

Lorton & Derwent Fells

Local history Society

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
County of Cumberland,

AND SOME
PLACES ADJACENT,

FROM THE
EARLIEST ACCOUNTS TO THE PRESENT TIME:

COMPREHENDING

The Local History of the County ;

ITS ANTIQUITIES, THE ORIGIN, GENEALOGY, AND PRESENT STATE OF THE
PRINCIPAL FAMILIES,

WITH

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES ;

ITS MINES, MINERALS, AND PLANTS, WITH OTHER CURIOSITIES,
EITHER OF NATURE OR OF ART.

Particular Attention is paid to, and a just Account given of every Improvement in Agriculture,
Manufactures, &c. &c.

BY WILLIAM HUTCHINSON, F. A. S.

AUTHOR OF THE HISTORY OF DURHAM, &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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MDCXCIV.

Secretary's letter

It is with much sadness that Ron George and I report the deaths of two of our founder members. They are Alan Wigham, whose family goes back over 150 years in Lorton and Betsy Brown, who was perhaps the oldest "off-comer". Both were staunch supporters of the Society and attended all meetings until illness prevented it. We shall sorely miss them both.

In this issue, we have a full article researched and written by Ron George. It is about a subject close to our hearts(?) but it still leaves some questions unanswered, so there is plenty of scope for more work by someone else. Walter Head's articles about the Yew Tree Hall move into the time when the hall had been bought from Jennings and he ends this one with the first connecting up of electricity. Walter has also provided another article for this Newsletter, which he has called "Dialect and Accents" and this mentions the Lake District Dialect Society; I came across an article about this society many years ago but had completely forgotten about it.



I have a little duty to perform now - which I do with much pleasure. Last year our Chairman, Ron George, heard from Lancaster University that, based on a research project that he had submitted to them, he had been awarded a Certificate in Local History with a Pass with Commendation. I'm sure that we all express our warm congratulations to Ron.

MSG

"When I was a lad"

The visit to Danny Leck's farm had to be postponed last year due to the weather, but it has been re-arranged for **Thursday, 27 May** starting at 7pm at Waterend Farm. There will be the option of refreshments at the Grange Hotel afterwards. It will be interesting walk around and if you're interested, please put the date in your diary/organiser/whatever!

Before that, on **Thursday, 13 May**, we have, appropriately, "Evolution of farming methods in Cumbria" by Mr A Humphries who is from Newton Rigg. And, because the Euro elections are taking place on the second Thursday of June, our AGM will now be held a week earlier on **Thursday, 3 June**.

The Yew Tree Hall history - 1921 to 1926 by Walter Head

The period 1921 to 1926 was a busy period for the new Board of Management who had taken over the running of the Yew Tree Hall from the old Management Committee following the purchase of the hall in December 1920. The new Board of Management held their first meeting on 21 January 1921 with the following members:

J D Pearson	Chairman	Mrs C L Burrows
C L Burrows	Hon Sec and Treasurer	J H Stoddart
J W Towers		G Oglethorpe
J J Lennox		J Jackson

The deeds and documents were in the custody of Waugh & Musgrave, Solicitors, who returned their fee of £8-10-0 (£8.50) as a donation to the hall. The fee was for work carried out in conjunction with the Conveyance and Deeds of Trust. Mrs Sharrocks was Caretaker and paid £3 per annum, which was increased to £4 in 1925. The building was insured with North British and Mercantile Insurance for £500 at a cost of 14/6 (72p) but "cinematography exhibitions" were not allowed unless prior notice was given. The cash balance was £347-1-4 (£347.07). £300 of 5% War Bonds were purchased at 87½% for a total cost of £262-8-6 (£262.42) which yielded £15 interest for 1921 which was put into a reserve account. A detailed inspection of the building by Mr Stoddart and Mr Lennox revealed the following, which required urgent attention:

1. Putty on many windows
2. Cracks in the concrete floor which required cutting out and filling with new concrete
3. Roof of abutment in bad order
4. Defective downspout
5. Foundation stones of the building and wall of the garden washed out
6. Some eaves slabs to be reset
7. All inside walls required distempering
8. Paper on dado rail required stripping off.

The Board accepted an estimate submitted by Mr Stoddart of £26-17-0 (£26.85) for internal decoration and £5-0-0 for external painting. The work would be guaranteed for five years or made good at Mr Stoddart's own cost.

The major repair was item 5, which could only be carried out when the river was at a very low level. Walker Bros of Cockermouth suggested repairs to the foundations by inserting bags of concrete in the areas washed away and estimated two tons of concrete would be required at an approximate cost of £15. The removal of the large stones and obstructions from the channel of Whit Beck revealed the damage to the foundations to be more serious than at first thought. Mr Benson senior advised the insertion of large stones keyed in and the rebuilding of the former protecting wall on the old foundations to protect the main foundations of the hall. The work was carried out in early July 1921 at a total cost of £18-14-0 (£18.70) and only three bags of cement were used.

Water was leaking into the hall at the point where the stove pipes went through the roof. These were made watertight and the damaged plaster in the Supper Room ceiling repaired.

The new scale of charges for 1921:		
Smoke Room	2-0	(10p)
Supper Room		
	2-0	(10p)
Whole building		
Lectures - free admission	5-0	(25p)
Lectures - with entrance fee	10-0	(50p)
Concert	10-0	(50p)
Whist Drive	10-0	(50p)
Ball	15-0	(75p)
Concert and Ball	1-0-0	(£1)
Whist Drive and Ball	1-0-0	(£1)
Travelling entertainments	15-0	(75p)
Political meetings	15-0	(75p)
School treats	10-0	(50p)
Whole day use	1-0-0	(£1)
If required for decorating purposes		
prior to a Ball etc (per night)	2-6	(12½p)
Reservation or booking fee	2-6	(12½p)

Water continued to be supplied to the hall from Sandholm Field, owned by Jane Pearson, for a payment of 1/- pa (5p) but repairs to the pipe were required at a cost of £1-17-6 (£1.87). Mrs Moffat was charged 2/6 pa (12p) for use of the garden plot of land. In 1921 Mrs Moffat purchased the old brewery building and requested permission to tap into the water pipe, which fed the hall to provide water for herself and her cottages. This was done by means of a standpipe and she agreed to share the cost of any future repairs to the pipe.

The partition and doorway at one side of the men's cloakroom were removed and used to make a storage cupboard under the stairs and the landing to the ladies' cloakroom was also repaired.

In 1922 there were meetings of the Juvenile Branch of the Scale Force Lodge of Oddfellows and the Primrose League and of the Women's Institute who paid a special rate of £2-2-0 pa (£2.10). 1922 saw the first recorded meeting of the Mothers' Union and the Lorton Village Club was formed with a Committee comprising G Scott, M Needham, R Wigham, R Pope and J Eland. The Lorton Village Club paid £2-10-0 pa (£2.50) plus the cost of heating and lighting for exclusive use of the Smoke Room as far as practicable from 6pm to 10pm all year round.

It cost 7/6 (37p) to have the piano tuned and a balance weight and chain were fitted to the lamps over the platform at a cost of 15/- (75p). The wooden floor in the kitchen was replaced by concrete and an external door into the basement was constructed at a cost of £10-10-0 (£10.50). Storage of cycles in the basement during attendance at a function was now available at 3d (1p) per cycle per evening. £5-10-0 (£5.50) was spent on a 10 gallon (45 litre) portable boiler for the kitchen. In order to brighten up the hall, six pictures at prices from 5/- (25p) to 15/- (75p) were purchased from Hugo Lang of Liverpool.

In 1923 the Lorton Village Club wanted to install a billiard table in the hall but this required costly alterations so the billiard table was finally installed in Low Lorton in rooms formally used as a reading room and billiards room. The Yew Tree Hall loaned the Lorton Village Club nine chairs for use in the billiards room.

Storms caused damage to the hall roof and floods damaged the water supply pipe where it crossed Whit Beck.

In 1925 the water supply pipe to the hall was extended to take water to troughs in Broom Field and the School Field, both of which were part of the Boonbeck Estate. To improve the lighting, £1-3-3 (£1.16) was

spent on two single burner wall lamps and one duplex burner, together with associated spares. A stairway was constructed from the men's cloakroom to the kitchen and a men's urinal was built outside in the yard. The emptying of sanitary pails was carried out at 1/- (5p) per occasion, later changed to 5/- pa (25p).

Fifty wooden chairs were purchased at 4/10 each (24p) and two six-gallon (27 litres) tea urns at 18/9 each (94p). Also, £11-3-8 (£11.18) was spent on new crockery (see panel). The hire charges for crockery were 5/- per night (25p) for local people, 7/6 per night (37p) for up to 100 pieces for outside organisations and 10/- per night (50p) for a full set of crockery for outside organisations.

The insurance on the building was progressively increased from £500 in 1921, to £600 plus £100 for contents in 1922, to £850 plus £150 for contents in 1926.

New crockery purchased in 1925:		
8 dozen gents' teacups	2-0-0	(£2)
8 dozen ladies' teacups	1-14-0	(£1.70)
3 sugar and cream jugs	1-16-0	(£1.80)
6 B&B plates	1-4-0	(£1.20)
2 teapots	1-5-0	(£1.25)
6 water jugs	5-0	(25p)
21 glass dishes	19-3	(96p)
16 dozen plates	1-6-8	(£1.33)
15 dozen glass dishes	13-9	(69p)

By 1926, all this refurbishment had been a drain on resources and although money was invested in War Loan Stock, the actual cash in hand balance showed a deficit of £5-2-6 (£5.12). Still wishing to improve the hall amenities, the board of Management decided to install electric lighting. £150 of War Loan Stock was sold to finance the venture, which yielded £150-16-6 nett (£150.82). Capt CLC Hodgson of Tenters offered to supply electricity from his private generating plant at 6p (2½p) per unit. [Note: there were also private generating plants at Rogerscale and Armaside] In the absence of Capt Hodgson, Mr JH Stoddart, Alf Wise, Thomas Stoddart, George Scott and R Wigham were nominated and trained to operate the generating plant if required. J H Stoddart was in control of the electric supply inside the hall (meter, fuse boxes etc). Two larch poles were supplied free of charge by Mr Stanley Dodgson and erected on land owned by Jane Pearson and Wm Baxter to carry the overhead cables to the hall. The County Council insisted that a guard, or cradle, was put under the cable where it crosses Boonbeck Bridge. The installation of electric fittings etc was carried out by Robert Wild of Cockermouth for £100. Other tenders submitted were from John Ellwood of Whitehaven for £98-2-7 (£98.13), Tile Electric Illuminating Company of Carlisle for £81-10-0 (£81.50) and Drake Gordon of Manchester for £124-10-0 (£124.50). **Electric lighting was used in the Hall for the first time on 28 October 1926.**

WEAP

★ Three requests for information ★

WEAP

☞ Does anyone have any information on the **Scale Force Lodge of Oddfellows**? If so, please contact Walter Head on 01900 85697.

☞ Lyn Howsam, who is a country member, is searching for the marriage of John Johnstone, who was possibly born in Cockermouth, to Hannah Key, who was baptised on 3 November 1774 at Lorton. Their son, Thomas Johnstone, was baptised at Cockermouth in 1798 but Lyn can find no further trace of the couple. In addition, Lyn is also researching Key and Bove families in the Lorton - Loweswater area, before the 1780s. Any information please on either of these topics to Mrs Lyn Howsam, "Ty Allyn", 8 Far View Road, Sheffield, S5 7TB.

☞ Another country member, Keith Sadler, has been researching his mother's family tree; she was a Hodgson, born in Workington in 1897. His grandfather was John Hodgson and his g-grandfather was Cooper Hodgson, born in Brigham in 1825 and died there in 1891. His g-g-grandfather was William Hodgson, born in Schoose in 1796 who later moved to Brigham where he married in 1820 and had 6 children by his first marriage and 7 by his second. He died in retirement in Flimby in 1871. Whilst in Brigham, he is described in the 1841 and 1851 censuses as a yeoman farmer with 95 acres; Keith has been unable to trace this land - there is only reference to his field and paddock at Brigham in his will which he has identified on an 1825 map as being opposite the school and less than an acre in size. His g-g-g-grandfather was William(?) Hodgson who married Ann Cowper in 1792 in Lorton church and he might have worked on the Curwen experimental farm at Schoose. Any clues or information please to Keith Sadler, 44 Wrottesley Road, Tettenhall, Wolverhampton WV6 8SF.

Thanks

Dialect and Accents by Walter Head

The Lake District Dialect Society, which is dedicated to keeping alive the district's traditional speech, celebrated its diamond jubilee in 1998. One of the reasons for the study and speaking of dialect is that it enables us to recall our forefathers, their ways, sayings and doings.

On 21 April 1923, Fred Head, son of Thomas and Jane Head of Low Hollins Farm in Brackenthwaite, sailed from Liverpool aboard the RMS Montcalm to a new life in Canada. He had served in the Cavalry Machine Gun Company in the Royal Dragoon Guards during the first world war and now followed two brothers who had already emigrated to Canada; they were John to Saskatchewan in 1910 and Joseph to British Columbia in 1920. Fred settled in the farming region of Saskatchewan, reasonably close to his brother John, and married in 1940 and raised a family. The original farm house is now one of Canada's listed National Heritage Sites. None of the brothers ever returned or visited England again. Fred died in 1984 aged 85, Joseph in 1986 aged 84 and John also died in 1986 aged 97. (An extract from a letter sent by Fred appeared in Newsletter No 9 in September 1996).

74 years later in 1997, another Vale of Lorton family emigrated to Canada, Mike and Joyce Shield, Mike being the son of John and Amy Shield of Scales Farm. Mike and Joyce settled on a farm in Alberta.

In 1998, Mike was visited on his farm by an agricultural engineer who remarked "You talk with an accent, just like my Dad used to talk". Mike enquired where the man's father was from and was told Cumberland, England, a place called Low Hollins Farm at Lorton. To which Mike replied "I was born and raised only a few miles from Low Hollins". The visitor turned out to be Walter Head, son of Fred Head who had emigrated in 1923 and who never lost his Cumbrian accent.

* * * * *

Here's an excerpt from William Hutchinson's "The History of the County of Cumberland", 1794, Vol II, page 120, which shows the descriptive terms used by writers of that time.

WHINLATER ROAD.

Led on in the progress of this work by the alluring objects on the sea coast, where trade and navigation interest the mind so greatly, we have left behind us a large tract of country within the limits of Allerdale ward above Derwent, where a multitude of scenes form a striking contrast to those we have lately traversed.

We shall therefore make our further progress from the *Whinlater road*, as the traveller passing from Bassenthwaite and Kefwick is commonly directed thither in his way to Whitehaven, when he is led to visit the beauties of this country.

The steep and alpine passes of *WHINLATER* form an ascent of five miles, up stupendous heights, by a winding path, contrived in an excellent manner, passing round the foot of the mountains, and taking the course of every little valley, to render the advance more gradual. In some parts you catch the prospect of small recesses, where some cottages stand in a solitude romantic and highly pastoral: in other parts you look down from such tremendous precipices, on whose brink you are travelling, that, from the windows of a carriage, the aspect and situation are alarming. The lake of Bassenthwaite looks from thence like a gloomy abyss, and the vale above Kefwick, with the lake of Derwentwater, appeared to us as enchanted ground; where the scene seemed realized, which was imagined by the ingenious author of the tale of the Prince of Abyssinia, in which the young hero of his narrative was held, secluded from the busy world, by encircling mountains.—Skiddaw, shrouded with vapours, appeared to nod his drowsy head; and innumerable eminences, one behind another, pushed their fronts to the view, and crowded the horizon with enormous objects. From this pass, where the road becomes more level, you are inclosed by mountains on each hand, at whose feet the path lies, and whose summits are not to be reached by the traveller's eye who passes so immediately under them, as they rise almost perpendicularly. A fine verdure covers most of them, and they afford excellent sheep-walks; others are barren, bleak, and shivery, sending down continued streams of sand, slates, and stones, with every shower of rain. The contrast makes these vast objects agreeable to the eye.

Suddenly you emerge from this gigantic scene into

THE VALE OF LORTON,

through which the river Cocker runs,—a theatre formed of stupendous heights, about three miles in diameter, beautified with rich meadows, eminences covered with wood, and scattered hamlets: whilst here and there perpendicular and lofty cliffs burst from the sides of the surrounding mountains.

A LORTON MYSTERY

or

"An interesting piece of research for someone who wishes to feature in the annals of Lorton's History"

by Ron George

The true beginning of this story is not known - it's lost in the dust of time. The year of the beginning, which is generally known to the public, can be dated exactly to 1815. Does that set any bells ringing? I'm speaking of a publication and the date of composition was 1803. Does that help you place my subject? The author was born in April 1770 in Cockermouth.

William Wordsworth. Of course!!! Now you may ask, what is the mystery? Well there are several, and they are all connected with the YEW TREE. Did I hear a groan? Oh, NOT THAT YEW TREE AGAIN!!! Bear with me.

I suppose the most recent mystery was why in about 1995, '96 or even '97 (I seem to have misplaced or lent the newspaper cutting), a certain Mr. Pakenham wrote in a Sunday newspaper article that he had visited this village and surrounding area and found that nobody knew where "Wordsworth's" yew was, and had himself been unable to find it. He repeated this allegation in a terrible programme broadcast by the BBC in 1998, and if that wasn't bad enough, repeated on BBC2 on 7th January 1999. Did any reader see it?

There are other interesting and unanswered questions, but let me go back to February 1990. The reader should take due note of this date, 1990. Let it be clearly understood - I do not personally have any great interest in this or any other yew tree. But I was intrigued by the historical questions raised regarding this particular tree and its influence on village life here. A smouldering interest had been created when helping my wife in our village tea shop. Occasionally a visitor, usually American, would enquire in one of their regional drawls "Say - where's this famous Wordsworth yew tree?"

This interest was triggered into action by a letter I received out of the blue. It came to me via the Mayor of Cockermouth and Leslie Harris as Chairman of the Parish Council. Thank you, Leslie. It originated from a gentleman rejoicing in the name of Hal Hartzell in Oregon. He was writing a book about yew trees and asked specifically for any information about "William Wordsworth and the Lorton Vale yew" and in particular - and this is the all-important trigger - the chair that was carved out of the fallen top for Mr. Wordsworth by the citizens of Lorton Vale". WOW!!

I don't need to tell you I started asking questions myself and found precious few answers in Lorton, none in fact. Nobody knew of the existence of the chair - but everybody, and I mean just everybody, was happy to tell me where the tree was. In addition to telling me where the

tree 'was at', one of the guides at Wordsworth House in Cockermouth told me that there was such a chair which belonged to the Council. It had been kept at Wordsworth House for some years for lack of room during changes at the Council offices, and was now back there.

So, off I went to the Council Offices. Did anyone know about the chair? Of course not. Eventually someone suggested we look in the Council Chamber. There, at the head of the table, the Chairman's seat was a fine armchair, and on the back a tiny brass plate admitting in an engraved legend "Wordsworth's Chair" - nothing more. And round the room, from at least 1965, are photographs of successive Chairmen sitting in that very same chair. I sat in it myself - but unfortunately there was no one there to take my photograph.

Mission accomplished! Not at all - having established the existence of the chair, it still remained to discover who, when and how it was presented to Wordsworth, and how it got to be where it now was. Indeed it suddenly appeared necessary to show that it really had been made from the Lorton yew.

I enquired of those in charge of the Wordsworth properties, Dove Cottage and Rydal Mount. I eventually got a letter back from Jonathan Wordsworth, then in the USA and the Curator at Rydal Mount, to the effect that there "ain't no such thing" in any of the houses, in any of the Rydal Mount auction catalogues or mention in Wordsworth's Will, and they had no knowledge of any chair ever having been presented to Wordsworth.

A note in the "Link" (the Parish magazine), which some of you may remember, produced a positive lead from a resident in Cockermouth, who also has a similar though less ornate chair of the same timber. Through this kind individual, I was led to a report in the "Whitehaven News" of 1952. At the auction of Rheda Mansion, Frizington, and I quote "A handsome armchair carved from the Lorton Yew, which had been exhibited at the Crystal Palace Exhibition" was offered". We progress.....



Postcard by G P Abraham (1930s?)

Later, I uncovered in the "Evening Mail" of 13th October 1966, the following report, and again I quote "A wonderful family chair was accepted by Cockermouth Urban Council from the Trout Hotel after enquiries by Ernest Jennings, Town clerk. Until about 1940, the chair was at Burroughs, Papcastle, home of the Waugh family. When Miss Waugh died, the chair was bought for £50 by Mr. and Mrs. Eland, proprietors of the Lakes Hotel (now the Trout). Mr. Isaac Hodgson, an expert, aged 78, said the chair came from the Lorton yew. As a boy he remembered his elders talking about wood from the Lorton yew being used for ornamental furniture, dressing table, balustrades and trinkets". He is also quoted as saying he estimated the chair at between 120 and 150 years old, but it seems to me that Hodgson was adding two and two and making the answer the desired four.

So far we seem to have a "Wordsworth chair" made from our Lorton yew before the 1851 Exhibition, but we still have not a 'when, how or why', nor how it got from the Lakes Hotel to Rheda Mansion. Notwithstanding the reported dates just given, it would seem more logical that, at some time, the chair went from Lorton or Cockermouth to Rheda; and at this point we note that, although the tree was not on Lorton Hall property, Thomas Dixon of Lorton Hall (part of which is now Winder Hall) was the brother of Dixon who owned Rheda at Frizington. From divers Parish, Census and Manorial records, I believe the close containing the tree was in the hands of Robert Stubbs between 1813 and at least 1822, then Martha Stubbs in 1840, and subsequently Robinson certainly from 1851 until sometime after 1861. This appears not to help but, wait, help is at hand.

The oft quoted 1891 lecture by John Bolton, talking about the village in 1810 and after, offers yet another twist to this much convoluted story. Bolton reports that "Mr Stubbs cut down a great many large limbs and sold it to make weaver's shuttles," and he goes on "I believe Miss Sims had some furniture made out of a portion of it and Mr Grayson has in his possession some furniture made from it". If this is true, we have "Wordsworth yew furniture" in existence in 1891. Unfortunately I have no trace of this Miss Sims or Mr Grayson in my archive of Lorton parish at that time. We shall need to look for them elsewhere.

Let us go back to where we started - the tree. Everyone knows of Wordsworth's poem, even if they can't recite it, and I am not going to bore you with it now except:

"which to this day stands single, in the midst
Of its own darkness, as it stood of yore . . .
. . . perhaps at Crecy or Poitiers . . .
.

Of form and aspect too magnificent
To be destroyed....."

Wordsworth, at least, thought it to be very ancient and of an implied immortality. In my research, I have come up with the following, the details of which may or may not be accurately applied here - the figures depend very much on location and other local and varying circumstances but: the preferred soil for yews is chalk or limestone. It is customary to measure the girth at four feet above ground level, at which point a girth of 12 feet is reckoned to be 300 years old, and 30 feet to be 2,400 years old. At present 'our' yew measures about 17 feet girth at 4 feet above present ground level. Incidentally, we might reasonably ask ourselves "Has the ground always been at this level?"

Taking the above relationship between age and growth, a very conservative estimate of the Lorton yew would be some 900 years, and if we take Robinson's measurement as measured round the lower limb that was subsequently broken off in the gale, we can add another thousand years

to the age. And if that is true we have a truly double millennium tree with which to celebrate this millennium. In this context, resulting from correspondence initiated by this Society, a large number of cuttings were taken from the tree by the Conservation Foundation. It is expected that from these, a number of little second generation "Wordsworth yews", grown by that Foundation and purchased by village residents, will be planted around this valley during the next two years. So, in future years of the second millennium, people will not be able to say they do not know where a "Wordsworth yew" is, not even Mr. Pakenham.



1887 (Professor Knight)

So - was Wordsworth right? What I wonder gave him the inspiration to write that poem. Whilst talking about his poem, my research threw up another interesting snippet of information. The poet writes of the tree with wonderful poetic licence, and quite possibly with absolute truth: "Not loth to furnish weapons for the bands. . . and drew their sounding bows at Agincourt . . ."

Various writers argue that the wood of the yew was far superior to any other wood for the longbow, and no doubt our poet knew of this preference by writers, if not of the bowmen. But a recent authority of stature, Dr. Oliver Rackham in his "History of the Countryside", says:

"Nor do I have any evidence for the tradition that yews were grown for longbows" and "Elm poles made the second-best bows, the best being Spanish or Venetian yew." I wonder what Robin Hood used?

Now the last thing I claim to know anything about is poetry, so I can not pass critical comment on Wordsworth's poem. But for me, John Bolton, who was for some years a teacher at Lorton school, wrote a more satisfactory poem as it seems more representative of what I see now, and what I suspect is close enough to what Wordsworth saw. Bolton was buried on Boxing Day at Cockermouth in 1915:

"Here by the stream it stands alone,

.

It stands the pride of Lorton still,
Although its glory's done,
For centuries its seen yon hill
Reflect the ev'ning sun.

.

But, Ah, the sport of time and wind
'Twill die and fall at last."

Can it be that when Bolton wrote that poem, published in the West Cumberland Times sometime after 1874, that he was aware of something Wordsworth couldn't know, and I have recently rediscovered - storm damage? But let us, as the French say "return to our sheep" in this case, yews. (I apologise for the pun).

In 1887, Wilson Robinson of Whinfell Hall wrote to Professor Knight:

"I once measured the least circumference at 23 feet 10 inches . . . for the last 50 - 60 years, branches have been gradually dying on the South East side, and about 25 years ago a strong south-easterly gale wrenched off one of the great side branches down to the ground, carrying one third of the tree . . . a second portion was sold to a cabinet-maker at Whitehaven for £15, and a local wood-monger bought the remainder, but a Cockermouth medical gentleman . . . saved the tree . . . now it is but a ruin, much more venerable than picturesque".

We note that Robinson's 50 - 60 years goes back to a time when Wordsworth was aged and no longer visiting this area. Could these 'dying branches on the south-east side' be those which Stubbs removed? The damage 'about 25 years ago' was long after Wordsworth's death. That some timber was sold for £15 to a cabinet-maker rings true and ties in with our supposition about the date the chair was made.

Bolton would probably have known all this because Professor Knight published his book "Through Wordsworth Country" in 1887, quoting Robinson's letter together with a lithograph of the tree and the Jennings Brewery buildings in the background.

In 1898, Mr. E. Bogg published his own "Lakeland and Ribblesdale" with another but very similar lithograph of the tree, again with the brewery in the background. In both these publications the pictures are labelled "Pride of Lorton Vale", thus reflecting William's description of the tree.

There is one further wrinkle to this convoluted history. I was given a letter by the Cockermouth Librarian, which came from "The Tree Register of the British Isles" in 1995. The writer asked for comment on a newspaper clipping regarding "a large yew in the vicinity of Cockermouth". You may well laugh, as the clipping was undated and of unknown origin, but presumed to be 18th or early 19th century as the print used the long 'esses'. It speaks of large sums being offered for the tree by a cabinet-maker to furnish a 'noble-man's country seat', but intriguingly adds that in 1769, the late Duke of Portland sent a surveyor to make a drawing of it.

That is all very interesting, and the date of death of the Duke, which I have not sought, puts the publication between his death and 1769; but there is no way we can tie that to the Lorton yew with any confidence at all.

That, I believe, is as far as we can go with the information now available. When and by whom was the chair made, why is it labelled "Wordsworth's Chair" and was the plaque the reason it has it been called the "Wordsworth's Chair" in later documents, and the origin of the misunderstanding? The chair was never presented to the poet, but in view of being exhibited in 1851, may have been made before his death, using timber from the

damaged tree. How did it get from the maker to Rheda Mansion and then the Waughs? Where are the other objects supposedly made from the same tree? I was once told that the Lorton school teacher's desk had been fashioned from the Lorton yew timber, by Joseph Barns who, it so happened, married Mary Hodgson the daughter of Isaac, whose information we quoted earlier. However, the existence of this desk has since been denied, though it does not follow that it never existed. As a thought, since Joseph and Mary had a daughter Clara, who married Robert Wigham, perhaps the present Wigham generation has an inkling of whether or not that desk ever existed. Following up all these exciting questions for a final answer would be an interesting exercise, but it is no longer one for me.

So much for Mr. Pakenham, who was too self-possessed with his theory that Wordsworth's yew had been forgotten by the villagers and its whereabouts was not known. But he was not alone. One, Mr Cornish, in his book on yew trees, put Wordsworth's in the churchyard.



1898 (E Bogg)

I have not talked about the myths of Fox and Wesley preaching under the tree. Perhaps they did, there is some documentary evidence. The tree, close by the village centre, did figure in the village social activities. For example, a piece of what I believe is called 'doggerel' was penned by the Curate of Lorton, William Sewell, to commemorate the first village May Day parade in 1896, which started and apparently finished round the tree. I am indebted to Mrs. Marguerite Horlacher of Cockermouth, daughter of Nellie Milburn (née Wise of High Lorton)

who memorised it to recite in 1896 and wrote it down for posterity in 1967:

"When the finishing strokes to dress the Queen
And maids had been imparted,
From the Yew Tree, Pride of Lorton Vale
The grand procession started"

and after lauding all the children and adults taking part by name, it continues:

"When all accounts were added up
they found the'd plenty money
To buy some cakes and Boonbeck milk,
enough or more for twenty"

No doubt many children played around it and the beck, as they do today. We know of two lads who did. John Musgrave, whose parents lived in what is now called Graceholm, was born in 1771. He was completely contemporary with William Wordsworth and they must have gone to school together in Cockermouth; certainly they were friends and William used to visit John at Lorton. On one occasion, William fell into the beck, got drenched, and had to be sent home in borrowed clothes.

Was it during one of these youthful escapades he got his inspiration?