

Lorton &

# Derwent Fells Local History Society

Brackenthwaite

Buttermere

Embleton

Loweswater

Mockerkin

Pardshaw

Wythop

B R I T A N N I A,  
Volume the First:  
O R, A N  
I L L U S T R A T I O N  
O F T H E  
K I N G D O M  
O F  
E N G L A N D  
A N D  
Dominion of Wales:  
By a Geographical and Historical  
D E S C R I P T I O N  
O F T H E  
Principal Roads thereof.

Actually Admeasured and Delineated in a Century of  
*Whole-Sheet Copper-Sculps.*

A C C O M O D A T E D

With the *Ichnography* of the several Cities and Capital Towns;

A N D C O M P L E A T E D

By an Accurate Account of the more Remarkable Passages of Antiquity,  
Together with a Novel Discourse of the Present State.

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By *J O H N O G I L B Y* Esq;  
His MAJESTY's *Cosmographer*, and *Master of His MAJESTY's Revels* in the  
KINGDOM of *I R E L A N D*.

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L O N D O N,

Printed by the Author at his House in *White-Fryers*. *M.DC.LXXV.*

The famous Ogilby road maps of 1675 keep on cropping up - in talks, on our walks and in the newsletters.

At 1 inch to 1 mile, nothing like it had been done before.

This is one of the pages that greets you when you open "Britannia".

## Editorial

There's been a very interesting discovery recently. In the move from their old premises in Cockermouth, Mitchell's moved an old chest of drawers and some old documents were found which had dropped behind the drawers. I understand that they have not seen the light of day since the mid-1920s. These proved to relate to properties including High and Low Swinside and Tenters and were Surrender and Admittance documents for the customary tenancies of properties issued by the Derwentfells Manor Court, conveyances for the sale of properties subject to customary tenancies, and an abstract of title for "High Swinside" and "Tenters". The earliest document is dated 1685 and is in Latin. Thanks to the MD of Mitchell's, Peter Greenhill, we have been able to photocopy all the documents for our archive, but we haven't had time to look at them closely yet. The originals, which were put into the care of Ted Petty, will be deposited in the Whitehaven Record Office. Just to whet some appetites, names that appear include Adam Bell, John Bell, John Bowe (often), John Jennings the elder and many others; there are 33 documents in all. These documents should prove to be a very useful addition to our archive.

Michael Baron has sent me two interesting catalogues from the Public Record Office. One advertises the family history magazine of the PRO called 'Ancestors'. In their words, the magazine is "a bimonthly 64 page colour publication packed with information, illustrations and expert advice". Subscriptions are £22 for 1 year (6 issues) or £39 for 2 years. You can subscribe by telephone on 01226 734627 or on [www.pro.gov.uk/ancestorsmagazine](http://www.pro.gov.uk/ancestorsmagazine) The other catalogue is the PRO's book list for Spring to Autumn 2002 for "family historians and military enthusiasts". A complete listing of their books in print is also given. The PRO Publications Marketing telephone number is 020 8392 5271 or try [www.pro.gov.uk/bookshop](http://www.pro.gov.uk/bookshop)

There should be a subscription form with this newsletter - subs are due in November, and with our increased numbers, we're trying to reduce the crush at the start of the November talk! Michael Grieve

## Returned home to fight by Walter Head

Born in June 1882 and baptised at St Cuthbert's Church, Lorton on Sunday, 25th June 1882, John Benson was the sixth child and second son of Isaac and Ann Benson of Rogerscale. In 1912, he emigrated with his wife Annie and family to Canada and, up until his enlistment in 1916, was manager of a large farm in Toronto.

He joined the 58th Battalion Canadian Infantry (Central Ontario Regiment) as private No 67904 and landed with the Canadians in England in October 1916 and, after a short home leave with his parents, he left for France in December 1916.

He took part in a lot of heavy fighting and was wounded in the knee on 13th April 1917 while in action at Vimy Ridge, after which he spent a short time at base hospital in France before being transferred to Berrington War Hospital in England.

His wound was considered serious and he was due to have an operation when the wound turned poisonous and his condition deteriorated. His mother was making arrangements to visit him when a telegram was received informing her of his death. His married sister Mrs Oswick, who at that time lived in London, was with John when he died.

The body of John Benson returned to Cumberland by rail to Cockermouth station and the coffin was transported to the family home in Lorton. Khaki uniformed soldiers of the Cumberland Volunteers carried the departed soldier to his last resting place in St Cuthbert's Churchyard at Lorton on Friday, 25th May 1917 after a service conducted by the Rev W Lewis.

John Benson is the only soldier commemorated in Lorton Church whose body returned home for burial.



## Sources

West Cumberland Times  
Soldiers Died In The Great War

Record Office - Barrow  
L&DFLHS Archive

War Graves Commission

**Lorton and Derwentfells in 1687**  
by Angus J L Winchester

During the 1680s Sir John Lowther of Lowther, Cumbria's leading resident landowner and a rising star in national politics, commissioned a local lawyer, Thomas Denton (1637-1698) of Warnell, near Caldbeck, to write a description of Cumberland. Lowther appears to have wanted information about the value of estates, mills, mines and other landed property and an estimate of the population of each parish; Denton, on the other hand, was an antiquarian by inclination and, whether Lowther wanted this or not, used the opportunity to rehearse the history of each landed estate in the county from the earliest record right up to his own time. The resulting 'Perambulation of Cumberland', completed by Denton in 1687-8, survives in the Lonsdale muniments in Cumbria Record Office. It has never been published but, after several years' work by Mary Wane of Windermere and myself, is about to appear in print.



It provides a fascinating account of the county. The historical material is largely drawn (without acknowledgement!) from the earlier history of Cumberland's landed families compiled by John Denton of Cardew (a distant kinsman of Thomas Denton) in the first decade of the seventeenth century. But perhaps the most valuable material consists of Thomas Denton's own comments on the contemporary scene. Buttermere, for example, lies 'in a low crooked deep valley environed with many prodigious high mountains' and in the lake are caught 'the best charrs in the north, being fishes soe much admired at London'. He also tells us that Bowderbeck belonged to the Hudsons and was worth £100 a year and goes on to describe the wad or black lead mine there, 'the like whereof is not in Europe besides; which ... is not to be opened but once in seaven years, the merchant [a Mr Ellison from Newcastle] monopolizing that merchandice'.

The Vale of Lorton is, says Denton, 'the most fruitfull & rich dale in all Cumberland for the quantity' and he tells the story of a man who purchased an acre of ground there in 1647, sowed it with a bushel of 'bigg' (barley) the following year and had a crop of 50 bushels which cleared the whole cost of his purchase in one year. He also comments on the wealth the inhabitants derive from the 'vast stocks of sheep' on the fells, and on the 'great store of good oak & ash wood' in Lorton and Loweswater.

As a Royalist, Anglican gentleman, Thomas Denton had little time for Quakers and other 'phanaticks' and never missed an opportunity to disparage them. At Pardshaw he gives them a paragraph to themselves: 'Quakers. They dwell farr distant from any church, and haveing high-craggs or clinty rocks above the town [i.e. Pardshaw Crag], they have their great Quaking meetings there, from whence they do readily espye any who came to disturb their conventicles; and so they were wont to disperse before they were caught, to prevent their convictions; their ignorance & sloath haveing easily suffered them to be seduced & yeild to the delutions of their crafty speakers'. And he goes on to comment that the inhabitants of Mosser 'are allmost all Quakers, being too near neighbours to Pardsey-crag, and too far distant from any church'.

These brief extracts give a flavour of Denton's 'Perambulation', which I am confident will become a standard primary source for all who are interested in the history of Cumberland. When he had completed his description of the county, he filled the rest of the volume with a briefer perambulation of Westmorland, copies of two long manuscripts (a history of the Vipont and Clifford families, and a legal tract on customary tenantright), and descriptions of the Isle of Man and Ireland. Although the last two are drawn largely from other sources, they contain Denton's own descriptions of the towns on the Isle of Man and a very detailed perambulation of Dublin. The manuscript he delivered to Sir John Lowther thus has an interest well beyond Cumberland.

Our edition of Thomas Denton's manuscript is being published jointly by Surtees Society and the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society. It is currently going through the press and is due to appear early in 2003. Members of CWAAS will be able to obtain a copy at a special rate; others should contact the distributors, Boydell & Brewer, P.O. Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF.


**How about becoming our visits' organiser?**


As you know, we organise six "activities" in those months when there is no talk and we try to make two of them visits to somewhere with historic connections. They've been well-enjoyed, whether near, as at the Honister Mine, or further away, as at New Lanark Village. If you would like to have a go as organiser, please contact Michael Grieve on 01900 85259 or Derek Denman on 01900 85551 or any committee member. You would have the full support of the committee - so please think about it (and say yes!).

## Wheat, A Modern Production by Derek Denman

In the previous Newsletter I asked if wheat was a traditional Cumberland crop or a recent introduction and if 'The Wheat Sheaf' was a traditional name. The answer has come from 'Agriculture of Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland'\*, by J Bailey and G Culley, who were charged by the Board of Agriculture with surveying the agriculture of the northern counties and making recommendations for improvements, and who reported in 1805. Their report on corn crops in Cumberland starts as follows:-

'SECT. IV. - CROPS COMMONLY CULTIVATED.

**WHEAT** is a modern production here; a general opinion used to prevail, that wheat could not be grown in many parts of this county. We were informed, that it is not much more than 40 years since summer-fallows for wheat were first used; and it is not twenty years since Lord MUNCASTER introduced summer-fallows, and the culture of wheat, in the neighbourhood of Ravenglass, where it is now grown in great abundance, as well as all along the coast of Scotland, and in the neighbourhood of Carlisle. The wheat that is sown after turnips or clover, is trifling, the main supply is from Summer-fallows, they generally sow two bushels and a half per acre, in September or October, as the season suits, and they reap from sixteen to thirty bushels per acre.

**Barley and Oats** - being the grains from which the bread of the inhabitants is made, were probably the first, and only corn grown in this county for many centuries; *bigg*, or *bear*, with four rows of grains on the ear, was the kind of barley formerly cultivated; but lately, the common early sort, with two rows, has been introduced. They sow two and a half bushels per acre, in April or May, and reap twenty-one bushels on an average.

**The Common Oat** - was the only variety grown in this county, and far the most prevalent, but of late years, a few enterprising individuals have introduced the early varieties of this grain with great advantage; they are distinguished from the common oat by the name of *Layland Oat*, and are the Dutch or Friesland oat.

*The quantity sown* - is from four to six bushels per acre.

*The Time of Sowing* - March or April.

*The Produce* - from 15 to 40 bushels per acre; but the average of the county was stated to us to be only 20 bushels per acre.'

In those times of war and restricted imports it was important that maximum use was made of the land, and of course the main recommendation was to enclose the commons and grow corn. The report contains many criticisms of agriculture in Cumberland, from feudal-minded Lords of the Manor to blinkered and unambitious 'statesmen'. The authors try hard to find something good to say and eventually seem to settle for complimenting the young female cart drivers 'with as fine forms and complexions as ever Nature bestowed on the softer sex', and for this commendation on dealing with the velvet gentlemen of Cumberland:-

'**For destroying Moles**, - a for every parish to let the taking of certain yearly sum; which is raised in and does not now exceed a halfpenny was much cheaper than they could the moles not destroyed in this manner. every parish in the kingdom to destroy done so effectually here, that we scarcely ever saw a mole-hill upon the enclosed grounds of most parts of Cumberland.'



most excellent practice is prevalent here, their moles, for a *term of years*, at a the same manner as the parochial taxes, an acre; which, they justly observe, have had the ground *scaled for*, were It is a pity but there was a law to oblige their moles in the same manner; which is

\*At the Whitehaven Record Office, local studies library. Ref.22CUM

## Lorton Valley Post Office by Adrian and Walter Head

Joseph Plaskett was born at Braithwaite in 1815 and Dinah Mandale at Wythop in 1819. They were married at St Cuthbert's Church, Lorton on 18 July 1836. Joseph, an agricultural worker, and Dinah lived at Kelsick, Wythop for a short time after their marriage and their first son John was born there in 1837. A short time after this, they moved to Tenters in Lorton. Joseph's elder brother John was already living at High Lorton and working as a brewer for the Jennings family.

In 1853, the Cumberland Pacquet carried an advertisement for 100 farmers to emigrate to America and, as a result, Joseph and Dinah, with their family and Joseph's mother, sailed to a new life in America.

They settled in the Mount Vernon area of Fairfax County, Virginia, at a location up the Potomac River. This area was the land of the Tauxenent Indians when the first Englishman, Captain John Smith, landed there in about 1608 at a place called Hallowing Point. In 1684, a ferry was installed to cross the nearby Occoquan River and the area around the ferry point began to grow in occupation. In 1753, George Washington had a home on the Potomac River.

The Plaskett family moved onto a rundown farm next to the Belmont Plantation and after several years, Joseph opened a general store. Joseph petitioned the Post Office Department for permission to open a post office and he enlisted the help of a local man, Colonel Edward Daniels, a friend of President Ulysses S Grant, and the necessary certification was granted. On 11 November 1875, ten years after the end of the Civil War, Joseph Plaskett opened a post office in the store and named it Lorton Valley Post Office and the settlement, which was expanding, became known as Lorton.

Prior to Joseph's opening the post office, mail was sent down the Potomac River by boat and delivered by horseback. The arrival of the railroad to the Occoquan River in 1872 and the opening of the post office in 1875 meant that mail was carried from the post office on horseback or on foot to the railroad telegraph office to catch the train which made three round trips per week. Sometimes the train didn't stop and the mailbag was thrown into the open door of the mail and baggage car. If the aim was poor, the mailbag would miss the door and then be held over until the next run.

Joseph Plaskett died on 23 May 1893 and his son John, born at Wythop, took over as postmaster. The Lorton Valley Post Office closed on 31 May 1911 after 35 years 6 months and 23 days, during which time it was serviced as postmaster by only one family - Joseph Plaskett, his son John and his grandsons John Martin, James and Ernest.

The Plaskett family are buried in Cranford Church Cemetery and the headstone lists the birthplace as Lorton, England. They were a family obviously proud of having lived in the Vale of Lorton, Cumberland.

### **Sources**

A Glance at Lorton's History, Lorton (Virginia) Local History Society, by Harry Lattimore

Historic Lorton, Virginia, USA, by Ed Bierley

These Historic Moments by Doris Bubb (Great Granddaughter of Joseph Plaskett)

L&DFLHS archive; Cumbria Record Office, Whitehaven; The Cumberland Pacquet

### **Lorton Reading Room - fund raising by Walter Head**

The following details are taken from an article in the West Cumberland Times of February 1900.

"The fourth annual concert promoted by the Lorton Reading Room committee was held on Friday 2 February 1900 in the Lorton day school. Mr J E James and his concert party had been engaged by the committee who spared no expense to provide a high class and entertaining programme.

There was a very good audience. Mr A J S Dixon JP presided and in opening the proceedings referred to the usefulness of the reading room in providing a means of recreation for the young people of the village. The concert was to augment the reading room funds. But the committee, anxious to share in the great national movement for relief of the war sufferers of the Great War [this meant the Boer War], were to give half of the proceeds to the A.M.B. fund of the Daily Mail.

The performances were of unusual merit and a Lorton audience, usually cold and unappreciative, had seldom been more enthusiastic. A Ball was held after the concert and Mr Clague's band of four performed, discoursing sweet music to everyone's satisfaction. Messrs Hardisty and Thompson were MCs and the committee looked after the door and refreshments. Mrs Moffat had charge of the splendid supper and was assisted by her daughter, Mrs Bothwick, and Miss A Hodgson with Messrs G Oglethorpe and J D Pearson carving."

The Reading Room was in Low Lorton next to the Packhorse Inn.

### **Hear ye, hear ye - a new course?**

I heard from Michael Baron that the Cumbria Institute of the Arts in Carlisle is proposing to run a part time day course on Mondays and Tuesdays (October to June) on combining creative writing with researching and documenting local history and heritage - if there's enough interest. And it's free to over 21s! You should find a flyer about it in this newsletter, but the contact is Fiona Powley on 01228 818134.

## What did Thirlmere look like before Manchester Corporation came along?

Although not part of our area, I have always been interested in the history of Thirlmere. I recently came across this Abraham photograph of the two lakes, Wythburn Water, nearer to the camera and Leathes Water, the whole area being known as Thirlmere. At the narrowest part you can just see the three old bridges which crossed from Armboth and Watendlath. This photo was taken around 1894 during the filling of the reservoir.



And this is an engraving of the bridges by Thomas Allom made in the 1830s. These engravings were often made to look very dramatic!  
Michael Grieve

## Letting the genie out of the bottle, part 2 by Ron George

In the last newsletter, in the first of three parts, Ron surveyed the scene of family history research and his own studies.

Here, in the second part, he gives some details of what he found and the practical problems that arise.

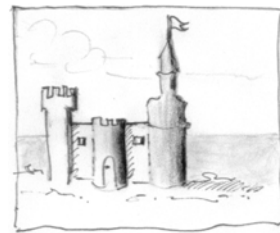
I had mixed fortunes, but more luck on my paternal side. Making another calculated guess, or if you prefer, another leap in the dark, I sought by the same process, and found, my father's parents' wedding date in 1885. When the system had run its course, I got the certificate. John was aged 22, Henrietta, his bride 25, and both their fathers were named. Here also was another new address - both were living in the same house, and it is a fair guess it was a boarding house. Going back another twenty five years, and repeating the process, produced John's father's wedding; another John to Emily on 20th June 1861, both 'of full age', again both living at the same address in what must surely be another boarding house, and again the groom's and bride's fathers are named. Another hiccup. The date, June, is important because it was only five weeks after the national census was taken, and with just a little co-operation and fore-thought on their part they

would not have moved before the census was taken, and I would have a lovely new set of data. Unfortunately, the street no longer exists, and I have so far been unable to locate it in the Census records. If this could be found it should give more details of the background of both families. It is noteworthy that the only witnesses to the marriage were from the bride's family. Did the groom have no relative present? If not, why not?

If we go back once again an assumed 25-30 years to resume the search on the last 'father', we cross that time boundary, 1852, that I mentioned earlier. We are back into the country. Where? Ah-ha, that is the vital question. If you do not know where the ancestors lived before 1852 you are stuck. But wait - it is possible there is help at hand. God bless the Mormons. You may or may not agree with their religious philosophy, but as a church they have, I think, undertaken the Herculean task of indexing all parochial records worldwide. The end result is not yet complete, they are still going at it 'hammer and tongs' and it is not a great deal of use after 1875, although some records go up to the 1920s. The index is known as the IGI (International Genealogical Index) and copies of it can be found in most large English libraries and sometimes the CRO. The index is complicated, subject to error, and not all parishes have yet agreed to have their records copied. It is generally on microfiche and a pain to use - but it may solve your problem, and you just possibly might get back to the mid-16th century. Then again, you might not, and the odds are against you. There is a wonderful fully computerized version on CD-ROMs here in my main local library which has disadvantages as well as advantages. I also discovered that neither my maternal nor my paternal grandparents figure in the IGI. I suspect that, for different reasons, neither set of records has yet been copied by the Mormons. But do not forget there are many other sources of family births, deaths and marriages than those in the Anglican records. I can only suggest here that if other than Anglican is likely, you consult with the local CRO to find out what records are available in your case.

One of the reasons I have ground to a halt researching my maternal line is that my mother's father's name was Edward Wood, and there are hundreds of them scattered all around London about the right time. On the other hand my father's family indulged in some very unusual names to accompany the John which had been handed down for at least the last three generations. This is common and a useful guide in tracing family. As a result, the IGI told me that the family witnesses missing from that wedding were to be found at St Columb Major and St Columb Minor in Cornwall. So that is where I went next. Not immediately, of course, Cornwall is a long way from Cumbria, and a journey with such a serious objective is not to be undertaken lightly. I was also more than a little miffed. I had been living at Porthcurno near Lands End; I had rushed past St Columb Major many times and actually visited St Columb Minor in its modern form, a suburb of Newquay.

I stayed a week in a very modest but adequate boarding house only five minutes walk from the Cornwall Record Office in Truro. Do not book to do this until you have checked with the relevant RO that you can have a place for the week - some offices ration their facilities and they will probably want to know what documents you want to see. Tell them you are travelling especially from the other end of the country and you will almost certainly get sympathetic treatment. I invariably found CRO staff understanding and helpful - some more than others, of course. Start with the later registers in which the writing is easy to read. Run down the pages and make a note of everyone with the family surname; you will find you quickly get into the swing of running the finger down the column of surnames and fast reading - the name you want will leap out at you. You can work forwards from the beginning of the book, or backwards from the end. The only difference is the date order of your notes. Do this for all three registers and make sure to check the brides' names as you go through the marriage register. It is probable you will find examples of both sexes of your family are from adjacent parishes, or even further afield.



## **WANTED**

*Ancient houses and Owners\**

*The House History Group would love to hear from you if you have an old house which would be interesting to hear about.*

*What an opportunity!*

*Actually, we'd love to have you even if you have a brand new house, and are interested in the history of local houses.*

*\*You don't have to be ancient, either: we are an equal opportunity House History Group.*

*John Scrivens ~ 01900-85287*

When you have been through all the registers for the main parish, in my case St Columb Major, go through all the others to which you have found references - in my case St Columb Minor, St Ervan, Perranzabuloe, Crantock, St Breok and, because one of the family middle names appeared from Falmouth, I checked Falmouth and Truro too. You can see where a week of effort takes you. If you do this searching in the summer months with the long evenings of bright sunshine (yes, you know it does happen) you can vary the monotony of reading dreary old manuscript registers by driving around the churchyards and seeing what extra information can be gleaned from gravestones. Apart from yielding extra information, or not as the case may be, the churches are worthy of a visit. Sit quietly in a pew - listen to the utter silence - and remember your forefathers and their families who worshipped in those same pews for generations. Take photographs - a family history is much enhanced with a pictorial record of church, headstones and early family homes.

There is one more thing you need to know about dates. The history of calendars goes back along a very long and complicated path, but our immediate interest is to remember that up to January 1st 1752, the calendar year (in England - other countries are different) ran from March 25th to the following March 24th. So, for example, a document labelled 3rd March 1744 comes *49 weeks after* 25th March 1744, and the first of those dates falls within what we now term 1745. Confused? You get used to it, and also to seeing years given as 1744/5, so signifying recognition of both methods of time measurement. (As an aside, folks looking at gravestones in Lorton churchyard were always foxed by one that read “.....buried 167½”; but you will not be fooled by such, now, will you?) So, now you go home and try to derive a tentative family tree from the multitude of names and dates you have gathered. This exercise may clarify the wealth of data into a manageable working hypothesis. Next time you go back to the same CRO, get out the Census returns for the townships you have pinpointed. Note that the Census goes by townships, and not church parishes, so there may be an overlap or a shortfall in any one set of records. Do not bother with Census returns before 1841 they do not give individual names, only total numbers - but they do, if you wish, give information about the general makeup of the township's work force. When you have got back to the 17th century, start looking at such items as the Protestation Returns of 1641, Muster Rolls, Hearth Tax returns 1662 - 1689, Land Tax returns 1692 - 1832, but do not put too much faith in their accuracy or their completeness - they are notoriously deficient on both scores, but may be helpful nevertheless. Then there are the Quarter Session records, which may turn up something interesting, even if it only relates to the family background and does not necessarily imply criminal activity or civil disobedience to by-laws.

When you are tired of this lot of paper work, go to the depository of wills and Probate papers. These, when you can find them, are another valuable source of family history. Do not be disappointed if most of your forebears are described as ‘husbandman’ or ‘thatcher’, tin-miner, or some similar land-based trade. Most people of the many millions of inhabitants lived and worked off the land and attendant trades, even well into the 20th century. In most of the wills of my early family, they were so described. It is quite common for the same person to be described at one time as ‘husbandman’ and at another as ‘yeoman’. Both terms tended to be used rather loosely, and interchangeably, although it could also indicate a change in personal circumstances.

Nationwide Census returns have been taken every ten years from 1801, excepting during the War year 1941. They are now usually taken at the beginning of April. From 1841, for each dwelling, they show the head of the family and all its members with their relationships, together with everyone else staying at that address overnight, so includes servants and visitors, with the occupation of each. Most importantly, censuses from 1851 onwards also give place of birth, so a family's movements around the country can be traced. Because Censuses are subject to the 100 year rule, the last Census available for public consultation is that for 1901.

In the final part, Ron will look at the internet, will give some encouragement! and will list some useful addresses.

### Future Talks and Activities for 2002

12 September	Talk by Andrew Lowe, Buildings Conservation Officer in the Lake District National Park Authority, on “Discovering a Landscape of Industry”.
10 October	No activity arranged
14 November	Talk by John Todd on “The Medieval Church in Cumbria”.
12 December	Panel question and answer session.



The talks start at 7.30pm, normally in the Yew Tree Hall, High Lorton, but please check the talks' adverts in case of later changes in venue.