

# Lorton & Derwent Fells Local history Society



Two extracts from the original Ordnance Survey, 25" to the mile, maps surveyed in 1863 and reduced to 12½" to the mile for this cover

## SECRETARY'S LETTER



Two weeks before I sat down to start typing the next (ie this) Newsletter, I had no proper articles to hand and I was beginning to wonder what I was going to use. Then two things happened. First, Ron George offered me an article about how to research the history of your house and this looks really useful. Then, second, a piece came from one of our country members, Susan Laville, about the Pearson families who lived in the Lorton valley - and near Kendal - many centuries ago. So, in a period of two or three days, I had the makings of a Newsletter! I'm saying this to show just how important it is to have a steady flow of material coming in for the Newsletters. A little while ago, I got a few short pieces from Walter Head which are ideal for the gaps which nearly always appear when I start putting everything together: I'm very grateful for these so how about some more from other members? And finally, if anyone has an idea for the front cover of a future Newsletter, please contact me. Phew! that's over.

The last Newsletter came out shortly before the Lorton Festival and the Festival advert was featured on the front cover. I'd like to report on two things. One was the Local History Exhibition held in the Yew Tree Hall which was organised mainly by Ron George with much help from Society members plus a sizeable entry from the local school. I think it's right to say that the Exhibition was a great success - everybody I spoke to had certainly found it so. Some, mainly local people, found the school photographs particularly interesting because they, or their friends were on them! I know that in at least one photo, the date was wrong so that one boy looked younger in the later photograph (it's all right Charlie, I won't let on who it was!). Equally, others found much to interest them in the rest of the Exhibition. The linked Art Exhibition got a lot of praise and I believe the two separate exhibitions complemented each other in several ways. The other point is much shorter - the Lorton Festival weekend was a financial success and it is nice to have played a part in helping the Church Appeal to exceed its target of £25,000. The work has started on the church and let's hope that the rainproofing is successful!

I was in the Carlisle Record Office a few days ago looking, for the first time, at the original Ordnance Survey maps of Lorton village. They were surveyed in 1863 and published at a maximum scale of 1:2500 which is about 25" to the mile. So the detail on them is very good and I hope that you can see this detail on the two extracts on the front cover which I have reduced by a factor of two to fit them on; so their scale is about 12½" to the mile. I noticed that they had been produced in two versions, black and white at 3/- and coloured at 4/-. Luckily, many of the maps in the CRO are coloured and they are really attractive. So as well as getting some photocopies of selected areas, I tried taking some hand-held colour photographs and, if successful, I shall take a tripod there sometime and see if I can get some photos of complete maps. If I never mention this topic again, you'll know it was a complete failure!!

Still on maps - you might be getting the idea that I like them - I see in the August "Cumbria" magazine that someone has spent four years stitching together all the small maps in the Wainwright Pictorial Guides and so far he has produced two large maps, based on Books 4 and 6 - The Southern Fells and The North Western Fells. Part of the latter is shown in the "Cumbria" article. I think it's a great idea because I find that, used with caution, they still can be invaluable, especially in bad conditions on the fells. Try finding your footpath in bad weather on one of the 2½" OS maps when there are also lots of contour lines where you are! The reason for mentioning this is that Wainwright's maps are now getting quite old (Book 1 is just over 40 years old) and therefore of historic interest. Luckily, footpaths on the high fells don't really change much with time.



## SO YOU WANT TO TRACE THE HISTORY OF YOUR HOUSE!

by Ron George

Sometimes I am asked "How should I go about finding the history of my house, which I believe to be quite old ? "

The search is sometimes quite long and difficult, but if in your heart you truly want the answer, the effort is both rewarding and always interesting. So let us look at what may be available, what we might expect to find from the various sources, and how much we should trust them.



The initial source must be the house itself. Details of wall materials and structure, layout of rooms and passages, details of features such as roof materials and roof timbers, windows, doors and their decoration. Information of these can be

found in specialist books; one such for the Cumbrian area being "Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties" <sup>(1)</sup>. If we are discussing a farmhouse, perhaps as far back as the of 17th century, it is most probable it will have a name that has come down unchanged through the centuries, and this will make tracing the history simpler than if no name is known. It is extremely unlikely that a single house, other than a "great house", would have its own name before late Victorian times. Do not forget that dated fireplaces and transoms can be moved, if not from another building, which does happen, perhaps from another room.

Deeds are perhaps the next logical step, but very often there is none for periods earlier than the twentieth century. If they exist and are not in the possession of the new owner, they should be with the solicitor or perhaps a mortgagee. In theory they will give the history of the ownership of the house since its construction. If this is so, the quest may well end here; however it is unlikely that deeds would be so comprehensive. In this case the search would proceed along the following lines which supposes there are no old deeds. In any case the deeds are less likely to give details of occupants, as opposed to owners. Land tax records to be found in the relevant County Record Office may be able to give details of both owner and occupant for some or all of the period 1780 - 1832. These records were collected for periods outside that range, but are less likely to be extant. For Lorton and the surrounding area, they are to be found at the Carlisle Record Office (CRO) <sup>(2)</sup>. The land tax soon became tied to rateable value, but as this was based on the 1692 value and not changed; depended on the quality of the land

and how it was used, it can not therefore be used today with any degree of exactitude to relate to size of the holding. The names of owner and occupier are sometimes transposed, which might lead to confusion, and search up blind alleys.

Parish Records (the north west Cumbrian area is now to be found in the CRO) should be consulted as, with any luck, for the period under review, personal entries of weddings, births and deaths may give the specific relevant address. Addresses before the 18th century are very often not given, so should the house in question go back that far it may well not be possible to prove it from this source. Assuming we are lucky, we then will have family details of owners or occupiers of the house, but without any direct indication as to which category the person falls. To fill in gaps that may occur in this research, recourse should be made to the Wills, also to be found in the Record Office <sup>(3)</sup>. These are unlikely to give very much help regarding land, since real estate is seldom mentioned within the older Wills, but the Will does often give the residence of the person and, failing the existence of a Will, it may be that a Probate Inventory, or a Bond of Administration, is in existence, either of which might give the same minimum information <sup>(4)</sup>.

Again, given that we are talking of a named house, we might well find that one or more of the Census returns for 1841 onwards will confirm or add to the information obtained from the records mentioned above. It will also broaden the picture emerging, since the census not only gives the occupier, but all the family and any farm and domestic servants that may live there, together with their place of origin (1851 onwards).

One certain source for information will be the Tithe Return with its associated map of the area. This will provide a "snapshot" of the area and any land associated with it at a given date, and can be very useful for broadening out the data acquired elsewhere as it will show use of the land. Again, this will give the owner and occupier at that date and is normally accurate. Do not be put off by odd spellings of modern names. It may be possible to correlate the Tithe Award data with the 1841 Census to extract helpful information.

Another source that should be explored to

complement the above is the Manorial Records archive. These records may be held in a variety of places - the County Record Office, the local reference library, Diocesan archives in the case of church Manors, solicitor's offices, or in private hands - all are possible, and sometimes a combination of them.

One possible source of information worthy of investigation is the series of local trade directories. These must be used with a certain element of care, since they contain entries paid for by those whose names appear, and these entries are subject to personal whim, as well as editorial error <sup>(5)</sup>. Finally, when all else has been exhausted, or failed, trawl through the Tax and Quarter Sessions records held in the Record Office for the odd reference to the named farm, house, or persons in question, and the relevant farming, political or other sections of the local newspapers. For West Cumberland, the oldest newspaper is the "Cumberland Paquet", which is believed to be complete in the Whitehaven Public Library from 1774 to 1914. Workington Library holds an incomplete set of the "West Cumberland Times" from 1874 to 1966 as well as the "Workington Star" from 1904 to 1942 and the "Times and Star" from 1970 to the present.

Should the property prove to be even older than the times covered by the above documents, references to owners and/or occupiers, but probably with very little other supporting information, might be found in such documents as the Hearth Tax Returns of the 1660s. But at this stage, discussion of the case with the County Archivist would be the best way forward. In fact a chat with the Archivist is always a good starting point.

It remains only to find the physical storage site of the various records mentioned. Volumes such as Tate or Richardson <sup>(6)</sup> give lists of County Record Offices and the area covered by their records. In the case of modern Cumbria, most records are divided between Carlisle and Kendal, i.e. old Cumberland and old Westmorland respectively. A new office for West Cumberland archives is just about to be opened at Whitehaven. However, Wills and Probate papers for those parishes which had previously been in the Archdeaconry of Richmond and Diocese of Chester are filed at Preston for dates before 1832. All Parish registers that are not in current use should be found in the relevant county record office.

Diocesan archives are now mostly now in county record offices: that for the Diocese of Carlisle has recently been transferred to the Carlisle Record Office. For the Parochial Chapelry of Lorton, many of the documents mentioned are in the archive of our Society.

If the research has proved fruitful we should finish up with a comprehensive idea of the ownership and occupiers of not only the house, but also the land of which it had been the economic centre. Good hunting!!

### References

- 1 Dr. R W Brunskill's "Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties". Faber, 1974.
- 2 Under the general reference QPR/1.
- 3 Those for this area before 1832 are to found in the Lancashire Record Office [La.RO] at Preston. Subsequent ones are at the CRO.
- 4 All these are to be found under the same general reference WRW C at the La.RO.
- 5 Carlisle Record Office, Carlisle Library and Workington Library have the best selection of the various Directories published periodically from 1781 onwards.
- 6 John Richardson, "The Local Historian's Encyclopedia", Historical Publications Ltd 1986 and W. E. Tate, "The Parish Chest", Phillimore, 1983.

### CUMBRIA LOCAL HISTORY FEDERATION

In the August Bulletin, there is news of an **Archaeology & Local History Day** on Sunday 15 September 1996 at the National Park Visitor Centre, Brockhole, Windermere. It runs from 10 am to 5 pm, admission and most events are free although there will be a charge for car parking. The day has been arranged to present some of the results of recent local archaeological and historical work carried out by a wide range of different organisations. There will also be many exhibits and displays and a wide selection of relevant new, second-hand and antiquarian books. Plus, at 2.30 pm, the AGM of the CLHF! I know it's short notice but if you're interested, details from Brockhole on 015394 46601.

### NEW WEST CUMBRIA RECORD OFFICE

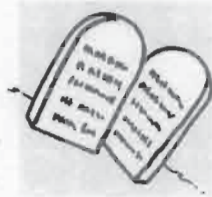
Also in the August Cumbria Local History Federation Bulletin, Anne Dick, Local Studies Librarian, says that the new record office for

West Cumbria will open on 27 August 1996 in Scotch Street, Whitehaven. Records concerning the area from the Derwent to the Duddon are being transferred from Carlisle although the Lonsdale archive will remain at the Castle. Subjects covered include parish records, council and business records and family archives such as those of the Penningtons of Muncaster and the Curwens of Workington. It will be open Monday to Friday 9.30 am to 5 pm (to 7 pm on Wednesday) and Saturday 9 am to 1 pm. The telephone number is 01946 691552 but this will change at the end of the year.

### DO YOU KNOW? .....

To the glory of God and to the memory of the men who fell in the war 1914 - 1918

J BENSON  
S ELAND  
T HEAD  
R MOFFAT  
J MOUNSEY  
J NEEDHAM  
A PEARSON  
W ROTHERY  
J J SWANSTON  
A W TOWERS  
W WALKER



When shall their memory fade

Would anyone with information on any of the above please contact Walter Head on 01900 85697.

Secretary's note: Walter has produced a competition on a local topic (and there is a prize) so watch out for it in the January Newsletter!

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Now we have a very welcome piece from one of our country members who has a particular interest in the Pearsons who lived in this area many centuries ago. Her story is, understandably, fairly complex and contains some informed deductions; if anyone has any information which adds to, or seems to clash with, the following, please let me know and I'm sure that Susan will be interested and will perhaps produce an update sometime in the future.

## THE PEARSONS OF LORTON VALE

by Susan Laville

My grandmother was born Ellen Pearson and she inherited a collection of family letters dating back to 1699 and a family bible which dates from 1642 and contains a family tree up to 1767. By this time, the family had left England and settled in County Cork. The letters and bible disappeared for about forty years until they turned up, wrapped up in some old corsets, and nearly ending up in the dustbin! It has taken many years to "flesh out" the basic facts and, as far as I can see, the Pearsons went on in Lorton long after my ancestors left the area and were still recorded as being there in deeds made at the end of the 18th century. Anyway, here are some notes on the Pearsons of Lorton Vale.

There were several Pearsons (mostly related to each other) who farmed in the Vale of Lorton in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries - amongst the properties were Miller Place, Gilbrae, Hope, Bridgend, Sheaton or Shatton, Fangs, Latterhead, Cold Kell, Wateryeat, Byerstead and several others in neighbouring parishes. Most of these farms still stand, though probably reconstructed during the "great rebuilding" of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. If anything remains at all of the buildings which the ancestors inhabited, then they are likely now to be the cowsheds or barns in the farmyards of the more modern farmhouses.

The Vale of Lorton was, in Tudor and Stuart times, a centre of primitive "industries" such as charcoal burning and coppicing, milling, even lead mining and, of course, sheep farming and at the end of the 16th century, Brackenthwaite was quite an important place; it appears in early maps of the County of Cumberland along with places which are now quite sizeable towns and villages. In the middle of the 18th century there was a flash flood which washed away most of the Lanthwaite Green area of the village (see Newsletter No 7). The modern village is a small and scattered hamlet which appears only in some large scale maps.

It is interesting that around 1550, no Pearsons in Brackenthwaite are shown as customary tenants of the manor. Probably it was a few years after the break up of the great monastic estates that the Pearsons were able to buy

leases of land which, at that point, became available.

Several Pearsons were mentioned in local records at this time. A Robert Pearson was listed in the Muster Rolls for the township of Lorton in 1535. He was not one of the seven wealthier men\* recorded as being able to provide a horse for military duties but was a plain foot soldier and was quite possibly the man recorded as being the miller at Low Lorton, who died in 1560. A Peter Pearson of Low Lorton died the same year. Low Lorton was part of the manor of Derwent Fells which was then owned by the Percy family, so more about these Pearsons may be found in the Rental Lists for this estate.

In 1605, Richard Pearson joined with the Lawsons of Isel Hall and others and bought the lands of the rebel Walter Grame (Graham) whose days of pillaging were numbered when King James I came to the throne in 1603. After a lifetime of terrorising the district, Graham's lands were confiscated by the Crown and a great many rich sheep farmers, who wished to expand their flocks and farmland, moved into the area which had at last been made safe. Richard Pearson acquired property at, amongst other places, Watendlath and Rosthwaite. In 1606 it was recorded that, in the Allerdale Ward, Mr Pearson paid the enormous sum of £97 in tax for "the transportation of the Grames, border raiders, their lands to be settled by more peaceable people". There was a long list of people taxed for the same purpose, most of whom paid only £1 or £2 but Pearson's was by far the largest sum paid. Richard Pearson settled at Dunthwaite in Setmurthy where his descendants still lived some generations later. His daughter Elizabeth, who died in 1621, was married in 1616 to Christopher, the son of Christopher Crakeplace who had built Crakeplace Hall in 1612 and who had been a servant to a Baron of the Exchequer, Baron Altham, and "waxed rich thereby".

Richard Pearson's brother, Thomas, married Anne Pickering of Scalthwaite-rigg near Kendal in 1591 and they lived in Killington Hall. Some years later, Thomas Pearson acquired the lease of Sheaton (now Shatton) in the Vale of Lorton. He named ten children in his will of 1623 but had others, including some married daughters, who were not named but who had already had small bequests on their marriages.

However, one married daughter was Isabel who in 1622, probably as a young child, was officially betrothed to John, aged about three, the son of Arthur Wilson of Whinfell near Kendal. The marriage settlement concerned the capital messuage called "le Spittle", lately part of the dissolved hospital of St Leonard, in the Scalthwaite-rigg district including many acres of land plus four other premises in Westmoreland. These premises were conveyed to four people including Henry and John Pierson, Isabel Pearson's brothers and so this branch of the Pearson family had wide farming interests throughout two counties.

Richard Pearson's second brother, Henry, married in 1600 Elisabeth Williamson of Newhall near Applethwaite, Keswick who, through her grandmother, was descended from Sir Lancelot Thirkell of Mehere - said to be in Cumberland though so far untraced. Sir Lancelot was a 16th century notable who owned at least three large properties including one in Threlkeld near Keswick and this estate provided him with many tenants and men to go with him to war. At the time of his marriage, Henry was said to be of Embleton (see Visitations of the Heralds) but he later settled in Low Lorton where he leased land from John Winder of Winder Hall. (Incidentally, Winder held this land under Earl Percy and he also had more property at Isel which he held under Sir Wilfred Lawson). Henry Pearson died as a twice-married great grandfather in 1651 and his assets were valued at nearly £1000 so, by the standards of his day, he was a rich man. His granddaughter, one of the beneficiaries of his will, had married into the influential Lowther family of Penrith.

The marriage allegations for Cumberland show a marriage between Peter Pearson of Isel and Elisabeth Williamson of Thornthwaite (Millbeck) which took place in 1617. Their son, John Pearson, received a bequest from his uncle, John Williamson, in 1640. We know that the Isel Pearsons were related to the Sheaton Pearsons and there may therefore be a further family link here.

It was Peter Pearson of Brackenthorpe (sic) who was said, in the Oxford Alumnia, to be the father of our direct ancestor the Reverend John Pearson (1622-1691), Vicar of Brigham and later Rector of Great Orton. The entry in the Alumnia is certainly inaccurate with regard

to the spelling of Brackenthwaite - no such place as Brackenthorpe exists in England. It appears that a mistake was also made in this entry regarding the name of John's father - Peter Pearson was probably a close relation and was the official assessor of John's father's goods and chattels and later became his stepfather. John's real father was William Pearson of Miller Place in Brackenthwaite who married Agnes Rudd in 1612, possibly when they were both very young, who was the daughter of Thomas Rudd of Pykethow (Pickett How) in Brackenthwaite. There was a gap of eight years before the birth of their first child Elisabeth; Thomas was born in 1622 and John born before his father's death in October 1623, although he was baptised in January 1624. 1623 was a bad time for the plague\*\*, which killed many people in Cumberland. After William's death, Agnes married Peter Pearson and she died in 1638.

In common with most people of those times, the Pearsons always used family Christian names and the name Peter was never used in our branch again. William, however, crops up in nearly every generation for three hundred years and as the Reverend John Pearson called his eldest son - later to be the Chancellor of York - by this name, it seems likely that he was named after his long-dead grandfather.

There were several Peter Pearsons in the Lorton valley at that time and it is difficult to pin-point the exact man that Agnes married. However, he is most likely to have been the son or the brother of Anthony Pearson of Hope, a farm about half a mile from Miller Place, since both a Peter and an Anthony Pearson were mentioned in William Pearson's will. In 1649, the Parliamentary Survey records that Hope was occupied by both Janet, the daughter of Anthony Pearson who by then was dead, and Thomas Pearson, probably the eldest son of William and Agnes who is mentioned above. Thomas inherited his father's farms, including Miller Place, but did not figure in his will since he had, as eldest son, automatic right of inheritance to his father's lands.

Wills of Kendal Pearsons show them to have been much more wealthy than their Cumberland relations; they frequently left silver cups and spoons, gold rings and fine clothes as well as land and livestock to their heirs. On the other hand, the money of

Cumberland farmers was tied up in land, cattle, sheep and more mundane household and farm equipment. The assessments made of their goods and chattels show a Spartan way of life. Even the marauding Scots seem to have avoided raiding in the Cockermouth area for there were no rich pickings here; they saved their efforts for softer and more rewarding targets in Westmoreland. Even in the 16th century the Kendal Pearsons, men as well as women, seem to have been literate and able to sign their wills with a good hand. This was often not the case with the Cumberland Pearsons and there is something rather pathetic about the childish scrawled crosses made instead of signatures.

From early times, there were many links between Kendal wool merchants and the sheep farmers of Cumberland. Pack horse trains, laden with wool from Borrowdale and other distant Cumberland valleys, were constantly bound for Kendal where wool was woven, died and prepared for sale. In the latter half of the 16th century and the early years of the 17th, these Kendal merchants took advantage of large scale sales of land and sheep runs in the Keswick area to buy up long leases and this would seem to account for the connections between the Kendal and the Lorton Pearsons.

\*[Sec] Interestingly, in Newsletter No 6, Angus Winchester lists the names of the seven men who each provided a horse for military duties; and Robert Pearson is actually listed as Roberte Person.

\*\*[Sec] Ron George tells me that modern research casts considerable doubt that it was plague in this year. Has anyone any information?

## FROM LORTON TO CANADA

By Walter Head

At the outbreak of World War I, Jane and Thomas Head lived at Low Hollins Farm, Brackenthwaite. They had seven sons, not all of whom were living at home. By this time, John, who had served in the army, had emigrated to Canada. Of the other six, five were of military age and all joined the army. Thomas was killed in 1915 - more of him at a later date.

On their return from the conflict two more sons, Joseph and Fred, emigrated to Canada. None ever returned to Britain.

The following is an extract from a letter from Fred to his brother Bert in the UK.

"I was never any good at writing letters, and to put 56 years in one letter - well I'll try. So here goes.

I worked out on farms for a few years till I got a few \$ saved and then bought this land 320 acres of new land \$12.50 per acre @ 6% and 12 years to pay, bought a tractor, plow and 21" disc and built a small shack. When I say I bought them I mean borrowed the money at the bank.

In the spring of 1928 I got a few jobs plowing that helped buy gas for my breaking (clearing and working virgin ground).

I moved up here about the end of May and started to work on my own. It was quite a thrill to drop the plough into land that had never been touched since the Ice Age. I suppose I worked hard but it doesn't seem work when your trying to make a dream come true. I broke 120 acres that year and got some of it worked down and then got a job running an old case tractor on a threshing machine, got 30 days in at \$5 a day, then came back and finished my breaking down, the last day I worked in a snowstorm, moved the shack behind a clump of bushes for protection from the worst of the winds and settled in for the winter.

It was a little chilly in the shack a little below zero in the mornings. The lumber had dried in the hot sun and you could see out between the boards, it was too late to do anything about it. It must have been healthier for I was never sick, not even a cold.

Then came 1937 I seeded 180 acres in the spring but we didn't get a drop of rain all summer just hot dry winds so there was no crop, so next I had to go to the bank and get a loan for seed and gas. Then again in 1939 I seeded the same and got a 40 bus and acre crop!

1940 was a good year I finished paying for the land, got married, it sure was an improvement."

## PREVIOUS MEETINGS

We had a special members' evening on 9 May to see what we could gather together for the Lorton Festival. Thank you to everyone who brought things along and to those who promised items for the Festival.

On 13 June we held our AGM and, surprise, surprise, the old Committee was transformed into the new Committee unchanged! Then Ron George gave us an interesting view on rural/urban population movements in our area over the 18th and 19th centuries.

Then on 11 July, Hugh Turner from Cockermouth told us about the various plans for canals in what is now Cumbria and described those that were built. It was interesting to hear that some were quite successful for a while but sad that all were superseded by the railways that spread so quickly and widely in the 19th century. He finished with a question to us (nothing to do with canals!) - he has found two stones near the top of the Whinlatter Pass, near the road, one has 1846 and the other 1847 and both (I think) have RWS on them. Any thoughts to Ron or me please!



## FUTURE MEETINGS

On Thursdays at 7.30pm in the Yew Tree Hall.

12 September 1996 "So you know your area?"  
by Mike Davies-Shiel.

14 November "Lakeland curiosities"  
by George Bott

9 January 1997

13 March

8 May

12 June AGM