peasantry have one enjoyment here, which is prohibited to most men of their class. Through the liberality of their lords, a hound is kept in almost every house; two or three qualified inhabitants take licence to kill game and command the pack. As soon as harvest is in, an honest cobbler shifts his garb and becomes huntsman, and every second or third morning collects the dogs, and calls the sportsmen to the field: the cottagers climb the mountain's side, where they can view the chace, and, without much exertion, enjoy the pleasure of the hunt: after which they retire with cheerful minds and invigorated constitutions to their peaceful homes, and do not end the days of sport in revelling and riot, like the sportsmen of the plains. How odious do the game laws appear when held up to this picture of nature!—**HOUSMAN'S NOTES.**

This is one of the many informative footnotes written for the History by John Housman.

Future meetings this year

- 10 September 'The history of policing in Cumbria' by David Garner who is the Curator of the Cumbria Constabulary Police Museum
- 12 November Presentation of old local Wills and Probate Inventories by Ron George