

Derwent Fells Digital Archive of Historical Sources

General Introduction, Issue 1

The Derwent Fells Digital Archive of Historical Sources (the Archive) is a collection of copies and transcriptions of primary historical sources which have been gathered by members of the Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society (the Society) since its creation in 1993. It is offered as a resource which can be borrowed by members and others who wish to undertake projects involving the local history of the Society's area of interest.

Very little of the Archive is copies of original material held by the Society. The great majority is copies of records held by repositories such as the Cumbria Archive Service and The National Archives.

Coverage

The focus of the Society is the Civil Parishes of the Cocker Valley, south of Cockermouth in Cumberland, an area which includes three of the north-western lakes, Buttermere, Crummock and Loweswater. These Civil Parishes are Lorton, Loweswater, Buttermere, Blindbothel, Embleton-Wythop-Setmurthy, Eaglesfied-Mosser, and parts of Dean. Cockermouth itself is not within the primary area, though the Archive contains some sources for Cockermouth, Above Derwent and Keswick.

Content

The content has not been collected systematically and is not complete, but rather reflects the interests of its members over the years. It has now been organised by categories, and with a geographical guide to help find records by place and period. The records range in time from medieval charters to the latest major source, which is the land valuation survey of 1909-15.

Excluded are those family history and other records which can be found online, such as Census enumerations, Civil Registration, Ordnance Survey maps and Newspapers. The Society's collection of historical photographs may form a separate archive.

Excluded also are secondary sources, or histories which have been written by members and others. All of the Society's publications can be found on the website www.derwentfells.com.

The content for issue 1 can be found in the archive listing document. Its geographical application can be found in the archive finder document.

Issue 1 does not contain manorial records, which will be the main upgrade to issue 2, expected a little later in 2023. Please contact the editor with any requests for manorial records held.

Form and quality of records

Most of the content takes the form of photographs of original documents taken with a hand-held digital camera, and have not been processed to improve the quality before presenting here as a .jpg image. Some photographs, particularly in maps and plans, are of a higher and accurate standard.

The documents are good enough to read, which is the purpose of the Archive. However, most original documents are manuscript and the condition, script and sometimes language, can pose a problem.

Other records have been held as photocopies of the original, and these have been digitised for this archive either by photography or by scanning, as convenient.

Some records have been transcribed from the original, and this is identified. If available as, say, a Word document, these have been converted to .pdf.

There are some databases included, particularly the registers of St Cuthbert's Lorton. These are presented in a format suitable for Microsoft Access, which permits powerful searching. For those without Microsoft Access, databases are also presented as text files in .rtf, both by surname and by date, which can be opened in any word processor.

Applications

The Society is a local history society, and so the content and its organisation are optimised for enquiries and projects in local history, either within our area or as part of a wider or regional study. The most obvious area

of application is in property history; houses, business premises, farms, estates, land use. The study of family history has its own well-established finding aids and sets of records which recognise that people and families moved and spread. However, this archive includes many local and specialised records which will allow the family historian to discover more about families known to have lived in our area. The archive will also be helpful to those doing academic studies or writing which involve property or people in our area.

This archive should provide a quick and convenient entry into the major records for local history in our area, but it is not complete and comprehensive. All studies are likely to require the use of other records held by the Cumbria (Cumberland?) Archives Service and The National Archives, which can be searched – but not read – using their respective finding aids, CASCAT and Discovery. Other repositories may also be relevant.

Referencing

This archive has a numbering system but is not itself a repository of any original records and is not intended to be referenced as the source of original documents held elsewhere. Use of the archive facility can be acknowledged, but any historical reference should that of the original document, which will be included in the archive.

Development

The first issue of this archive was created in February 2023. The intention is to develop and improve it through later issues, and to ensure that all copies are kept up to date. Later issues will contain a list of additions and improvements.

Physical format

This archive of historical sources contains images of original documents and transcriptions which have been collected over time by various people, some unknown, and under various conditions of use, particularly concerning publication of images in print or online. Consequently, this archive will not be published but will be made available on loan on 128 GB flash drives/memory sticks.

Conditions of use

This archive will be made available to society members and bona-fide researchers in the form of a 128GB flash drive. This will remain the property of the society, on loan, and borrowers will be required to agree to the conditions under which the flash drive and its contents are made available to them. Essentially this will ensure firstly that ownership of the drive is acknowledged and maintained and secondly that the information contained is used only in ways which are set out and are consistent with the commitments given to other parties by the suppliers of the copy-material.

No charge for use is currently envisaged.

Support

The archive itself and the records within it are accompanied by general guidance on the content, meaning and use of the records, the quality of which should develop and improve over time. There is also a finding aid, but not a search facility, which will allow the identification of records for a local history project by location within our area and by period.

Support will also be given to users by the current editor of the archive, and others with experience who may volunteer.

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