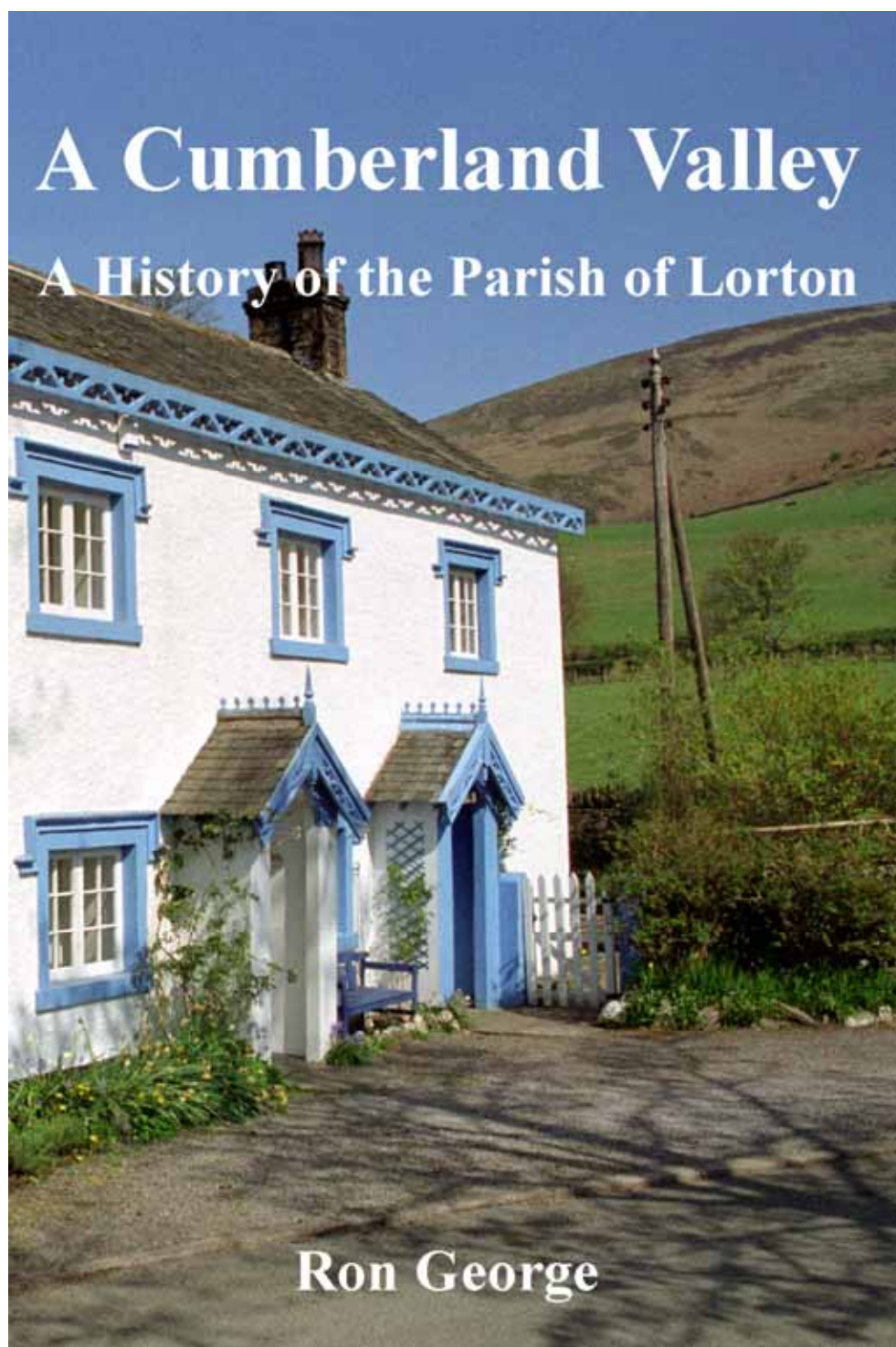


Lorton &

# Derwent Fells Local History Society

Brackenthwaite    Buttermere    Embleton    Loweswater    Mockerkin    Pardshaw    Wythop

**October 2003 - our 10th Anniversary!**



It's nearly here - see inside!

## Editorial

It cannot have escaped your notice, I hope, that it is the Society's 10th anniversary this October! Ten years ago, Ron George called a meeting in his house, White Ash, where it all started. Nobody wanted to be the Secretary and, eventually, I fairly reluctantly said I would have a go. It has proved to be a fascinating "go" with lots of new and interesting things to learn, coupled with a fairly small number (as I remember) of panics! And now we come to our anniversary celebration, the exhibition at the Loweswater Show and the Yew Tree Hall later this month. I should like to mention the centrepiece which will consist of five large maps, specially produced for this exhibition. They are based on the c1840 large scale tithe maps of (in alphabetical order!) Brackenthwaite, Buttermere, Embleton, Lorton and Loweswater, all of which were at a scale of 4 chains to the inch - to save you working it out, that's 20 inches to the mile - so the map is detailed enough to show the shapes of buildings as they were then. On the exhibition maps, all the field names are added and coloured to show who owned and occupied them and the 1841 Census information is added to show who lived where, how old they were and, for some, their occupation. Sorry I've gone on a bit about the maps (I'm a map person!), but there will be much more at the exhibition, so please see the details further on in this issue.

As you can see from the front cover, it's good news about Ron George's history of this area - his book is to go on sale on 18 September at the Loweswater Show in the exhibition. The book contains a great deal of information, gathered over many years and details are given in the flier in this Newsletter.

A number of people have said to me that they are finding Maud Vickers' history of the Lorton Women's Institute interesting. The post-war years were going to be covered in this issue but when I got Maud's manuscript, it was clear that it would have to be either heavily edited or split into two. I tried the former but gave up - I'm sure that the bits, or I should say lots, that I cut out would be bound to interest someone! So the WI history in this issue covers the period 1945 to the 50th anniversary in 1972 and the final one in January will take us up to the 75th anniversary celebrations in 1997. I'm very grateful to Maud for working on this history and letting me print it.

A year ago, we tried an experiment where we included a flier in the Newsletter for subscriptions to be sent straight to the Treasurer; in this way, we hoped to avoid the big queue at the November talk. And it worked! So you should find another flier in this issue - if it is convenient, please use it to pay next year's sub. Thank you.

Michael Grieve

### Brantwood ~ Saturday, 4 October 2003

The Society's next visit is to the home and gardens of visionary and artist **John Ruskin** at Coniston.

Ruskin was eminent and influential in so many fields ~ an artist, writer and thinker who influenced many names more well known than his, Gandhi and Tolstoy among them.

His house, Brantwood, reveals how wide the interests of this multi-faceted man were, including as it does many of his collections and personal possessions, together with a wealth of Ruskin's watercolours and drawings.

The garden ~ or rather gardens ~ at Brantwood are also varied, and have been restored or created to reflect Ruskin's ideas and designs, ranging from the "Zig-Zaggy," (said to represent Dante's Purgatorial Mount!) to the Trellis Walk and the Hortus Inclusus herb garden ~ eight gardens in all.

We will be travelling to Coniston by coach after 9 o'clock and crossing the lake to Brantwood on the Coniston Launch; after a light lunch at the Jumping Jenny coffee house and restaurant, in what was once the Brantwood stables, it's off to the house and gardens, returning across the lake at shortly after four o'clock. The cost will be in the region of **£12 for Society members** (the Society is subsidising this trip) and **£13 for non-members**, plus the cost of a light lunch.

If you would like to go, please let me know. John Scrivens ~ 01900-85287 ~ jbsgis@ic24.net



### Brackenthwaite Sorrow and Pride by Walter Head

Born in 1893 at Miller Place and baptised at St Cuthbert's Church, Lorton, on 19th February 1893, John White Towers was the first son of John Wilson Towers and his wife Mary. Their second son Allison White Towers was born in 1894, also at Miller Place and baptised in Lorton Church on 2nd December 1894. It is these two sons who are the subjects of the following which took place during the First World War.

Allison White Towers was educated at Lorton School. He won a Cumberland County Council Scholarship and continued his education at Keswick School. After leaving school, he gained an Associate in Arts at the University of Oxford. He joined the London Joint Stock Bank and served at Penrith and Cockermouth. He was a member of the Institute of Bankers and spoke fluent French. In October 1914, he visited Penrith and enlisted in the Westmorland and Cumberland Hussars as Private 2457 of the Household Cavalry and Cavalry of the Line Regiment.

Man has always constructed barriers for defence and to enclose their land, usually from materials adjacent to the site, wood from trees, stones, earth etc. When settlers started to farm the great plains of America, these materials were in short supply. To satisfy the demand for an economical type of fencing, Joseph F Gladden of Illinois invented barbed wire in 1873 at the age of 60. The deployment of barbed wire as a form of defence in World War I had a huge effect on the efficiency of the cavalry and resulted in most cavalry regiments spending their time dismounted and engaged in other tasks. When Allison moved to the front line, he had to leave behind his horse called Toby for fear that he would be poisoned by gas.

A W Towers acted as an interpreter on the battle front and built up a friendship with the French Dragoon Guards and French Flying Corps. He was moved to Divisional Headquarters and then to Brigade Headquarters where he worked as a French telegraphist.

In a letter home, he described how he worked near the front in a shell-swept area with shells continually bursting on all sides and there was a continuous roar of guns. An extract from this letter home reads: "When we get down to sleep, we know not what may happen before morning. Our abode (it would enrage you to see it) is all in ruins, wasted by the war. There was more of it when we came here but it has all been shelled away, and we know not the day or hour."

On the night of 2nd October 1916, after being in France for 18 months, he was with a party of men putting up barbed wire in front of their trench when he was hit by a bullet in the groin. He lost consciousness almost immediately and died about half an hour after being taken back to the trench. He was described by Major Guy Pocklington Senhouse and Sergeant Major Millington as the best and brightest in the Squadron.

He was buried on 3rd October 1916 near to Croix Barbic in France and is commemorated on plaque/grave reference 11.x.5 in the St Vaast Post Military Cemetery Richenbourg-L'Avoue, Pas de Calais, France which covers an area of 4080 square metres. He died aged 21, almost exactly two years after enlisting. A memorial service was held at St Cuthbert's Church Lorton on Sunday, 22nd October 1916.

John White Towers was also educated at Lorton School and in 1916 was serving in the same regiment as his brother Allison. However, in early 1918, he was serving with the 5th Border Regiment. In May 1918, word was received that he had been awarded the Military Medal for conspicuous bravery in the field. The award relates to the 24th April 1918. On that night, the Germans attacked a post which was manned by eight British soldiers, including John White Towers. The following extract from a letter home to his father at Millbeck in Brackenthwaite gives the details:

"Five were killed and the other three of us held on until dark and fought our way out. We ran into three Hun officers and bayoneted them and had to run through a trail of machine gun bullets. I was the only one to get out alright, although I got a hole through my pants and one through the hat. Another of the remaining two got wounded in the left arm and one was killed.

The next night was much the same, I held on to my post as long as possible and was the only one left when I retired. I did not go far until I found Major Rigg wounded in a shell hole. I stayed and dressed him and waited until dark again. I took him to a R.A.P. [Regimental Ambulance Post?] but had to leave him there and bolt, for once more I was surrounded. I came across two Lancastrians with a Lewis gun and told them that they were surrounded and to keep still. After about an hour, we heard the Germans talking in front of us and could see them walking amongst the débris, silhouetted against the sky. We put a pan in the Lewis gun and rattled it to one side from the centre and then another pan to the other side. How we got through, God knows, but the Huns were surprised when we fired into their rear and ran like mad. They gave us some stick after that for another seven days and nights and I shook hands with myself when I got relieved. I never saw such sights before and you would never believe it if I tried to tell you all."

John White Towers survived the war but moved away from the Brackenthwaite area on his demobilisation from the Army.

Their mother, Mary Towers, who is buried in Lorton Churchyard, died on 28 November 1910, aged 49, before the start of the war.

Their father, John Wilson Towers, who was instrumental in the conversion of the Yew Tree Hall to public use, retired to Grasmere to live with their third son, Earnest who, born at Low Hollins, was too young for war service. John Towers died at Fisherbeck in Ambleside on 11 June 1936, aged 77, and was interred in Lorton Churchyard.

## Four chains to the inch – measuring the land by Derek Denman

Most of our large maps at the September exhibition are at a scale of four chains to the inch, the scale at which the Tithe Maps were drawn. Field areas within the Tithe Apportionment are given in acres, roods and perches. So perhaps this would be a good time to give an explanation of some ancient units of land measurement, their derivation and application to medieval farming and the village layout in Lorton.

### The acre and its subdivisions

Most people will be familiar with the acre, which was reputed to be the area that could be ploughed in a day, though it varied in size from county to county. A statute acre was 4840 square yards, but how was this derived? The subdivisions of acres were the rood (a quarter acre) and the square perch (often just called a perch), which was one fortieth of a rood. Therefore 160 square perches made an acre in area. So a field that was written as 3a.3r.39p. was one square perch short of four acres. The size of an acre was determined by the length of the perch (or rod or pole) in use. The statute perch was 5.5yards, making a square perch 30.25 square yards, the rood or quarter acre 1210 square yards and the statute acre 4840 square yards, as stated earlier.

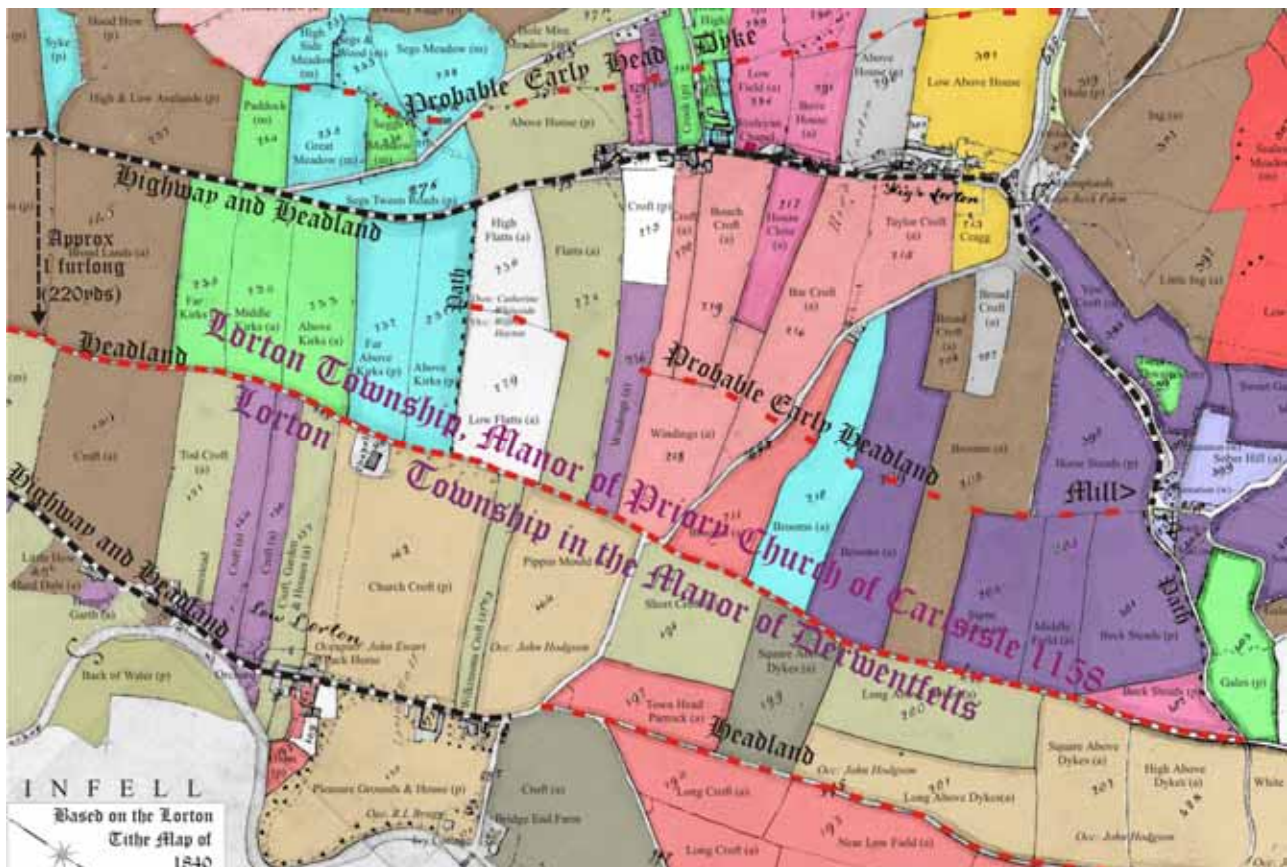
### Derivation

The division by four and then forty may seem arbitrary, or perhaps biblical, but it was derived from agricultural practicalities. To explain, we need a fundamental unit of length, the furlong. This derives from a furrow-long and is set by the distance a team of eight oxen can draw a medieval plough before a rest and a turn is required. The furlong is 220 yards, or forty perches, so that if the width of a strip of land is one perch and its length is one furlong, then it contains one rood or quarter acre. The rod, pole or perch would have been an actual wooden pole used for this measurement. In medieval strip cultivation, the selions, the basic ploughed unit, were normally a half acre, but could be between one quarter and three quarters of an acre. The perch could be used to set out quarter acres in a field about a furlong wide.

This brings us back to the chain, which was 22 yards or four perches. Just as a width of one perch with a furlong length gives a quarter acre, so a width of one chain gives one acre. The chain would be an actual metal chain used for land surveying, and is still the length of a cricket pitch.

### Lorton's open arable field system

The furlong length can be seen in the remains of Lorton's medieval open field system, described in



outline by Angus Winchester (1), and once growing mainly oats and barley. A possible interpretation is here superimposed on the tithe map of 1840, discussed above. The land between Low and High Lorton would have been open, without a single wall or hedge, the strips running east-west and divided between the two villages by Church Lane. The Low Lorton and High Lorton highways would also have been headlands on which the plough was turned. In parts of High Lorton fields, where the length of a furrow would otherwise be too long, it appears from remaining boundaries that there was a further headland running from the mill to the mid point of the ancient path north of Flatts.

This system was well in use by the mid C12th, when the cultivated lands of Lorton were set as the boundary of Brackenthwaite, and when, in 1158, the High Lorton Manor was removed from Derwentfells. It is therefore likely that Church Lane (or Crossgates Lane) was already there as a headland and path. However, the highway to High Lorton and to the common cuts across the furrow-line and it is probable that it has moved its course. The open field system also explains why the farmsteads in High Lorton were once all to the east of the road and in Low Lorton possibly once all to the west. It also suggests there were no farmsteads between the two villages and that only the church was placed on the dividing line to serve both Lortons.

### **It's never that simple**

Just to make this untidy, it has to be noted that in Cumberland the customary perch used was twenty one feet in length and called forest measure (cf 16.5 feet), resulting in a customary acre which was sixty percent larger than the statutory acre. Whilst this does not affect the practical length of a furrow, it is always important to check which standard is in use when dealing with records in this area.

**Reference:** Landscape and Society in Medieval Cumbria – Dr Angus Winchester 1987, pp 143-149

**Reading:** The History of the Countryside – Oliver Rackham 1986

### **The Lorton Women's Institute: part 3 - 1945 to the 50th anniversary by Maud Vickers**

In 1945, a new County Headquarters had been bought in Lonsdale Street, Carlisle, for the use of committees, and for members who might like to use it as a waiting room with tea making facilities etc. As this was close to the bus station and most people travelled by bus then it was very useful. An application was made for an extra bus to Cockermouth as passengers found it very difficult to get on the Monday morning bus during summer. Visitors crowded the bus to the disadvantage of shoppers, so in September a Wednesday and Saturday bus was added. Four parcels were received from Australia, containing sweets jam and jelly which would be used for children's party, and dried fruit towards the birthday cake in March, and these were most welcome in times of rationing

In 1946, four members joined the Loweswater Show Industrial Committee as the show was to go ahead again after the wartime stoppage. The pie scheme ended with £18 in hand and 15/- from the herb collections. This money was divided between the WI College, children's party, London Children's Hospital and the Yew Tree Hall. In 1947, a resolution to the County meeting was urging Post Offices to be kept open. A whist drive and dance was held in aid of Farmer's Distress Fund, part of the Agricultural Disaster Fund. No rationed food was to be sold at any sale. On the Royal Wedding Day, the WI organised a tea for the children.

Owing to storms in October 1949, the meeting was held by candlelight as the electricity supply had failed. Three teapots were bought to replace some broken when the lift broke down. The lift was a dumb waiter used when the kitchen was downstairs. In 1950, we sent complaints, along with the Parish Council, to the bus company about the Lorton bus service and its extreme inconvenience.

1951 was Festival of Britain Year, when a copper beech tree was planted in the playing field, the Institute to plant, fence, and provide a plaque, then to be handed over to the Parish Council to maintain. A village fete was held on June 2nd. A WI link was established with a WI in Ontario. In 1953, we contributed £10 and helped with the Lorton Coronation festivities; and as the Yew Tree Hall was being redecorated, helped with scrubbing, painting and sewing. Members were also involved with the distribution of ration books. Silks and patchwork material were sent to Malaya in 1954, and the new drama group gave their first play.

1956 began with very slippery roads in January so the speaker and many members were unable to attend. In June, two bus loads of children were taken to Allonby for an outing. We were unable to visit the Nativity Play at Carlisle, owing to petrol rationing. A national campaign trying to combat the litter problem was supplying publicity pennants at 1/6d each. Presents were sent to the Garlands patients.

In 1957, the Yew Tree Hall Committee asked the WI to make stage curtains and offered up to £25 to buy them. In June, the mystery trip turned out to be just that. The driver got lost on the Caldbeck Moors, and ended in a farm yard at Fell End with the bus boiling so, while he went for water, members sat on the grass on a lovely evening and held their business meeting before going on to a welcome supper. The British Railways outing was to the Clyde Coast. Members had given up the rose hip collection, but it was carried on by the schoolchildren.

The next year's railway outing was to Chester and North Wales. In February, members felt the benefit of an oil stove and decided to purchase it. A cloth for the President's table was made and embroidered in WI colours by Miss Samson and Mrs McLeish. In 1959, the Yew Tree Hall was undergoing extensive improvements, the downstairs kitchen being relocated to the ground floor and modernised and WI members supported and helped the effort. A large protest was being staged



A WI dance in the 50s - do you recognise anyone?

about the proposed closure of the Penrith to Keswick railway and members added their support. The outing by rail was to visit Rowntree's at York, and the following year, 1960, to Inverary. This was World Refugee Year and members served tea for people bringing clothes and money.

Some Lorton members were very active in 1961 helping to start a WI market stall in Cockermouth each Friday morning. These markets had been running in various parts of the country since the early 1920s to allow people to sell extra produce from their kitchen or garden. Cockermouth's market is still running after more than forty years. WIs were asked to adopt a refugee family, which Lorton did and, for quite a few years, corresponded and sent parcels of needed goods to them. Support for a petition for "The Preservation of Ullswater" was given. In 1962, a poster was put on show about the danger of uncooked foods possibly causing foot and mouth disease. This was the year of the 40th birthday of the WI in Lorton. Five members did research for a village history competition.

In February 1963, during blizzard conditions, the committee meeting was held in Mrs Downes' home, White Ash Barn, as the Yew Tree Hall was not warm enough. This was a particularly cold winter with weeks of hard frost, when many water supplies were frozen, causing quite a lot of hardship both to houses and farms. A coffee evening and bring and buy sale was held at Mrs Downes' tearoom in aid of the Freedom from Hunger campaign, proceeds being £19. In October, members held a 'Cumberland Neet with Tatle Pot' supper.

In 1964, fluoridation of water supplies was being considered, also the cost of school clothing. Our WI tablecloths had been chewed by mice in the Yew Tree Hall cupboard and thanks to Mrs Eland for repairing them. 1965 was Jubilee Year for the National WI and a scrapbook was made by most Institutes to record life in the village during that year. Miss Samson attended the Royal Jubilee Garden Party on Lorton's behalf. A Jubilee goblet was purchased for flowers on the President's table at meetings. Members visited the Jubilee exhibition in Carlisle, and had an evening outing along the West Cumberland Coast, with supper at Mill House Farm at Gosforth, much enjoyed. In September, a tatie pot supper was held, and later a rummage sale and whist drive with bring and buy. The WI presented a Jacobean oak table to the Yew Tree Hall with inscribed brass plate for Jubilee Year. A complaint was sent to the bus company about overcrowding on the school bus - one day 27 persons were standing - the bus company promised a bigger bus. There was great concern about a proposal under the new Council Health Service which meant that Lorton would no longer have a district nurse living here, and a letter was sent from a public meeting.

In 1966, the Lorton Hunt Committee gave £24 to be used for children's entertainment. This fund was used and topped up for many years for pantomime visits, parties and Christmas presents. In 1967, a whist drive was held at the Wheat Sheaf Inn, an antique show in the Yew Tree Hall and two plays were performed at Christmas "All on a summers day" and "Green grow the cabbages" to an audience of ninety.

A new scheme was begun in 1968 for the benefit of anyone living alone. They would be provided with 'winking lights' to be placed in windows and switched on by anyone needing help. A Christmas Coffee Evening was held at Bridge End Cottage for funds towards the lights, wood provided free by Armstrongs, and Mr Tom Walling assembled them.

Lorton's postmistress for the past 27 years had been Mrs Wilson, who lived in Smithy Fold and had the office in her house. However in 1969 she retired and, one month, the WI meeting was made an open night with a presentation to Mrs Wilson of an electric toaster, a cheque and a bouquet. Also this year, 89 meals had been provided under the Good Neighbours Scheme for anyone ill or elderly requiring them, this being run in conjunction with the WVS. In this year also, a club was formed for anyone in the village to meet every two weeks for a social afternoon, and would be called the Yew Tree Club.

1970 was the year of the Golden Jubilee of the Cumberland Federation of WIs, with various events of celebration, including a tea party at Muncaster Castle to which our members went by coach. A Jubilee Year Show was held at Moota at which our members helped, and who entered competitions with excellent results. As we were now helping with Dovenby Hospital League of Friends, with two members serving at the coffee bar each month, we invited a party of patients to visit Lorton WI in August, a very enjoyable afternoon. As the Post Office was now sited in the village shop, and the letter box moved there, there was a request for a box to be sited at the Rising Sun, but this was turned down by the postal authorities. This was European Conservation Year, which we were asked to mark in some way, so it was decided to plant two trees. However the Highways Department did not allow any planting at Broomlands or other suggested places, so a birch and a rowan were planted during 1972 at the bottom of the playing field.

**1972 was our own Golden Jubilee Year**, when we were joined by some of our founder members for the birthday meeting, and were presented with buttonholes of white heather and orchids made by president Mrs E Lowes. Two more trees were planted in the playing field. Lorton's team of Mesdames DeRenzy Martin, Hilton, Sandwith and Vickers won the first round of the County Quiz. A folding table was bought for the Hall. A party of 56 children and adults visited a pantomime. After experiencing great difficulty in getting parcels to our refugee family, it was decided to discontinue this.

#### **An account of the Women's Institute Field Day 50th Anniversary on July 15th**

After waiting since May for summer to arrive, we were pleasantly surprised when the weather settled and the sun shone for our field day preparations, and the day itself could not have been better. Mr Jos. Steel with tractor and trailer moved chairs, tables, crockery etc. from the Yew Tree Hall to the school shed and playing field. Tea was served in the shed by Mesdames deRenzy Martin, Beattie, Sharpington, Vickers, Taylor, Thomas, Hutchinson, Harris and Lowes. Mrs Monaghan had a display of handicrafts etc. made by our members which made a most interesting exhibition. Various stalls and competitions were set up in the field including, garden stall, grocery, tombola, bran tub, ice cream, lemonade, dartboard, treasure hunt, drawing and pony rides with Joan Wallace's pony. The children thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon, taking part in the sports programme arranged by Mesdames Robertson, Wright, Rogers and Birch assisted by their husbands. Our sincere thanks were due to all the above helpers and people who gave food and prizes, also to Mr Skelt Eland for the loan of a Calor gas boiler. This was altogether a most successful and enjoyable day in the village which for some time had not had an outdoor social occasion. It was not intended to make a large profit but it seemed that money rolled in and we found ourselves with a profit of £43. It was decided to donate £5 to the Yew Tree Hall, and £20 to the children's outing fund, the remainder being kept for future requirements.

*The final part of Maud's series in January will take the Lorton WI up to their 75th anniversary in 1997.*

#### **Candlemass hiring fair by Walter Head**

The following is an extract from the West Cumberland Times dated Saturday, 10 February 1900.

"The Candlemass hiring took place at Cockermouth on Monday. Owing to the wet winter weather experienced lately, farm work is in a backward condition generally and, as a consequence, there was a big demand for farm labour.

First class men were engaged for £10 - £12 for the quarter

Second class men were engaged for £7 - £8 for the quarter

Boys were engaged for £3 - £4 for the quarter

Women were engaged for £5 - £6 for the quarter

Young girls were engaged for £2 - £3 for the quarter

There was some scarcity of women servants but a number of men and boys offered their services."

# People, Place, Produce

## An exhibition, celebrating the Society's 10th anniversary, featuring:

- large, title map-based, reconstructions of the farms and communities of Brackenthwaite, Buttermere, Embleton, Lorton and Loweswater around 1840. All field owners and occupiers are given from the tithe information and photographs of all the dwellings on the tithe maps are included; the residents' names, ages and, where available, occupations are included from the 1841 census. The maps are up to 8 feet by 4 feet and professionally printed in full colour!
- the Three Valleys Oral History project which has been running for 4 years. We started as part of the "Voices of Cumbria" project and went on to cover 'foot and mouth' and 'off-comers'.
- local old photographs from the Archive.
- a panel by Lorton School children showing what life was like in 1841 and 1901.
- a panel from the Cumbria Archive Service, Whitehaven.
- the sale of various publications, including the launch of Ron George's "A Cumberland Valley, A History of the Parish of Lorton".

**At the Loweswater Show** on Thursday, 18 September with free admission to the exhibition and **at the Yew Tree Hall, High Lorton, on 20 & 21 September from 10am to 5pm, admission £1, with Society members and children free.**

★ ★ **Call for helpers** - we will need some help when the exhibition is in the Yew Tree Hall to be on the door or to be around to help visitors. If you could spare some time, please contact Michael Grieve (☎01900 85259). Many thanks.

### Half-size maps for sale

We're going to offer the large maps, at half size (up to 4x2 feet), for sale. If you're interested, please pick up an order form at the exhibition or ring Michael Grieve on 01900 85259.

### What's the value today? by Walter Head

In the last Newsletter, the "present worth" of money in previous years was given, going back to 1300AD in 50 year steps. Well, now there is an easy internet way to find out how much money today has the same purchasing power as a given amount in years gone by (back to 1264). Visit the Economic History Service website on <http://eh.net/hmit> and click on "Purchasing power of the British pound". Use the option for either pre- or post- currency decimalisation in 1971 and type in the amount of money and the year, click "Submit Query" and the answer will be displayed on the screen.

For example, £1 in 1900 would have the same purchasing power as £62.39 in 2002, which is consistent with the value given in the last Newsletter.

### Remaining Talks and Activities for 2003

11 September	<b>Talk</b> by Martin Tweedie on "Steel Bonnets - the Border Reivers".
18 September	<b>Tenth Anniversary exhibition</b> - a variety of exhibits in our own marquee at the Loweswater Show, many with a local farming interest.
20/21 Sept.	<b>Tenth Anniversary exhibition</b> - a variety of exhibits in the Yew Tree Hall, Lorton.
13 November	<b>Talk</b> by Alan Gane on "Arms and the Man" - heraldry and chivalry in the Middle Ages.

The talks start at 7.30pm, normally in the Yew Tree Hall, High Lorton, but please check in the press, adverts and our website in case of later changes in venue. Updates and details can be seen on [www.derwentfells.com](http://www.derwentfells.com)