

Lorton & Derwent Fells

Local History Society



The old cottage at Scales - our "field" visit on 25 March. See page 2.

Secretary's letter

First, I'd like to sound out members' views on the subject of our talks. We started off intending to invite speakers to talk to us about almost anything to do with the history of our three valleys but it is becoming clear - to me at least! - that to do this for every talk is going to be difficult, if not impossible. So what I would like to propose is that we widen our horizons to include local history from anywhere, although preferably having some relevance to Cumbria. This would open the door to many very interesting talks. Maybe some (most?) of you already feel this way but, whatever, Ron or I should like to hear from any of you with strong views either for or against this idea.

Your Chairman comments.....

It is some time since I appeared in print, so to let you know I am still here, I would like to share the following thoughts with you.

The extraordinary meeting held on Saturday, 25 March to consider "Your house and its history" went very well. With sixteen participants, we had just as many as the venue could hold comfortably, so it is just as well that those who had to drop out at the last moment (all for very good reasons) did so. Those of us who did participate felt that the day, from 9.45 am to 5 pm so well spent that it seems appropriate to try and have another similar exercise in the future for those who were denied this time.

That the day was successful was due to those who gave of their time and facilities - Mr and Mrs Denman who provided the venue at their home, Winder* Hall, all the refreshments and one of the two houses studied: Mr Kevin Shield of Scales, whose old cottage there was the other house studied during a "field" visit: and last but by no means least, Mrs Denyer of the National Trust, who gave an excellent tutorial and guided us in our approach to the study of the vernacular buildings of this area.

I do not want to anticipate any comments that are more appropriate to the AGM - please note the date, Thursday, 8 June - but can mention that I have taken note of those of you who, answering the questionnaire, said that they would like to sit round the table with me to try a "mutual tutorial" on troublesome documents. I will be in touch personally as soon as I can get over my present workload.

It is not too soon for members to start working out what they can do to participate in a practical way in our next scheduled members' evening - on Thursday, 14 September. Let us look out those old deeds, photographs, maps and those building plans that you drew when making that "adjustment" to the house and so on.

Finally, thinking along those lines, a point which was reiterated during our "teach-in" on 25th March; whenever you see a house, barn, or any other building being repaired, re-rendered, or modified, please, please, take some photographs, especially when rendering has been removed and before it is put back. There are so many secrets hidden under an inch of render.

RG

* we now know that this is pronounced with a short "i" (Sec)

Can you help?

A member has given me a cutting from the Family Tree Magazine, January 1995 and the following two queries refer to our area.

I am researching the lives of black slaves in Cumbria who worked as servants in the big houses following the abolition of slavery. Does anyone know if they had any descendants? [M A Fleming, 70 Balcarries Road, Leyland, Preston, Lancs PR5 2ED]

Rumour has it that my Cumberland ancestors were engaged in salt smuggling across the Solway Firth. Can anyone tell me if there was ever a salt trade between England and Scotland or Ireland? [Mr S J Harding, 15 Elmet Road, Barwick-in-Elmet, Leeds LS15 4HD]

Any response to the above copied to me, the Secretary, please.

A cautionary tale from a member

Douglas Huntington is a Country Member and he tells us that he is writing a book, one chapter of which is about Loweswater. He has sent us the following.

By way of contribution, it may be of interest to members as to how I became so interested in Loweswater. It was in fact under (innocent) false pretences.

When I retired four years ago, our youngest son evinced some interest in the family origins. I realised that although I had, as a youngster, spent some time in Cumberland/Westmorland living with some distant Huntington relatives, never had I bothered to enquire of their, and my, antecedents. Since then I have discovered that they are not the slightest bit interested, which is a pity because they could tell me so much.

I set about learning, in the usual way, asking my relatives, and visiting our nearby Mormon Library, etc. I got on rather well at first, traced my grandfather's birth in County Durham, traced his father John to Skelton, and his father, Isaac, also to birth at Skelton. Isaac's father was another John and he definitely was not born at Skelton. I knew his age at death and scrutiny of the IGI indicated that a John, son of Isaac and Sarah (née Bell) was born at the right date in Loweswater. I visualised him going to a hiring fair at Cockermouth and having got his job, trekking all the way out to Skelton to live his life out there. As I am sure many family history researchers do, I took Isaac and Sarah to my heart and learned as much as I could, from a time/space distance of 300 years and over 300 miles. My patient wife and I visited Low Park and High Park at Loweswater, where the couple had lived as weavers and brought up about ten children, seven to survival of infancy. I have some excellent photographs of both of those homesteads, which have been well restored. I wonder if anybody has some early pictures of these places and of the village. We became regular customers of the Kirkstile Inn and never shall we visit the county without a visit there for lunch.

Alas! I had been too hasty, for when I started to verify my theory, I found flaws in it, despite the fact that the names were valid, the dates valid enough. I shortly afterwards mentioned to my good friend at Carlisle Archives, Mrs Anne Howells, that I had discovered that the Westward Parish Register had largely been excluded from the IGI. She did a bit of rabbiting and agreed and then said that the Sebergham Register, likewise, was not fully

recorded in the IGI. When I trawled that source, I found my John Huntington, who had only moved from Sebergham to nearby Skelton. From then on, much wiser about verifying each conclusion, I was able to track my family line back from Skelton to Sebergham, to Holme Cultram, to Thursby, where I believe all the Huntingtons started their stay in Cumberland nearly nine hundred years ago.

By then, I had searched through most registers in the county and had so much information of so many branches of the family and so much about numerous places, that I decided to try and write a book. In the course of doing so, I am learning how LITTLE I know, but it is great fun putting that right and gives me an excuse to make occasional visits to the county. Whenever I visit Cumberland and Westmorland, I wonder at my ancestor's foolishness in leaving it, but I guess there were pressing economic reasons.

One thing my researches have not so far uncovered, when Isaac died and his place of burial. His wife Sarah, who came from Latterhead, died on 31/12/1799, aged 43. I could find no record of Isaac's death; I know that he outlived Sarah by twenty plus years, as he and one of his sons 'Lanty' (Lancelot) were mentioned in John Bolton's 1891 lecture, as living at Huntington House in Lorton, on the Cockermouth Road. Bolton said that he took this house over after Priest Sewell died. The Rev. William Sewell lived well into the 1820s. Naturally, I would love to be able to identify 'Huntington House'. I have searched the Lorton Register up to the mid 1840s, by which time Isaac would have been 96, with no success.

I am very grateful to Mr Huntington for this piece, in which he poses several questions. If anyone has any answers, photographs or further ideas for research, please contact him at 'Bonaventure', New Domewood, Copthorne, West Sussex, RH10 3HE; he'd be very pleased. Again, copies of any replies to the Secretary please.

Previous meetings

On 12 January, Geoff Cole talked to us about "Cumbrian farming - Stone Age to ESA" and took us from archaeological traces of early farming sites to present-day problems for farmers in the National Park. He showed clearly that the Cumbrian landscape was mainly man-made and we saw evidence of earlier farming methods, leading up to the recognition by certain pioneers that training, education and improvements in stock and grain were needed. He also showed the enormous changes that had taken place in his own lifetime and his photographs recalled once familiar activities such as haymaking and churning - now fast becoming history. A very enjoyable evening.

On 9 March, John Todd's interesting talk was entitled "Humps and bumps and things in fields" and it lived up to its title! He covered many different features that can be seen in fields, ranging from small sheep shelters to farmhouses. As an example, he showed how the number of farmhouses in Wasdale Head had fallen dramatically over the centuries to the few that exist today. I'm sure that one result of this talk is that we will be much more observant in the future - a case of looking and seeing!

We had good attendances for both talks which is a very heartening sign for the future of the Society.

I'm indebted to our President for two interesting pieces for our Newsletter - one follows and the other will be in the next issue.

A Georgian Chronicle: the diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood

by Angus J L Winchester

On 4 December 1781 *The Cumberland Pacquet* recorded the death at Underwood near Cockermouth, of 'Mr Isaac Fletcher, one of the people called Quakers; a man sincerely and worthily respected by a numerous acquaintance, and greatly lamented in his death'. Four weeks before his death Fletcher had made his last entry in the diary he had kept for most of the previous quarter century. It is a remarkable daily record of life in west Cumberland from 1756 to 1781, written through the eyes of an educated Quaker yeoman and lawyer, who had commercial and industrial interests in Whitehaven and Cockermouth. Its literary merit is not great - the spaces for the daily entries are small, so that he rarely wrote more than four lines a day - but the diary's value to the social and economic historian is considerable as, of course, is its interest to local historians in the Cockermouth area. It took me seven years to produce a full edition of the diary and I am happy to report that it is now in print.

The diary opens a fresh window on to life in west Cumberland on the eve of the industrial revolution. To give a flavour of the diary's riches, here are some extracts from the entries for the year 1777 to illustrate the variety of activities on which Fletcher commented. By that year Fletcher was an elderly man, increasingly housebound by infirmity, and the diary entries centre on life on the farm. The year began with cold weather - "the snow covers the ground about three inches deep and hard froze" - and winter was dominated by activities around the farm. He had hired a waller to open a quarry and wall one of his fields; his farm servant was busy threshing grain and carting coal for Fletcher's lime kiln; and the beef cow was killed: "killed the cow yesterday. She proved pretty well. Sold the skin to J.H. for 29s. ...Sold the tallow to John Fearon ... the beef weigh'd 20 stone per side. Pretty good." The rhythm of the farming year is never far below the surface. Ploughing and sowing corn and planting potatoes; mowing the meadows (they were "thinn this season on account of the cold spring"); harvesting the crops (it was a poor and late harvest, the last of the corn not being gathered in until 21st October). The entries also shed light on the lives of Fletcher's servants. In July, for example, Ruth Johnson, his servant girl, "got a hurt yesterday evening with attempting to drive the bull into the byer, but the dog rescued her from him. A little bruised & much afrighted."

But events in the wider world are also recorded in the diary. The American War of independence had repercussions for trade through the west Cumberland ports and Fletcher had a personal interest in the activities of Paul Jones and the other 'pirates', as his son was a sailor. In July he commented, "the north seas are more and more infested with American, or rather French pyrates" and in late August there came news of the capture by an American privateer of a Whitehaven ship carrying a ring of bells for Cockermouth church. Fletcher made a brief but telling comment, hinting at local political views: "As several of the people there [i.e. in Cockermouth] are much in favour of the American rebellion & against Government, some say it is just on them".

Fletcher's travels also feature prominently in the diary. In 1777 he only made one long journey. The previous year he and John Nixon, a fellow Quaker and a tobacconist in Whitehaven, had entered into a partnership in a lead mine in Galloway. (Fletcher had previously tried to mine lead unsuccessfully on his own land at Mosser). In the Spring of 1777 he and Nixon set off through Galloway to view the mine in New Luce parish,

Wigtownshire, and then sailed from Port Patrick to visit a mine at Newtonards in northern Ireland. His terse and precise description of the sea crossing is typical of his writing: "Left our horses at Stranraer and took the chaise to Port Patrick, 6 miles. Wind contrary this morning. Went on board the *Charlot* packet about 2 p.m. Landed at Dunoghada about 8: 6 hours on the water. Was sea sick. Lodged there. We paid 1s. a bed for our lodging. Bad usage."

The diversity of the topics touched upon by the entries is one of the diary's striking characteristics. The world Fletcher describes is very different from that of the local gentry families whose papers have hitherto formed the basis of much that has been written on the eighteenth-century history of the area. Not only does the diary provide a rare glimpse of everyday life on an eighteenth-century yeoman farm, but it also charts the concerns of the west Cumberland Quaker community at a time when the religious life of the Society of Friends was at a low ebb, sheds light on the activities of merchants and industrialists in Whitehaven, Workington and Cockermouth, and records many legal disputes. Numerous individuals from all walks of life are mentioned.

Fletcher wrote during a period in which the speed of change was gathering pace. The quarter century covered by the diary (1756-81) witnessed developments in the political, economic and social spheres which touched the lives of the 'middling sort' at many different points and were to have profound consequences. Nationally, the diary spans the years of the Seven Years' War (1756-63) and the American War of Independence (1774-81) and is contemporary with the pioneering inventions which paved the way for the mechanisation of the textile industries (Arkwright's water frame in 1769; Crompton's mule in 1779) and with the first great wave of Parliamentary enclosure of open fields in the 1760 and 1770s. At the local level, Fletcher records developments which, though small in themselves, brought west Cumberland into closer contact with the mainstream of national life. The postal service from Cockermouth, for example, was improved in 1761 with deliveries from London on six days of the week, while the journey to London, which had taken over a week on horseback, could be accomplished in three days by 1765, using the York 'fly'. The period also saw the appearance of west Cumberland's first local paper, *The Cumberland Pacquet*, published in Whitehaven weekly from 1774, and the 'discovery' of the Lake District as a playground for the rich and fashionable. The diary thus not only provides a chronicle of life in the middle levels of Georgian rural society but also portrays a pivotal period in the history of the local community in west Cumberland.

The Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood, Cumberland, 1756-1781, edited by Angus J L Winchester, was published by the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society November 1994 at £36 (post free). Copies available from Ian Caruana, 10 Peter Street, Carlisle CA3 8QP (Tel: 01228 44120).

A textile museum

The Cumbria Local History Federation recently sent me some information which mentioned the Helmshore Textile Museum. It is "situated in the picturesque Ogden Valley just below Haslingden and within easy access from the M66/Edenfield bypass". Apparently, the site possesses an excellent exhibition area together with a working waterwheel, fulling stocks and cotton carding and mule spinning machinery. The only other information is its address I'm afraid - Helmshore Textile Museums, Holcombe Road, Helmshore, Rossendale, Lancashire BB4 4NP.

Rosemary Southey's "Question time" in the last Newsletter created a lot of interest and has resulted in two follow-up pieces as follows.

Fulling mills

by John Jaggar

One learns from a quiz in proportion to one's ignorance. My ignorance of Manor Court Records is such that I was learning all the way to the fulling mill. There I felt on more familiar ground, with Rosemary Southey's description of "cleaning and teasing" the cloth - cleaning is indeed part of fulling but "felting" rather than "teasing". I thought that members might like a description of the process and I have drawn on an article by L F J Walrond in the Journal of Industrial Archeology, Vol 1, No 1, for a potted account.

Wool fibres, when magnified, show barb-like scales on the surface. When woollen cloth is beaten in the presence of water and a mild detergent, these barbs become entangled and the cloth felts, resulting in a denser and thicker material - remember that nice woollen jumper that got into the washer by mistake.....?

The term "fulling" is used loosely to include both "scouring", which removes the excess grease necessary for spinning and weaving, and "felting". Scouring may be achieved by pounding in water and Fuller's Earth, a hydrous silicate of alumina, quarried, amongst other places, near Bath. If felting was also required, the process took longer and used soap instead of Fuller's Earth. Scouring required the cloth to be frequently rinsed. Walrond tells that in 1839, it took 24 working hours to full a piece of white cloth and 36 hours for coloured cloth (one wonders why?), so the stimulus to apply power to the process very early in the history of mechanisation is obvious.

The earliest recorded Fulling mills were in use in Gloucestershire in 1175 (Walrond) and by the mid 14th century the Lake District had almost 150 mills, many around Grasmere and Ambleside. *"Water-driven wooden stocks pounded hand-woven material with soft brown soaps to mat or felt the cloth. Before water power was used men walked on the cloth in troughs - hence the name "Walk Mill" for early woollen mills"* (Andy Lowe in "Lake District, Landscape Heritage"). Despite mechanisation, Walrond records fulling by hand and foot in Ireland and the Hebrides as late as 1931.

The design of fulling mills was essentially simple. Wooden hammers were lifted by cams on a shaft rotated by a water wheel and allowed to fall by their own weight into the trough containing the cloth and liquid. The same principal was applied to forge-hammers which were developed at about the same time. The soap was probably made by burning bracken in Lye-pits, then boiling the ash, rich in potash, with mutton fat.

The second piece is from me (the Secretary!) and was triggered by the question about juries. Having heard some strange stories about jury service long ago, I thought that it might be interesting to find out what it really was like and I'm glad that I did. The following comes from " 'A' Level Law" by A M Dugdale et al, 2nd Ed 1992, published by Butterworth.



The development of the English jury system

"(The lay jury system) is credited with the development of the adversary system of justice and the protection of individual liberty under the law. Its original function promised none of these things. Juries were groups of laymen sworn (iurati in Latin - hence jury) to tell the truth about events in their locality. The Normans gathered information for the Domesday survey in this way. Later, juries were assembled to give information to Assize judges about local crimes. Under Henry II they were used for deciding the facts in trials concerning land seizure and when in the next [13th] century the Church withdrew its approval of the traditional form of criminal trial by ordeal, the jury was the obvious substitute. But the jury still functioned as part of an inquest. Its members would be asked what they knew about the land dispute or the particular crime alleged. The critical change of practice occurred in the fourteenth century. Juries were now asked not what they knew but what facts they thought had been established by the evidence of witnesses. Each of the adversaries in the case produced his own witnesses and questioned them and then those witnesses were cross-examined by the other party in an attempt to convince the jurors that they were lying. The judge acted as an umpire, seeing that the questioning was fair. At the close of the evidence, the jury was asked to come to a collective and unanimous decision on the facts and to encourage that process they were confined without food or warmth until agreement was reached. The requirement of a unanimous verdict provided some protection for the accused, much needed in an age when he had no right to be represented by a lawyer. Nevertheless, judges still sometimes tried to bully juries into convicting particularly where the crime had political overtones. It was not until *Bushell's* case in 1670 that it was clearly established that jurors were the sole judges of fact and could not be penalised for taking a view of the facts opposed to that of the judge. It is on this tradition of independence from both judicial and political pressure, that the jury's reputation for defending individual liberty rests. The tradition has continued into the 1990s."

Cumbria Local History Federation

Items of potential interest in the Diary, May - August 1995:-

- 16-18 June "The English Town from Tudor to present" by C J Bond at Higham Hall
- 17 June Maryport & Carlisle Railway's 150 year celebration (contact Cumbria Railways Association - Steven Machell, 105 Scotforth Road, Lancaster LA1 4SD)
- 16-22 July "The Geology of the Lake District" by Dr R C Wright at Higham Hall

Also mentioned - The Federation's AGM and Seminar on "Printing and Publishing Old and New" to be held in the Burnside Hotel, Bowness on Windermere on 23 September.

The Lorton & DFLHS Programme for the rest of 1995

- 11 May "Pardshaw Quakers: the history of a rural meeting" by Angus Winchester
- 8 June Annual General Meeting
- 13 July A talk by Brian Martland
- 14 September Members' evening
- 9 November "A history of the Whitehaven coalfields" by Jean Ward