Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society

Wanderer

No.55, February 2025

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Society News

'Presidents, sailors, soldiers and spies: an American view of Cumbrian history'

We have a new title and focus for this year's opening lecture on 20 March. Our speaker, Dr Chris Donaldson of Lancaster University, writes about his talk as follows:

We often view Britain's special relationship with the United States as a product of the Second World War. However, the ties between the UK and the US stretch far back into history. This is especially true here in Cumbria. Famous Americans have come here since the 1700s, and in that time countless Cumbrians have left their native county in search of new opportunities across the Atlantic.

In this talk, we will explore the deep-rooted connections between Cumbria and key figures and events in American history. Additionally, we will delve into the stories of Cumbrians who pursued their fortunes in the United States. Together, these historical narratives highlight a simple but significant truth: the histories of Cumbria and America are closely intertwined.

We look forward to welcoming Chris Donaldson who is Director of the Regional Heritage Centre at Lancaster University. Born in Pennsylvania, he came to the UK from the US where he gained a BA from Penn State University and a PhD from Stanford University. Since then, he has published widely on the history of northern England, especially Cumbria, the Lake District and the Anglo-Scottish border region.

Our future programme 2025

18-21 Mar 2025	Members' study week at Cockermouth Castle Archives	Contact Charles Lambrick
20 Mar 2025	'Presidents, sailors, soldiers and spies: an American view of Cumbrian history'.	Dr Christopher Donaldson
15 May 2025	'Countess Ossalinsky and the Thirlmere dam'.	Ian Hall
12 Jun 2025	AGM followed by 'Names in the Landscape'.	Professor Angus Winchester
18 Sep 2025	'Clouties and Mud – Long Meg Stone Circle and Birdoswald Roman fort'.	Bruce Bennison
13 Nov 2025	'The great enchantress: Ann Radcliffe's 1794 tour of The Lakes'.	Dr Penny Bradshaw

Talks are at 7.30 pm in the Yew Tree Hall, are included in membership and are open to visitors at £4 cash at the door, with refreshments. Talks are also streamed live to members using Zoom but are not recorded. Other activities will be added.

Officers and Committee 2024/5

President: Professor Angus Winchester Financial Examiner: Dr Ian Shaw

Andrew Chamberlain *Chairman*	07815 422092 *ldflhschair@gmail.com*	Charles Lambrick *Vice-chair,*	*charleslambrick@ btinternet.com*
Lena Stanley-Clamp *Secretary, talks*	01900 336542 *ldflhs.secretary@gmail.com*	Fiona Lambrick Gloria Edwards	
Dr Derek Denman *Treasurer, Wanderer*	01900 829097 *derekdenman@ btinternet.com*	Tim Stanley-Clamp *(co-opted)*	

Other contacts: Mary Baker, Membership*, ldflhs.subs@gmail.com*

Diary dates

Regional Heritage Centre, Lancaster University:

8 Feb, *Riot and Rebellion: popular dissent and protest in the North West 1500-1850*. 9:30am to 4:00pm, University Library events space.

A full-day study event with Dr Alan Crosby, considering examples of 'riot and rebellion' from our region.

12 Feb, *52nd Annual Archaeology Forum*. 9:55am to 5:15pm, Lancaster University Library Exhibition Space.

A full-day study event on developments in archaeology in the North West over the past year. It will also be live-streamed for those unable to attend in person.

Details: *https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/regional-heritage-centre/*

The **next issue** of the *Wanderer* will be published on 1 May 2025. Please send any short items to the Editor, Derek Denman, by 1 April.

The *Wanderer* is published by the Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society, 19 Low Road Close, Cockermouth CA13 0GU.

http://derwentfells.com *https://facebook.com/Lortonlocalhistorysociety*

L&DFLHS Archive: *https://derwentfells.org.uk*

Message from the chair

Dear members,

Welcome to our latest edition of The Wanderer, and welcome, too, to 2025! We have a great programme of talks to look forward to through this membership year, thanks to Lena Stanley-Clamp, and we are also planning to organise a guided walk to explore the architecture and history of Whitehaven early this summer, about which we'll have more details in the May edition.

November's excellent talk, on the Rise and Fall of Maritime West Cumberland, by Alan Bell, was very well attended, both in person and via Zoom. We were still putting up extra chairs in the hall within minutes of Alan's lecture commencing, and were very pleased to welcome a number of visitors from west Cumbria. If you were unable to join us, you'll find the talk report in this edition of the *Wanderer*, thanks again to Lena.

In addition to the talk report, you'll find a number of interesting articles from our contributors this quarter, covering the usual diverse range of topics from the Cockermouth to Keswick turnpike, to Gloria Edwards' article on sites and scenes from the River Cocker.

You'll also see that this edition has a particular focus on the Society's study week in October at the Leconfield Archives at Cockermouth Castle. My thanks go to all who made this visit possible, in particular Charles Lambrick, Derek Denman, Alison McCann (archivist), Andy Loukes (collection curator), the staff at Cockermouth Castle and, of course, Lord Egremont, for his generosity and support. I must say I thoroughly enjoyed the week and although there was hardly time to read any of the papers as they emerged from their metal boxes, it was quite thrilling to see what each box contained as they were opened, which more than made up for the sore back that came with helping to photograph some 16,000 images.

We were also able to support the Yew Tree Hall management committee through the provision of a pair of information boards on the history of the hall, which are now mounted in the supper room. I'd like to acknowledge Walter Head who originally researched the story of the hall from industrial building to village amenity and to those who provided the images.

I'd also like to thank all those who contributed to the November edition of the *Wanderer*, in particular, Sue Pexton, who agreed to write the trip report for the Society's visit to Carlisle Cathedral last October. Sue's report was much more than a summary of the key moments of the tour or a dry series of notable dates - it was also a personal reflection on the cathedral as a sacred space and the messages it carries for us, as seen through the eyes of an artist.

Last, but by no means least, I'd like to extend a very warm welcome to Tim Stanley-Clamp who has joined our committee. If any of you would like to know a little more about what's involved with being on the committee, do please make contact and I'd be very happy to chat to you about it.

Andrew

Meeting Reports

Leconfield Estate Archives study week 22-25 October 2024

In the November 2024 Wanderer I referred in 'Society News' to access having been granted to Members to study archive documents kept at Cockermouth Castle, premises that are not open to the public. The event duly took place over four days at the end of October last year.

To recap: the documents are held in the privately owned archives of the Leconfield Estate. Through the much-appreciated good offices and generosity of Lord Egremont and the Estate's professional archivist, Alison McCann, access to them was made possible. The objective for the four days spent at the castle was twofold: for Members to have the opportunity to do some research for their own particular local history projects, and for a major exercise to take place to photograph as many archival documents as possible that are of particular relevance for the Society's area of interest.

In advance of the study week a considerable amount of preparation work was done by Derek Denman and me. From the outset, following my informal conversation with Lord Egremont in the autumn of 2023, I was responsible for liaising with Alison McCann and other staff members about the arrangements for the study week. Derek concentrated on identifying and listing categories of documents and their archive box numbers in which the relevant material is kept. The list was sent to Alison McCann in advance so that the metal boxes could be retrieved from the castle's muniment storage area.

Derek's detailed list also provided the means by which I was able to allocate among Members who had indicated interest the timings for their research and photography. A total of fourteen participated during the days spent at Cockermouth Castle, some spending both the morning and afternoon sessions of each day there, while others were only able to attend one or two sessions.

On arrival on the first day, we were cordially welcomed at the castle gates by Andy Loukes who is the curator of the Leconfield Estate collections, and he showed us the way to the Estate Office where the study week was to take place. It is a handsome Victorian building with big windows looking out on the castle's inner ward while on the other side it abuts onto one of the inner ward's ancient walls.

The office space used for the study week is roomy and well lit. After being shown in, Alison McCann welcomed us and gave us a briefing about the handling of archive documents. We then proceeded to set up four worktables on three of which camera rigs were attached so that the photographing of documents could be managed efficiently. Usually, two people worked as a team – one to handle the document (some were many pages in length or otherwise awkward to manage), and one to operate the camera.

A large number of metal storage boxes that were on Derek's list had been assembled in the Office, but it soon became apparent that due to the sheer number and size of some of the documents in them it was not going to be possible to photograph everything within the four days that had been set aside. Consequently, the number of boxes had to be whittled down according to the priority of the importance of their contents.

Professor Angus Winchester, President of the Society, was among the Members who were at the castle on the first day. Earlier in the year he had helpfully contributed to the preparatory work. During the morning, he examined documents in furtherance of his research and helped with photographing various archive documents. In the afternoon he kindly provided a workshop for Members of the

Society's house history group, using examples from the Leconfield Estate archives (among those now available to Members – see below) to illustrate aspects of researching property history in the Society's area of interest.

As soon as the tables and camera rigs had been set up earlier in the day, work had begun on the photography exercise. We soon got into a rhythm for handling and photographing documents in an efficient way, occasionally seeking Alison McCann's advice about individual documents. For example, some of the sixteenth-century court rolls are about eight feet in length and guidance as to the best way to handle them was needed.

On each day half an hour was spent having a sandwich lunch in the adjacent coach house that Estate staff had kindly made available. Kitchen facilities were provided to make coffee or tea for quick morning or afternoon breaks, and a room was set aside where we could sit down round a table having our sandwiches.

By the end of the final day it had become apparent that participating Members had managed to make over 16,000 digital images of Leconfield Estate archive documents. Alison McCann and Andy Loukes had been very friendly and helpful during the four days study, and it is a pleasure to record grateful thanks to them for their support. And I can say without hesitation that the quite intensive photographic work done by Members in contributing so many images is much appreciated for the furtherance of local history research.

During November Derek spent time ordering all the images into a coherent and suitably labelled digital archive for future use by L&DFLHS Members and others. This constitutes a significant archive, and it will enable material that has been difficult for Society Members to access to be available for study. Please refer to page 11 in this *Wanderer* for an article by Derek in which he provides information about using the L&DFLHS Digital Archive of Leconfield Sources.

It is gratifying to report that following October's study week Lord Egremont indicated he was happy with the outcome and, furthermore, that he has recently agreed to L&DFLHS Members attending another study week at Cockermouth Castle. It will take place between 18 and 21 March. It's hoped to include those categories of archive documents that, although identified and made available, it wasn't possible to photograph in October.

Charles Lambrick

Talk: 'The Rise and Fall of Maritime West Cumberland', 14 November 2024

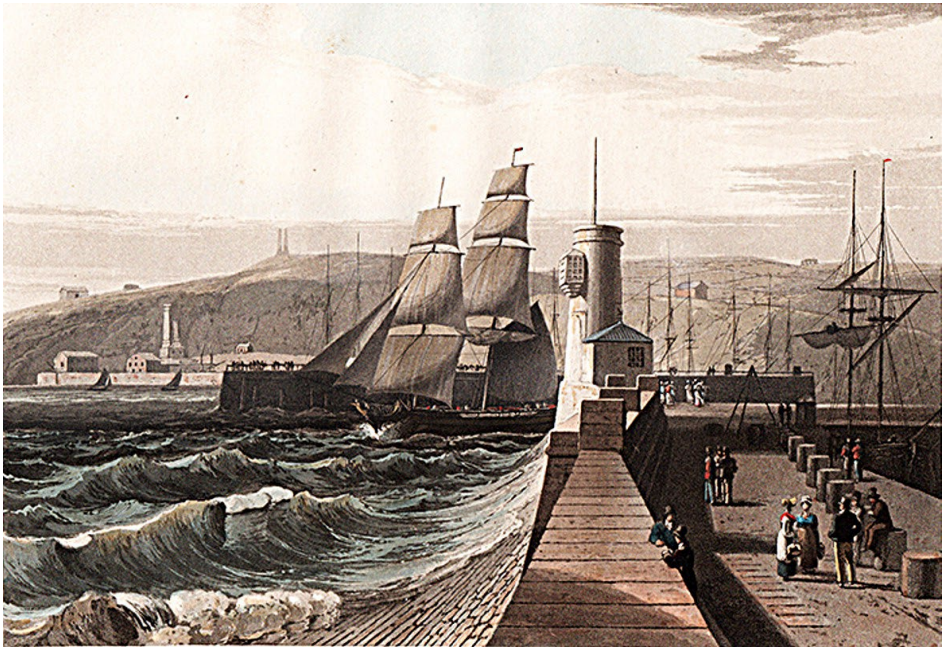
The November Talk at the Yew Tree Hall was packed with members and visitors keen to learn more about ships and maritime trade in West Cumberland over the centuries. Our speaker Alan Bell, Chair of the Drigg Heritage Group, started on his journey of discovery of West Cumberland's maritime past when in February 2018 winter storms and tides revealed old ship timbers on Drigg Beach. While photographing and sketching these remains he admitted to becoming very excited by the thought that the wreck could be a contemporary of Mary Rose, the famous Tudor ship. However, laboratory analysis established that the timbers dated back to between 1790 and 1810, still a rare find in Britain where over 96 per cent of all wrecks date back to 1840 or later. Other wrecks that washed on Drigg Beach the following year were dated to 1904 and 1941.

Alan Bell's survey went back in time to the Mesolithic period when people crossed rivers and estuaries in skin and log boats to fish and hunt. The Cumbrian coast was then further out and sea levels were about seven meters lower due to the water trapped in the ice caps. The remains of a log boat discovered inland in Branthwaite were dated to 900 BC. Fishing spears, a burnt canoe and a paddle dating back to Neolithic times were found by a farmer who drained Ehenside Tarn in 1869. During Agricola's campaigns in 78-84 AD, the Romans would deploy 900 ships to transport 7000 men. Only the smaller Roman barges could navigate the rivers Esk and Derwent, and merchant ships would sail around the Cumbrian coast.

The Vikings sailed galley boats that landed along the Cumbrian coast from Dublin, the Isle of Man and Scotland. The Normans conquered Cumbria in 1092; using boats to transport troops. Written records reveal that in 1297 in the reign of Edward I the bailiffs of Ravenglass were instructed that all their ships carrying 40 tons were to be at Winchelsea by mid-summer.

In 1299, two cargo ships were sent to carry grain to Skinburness for milling at Holme Cultram Abbey. During the Scottish

***View of Whitehaven,* Matthias Reed, c.1735**



***Whitehaven Harbour,* William Daniell, 1816**

Campaigns of Edward II, the records mention two cob boats sailing from Chester to Skinburness. Ships from Bristol, Newport, Devon, Dorset and Ireland carrying goods to Skinburness and vessels taking oats to the Whitehaven Creek for milling by the monks at St Bees Priory are also mentioned in the records.

The beginnings of the Royal Navy

Henry VIII inherited a 'navy' of four ships built during the reign of his father Henry VII. In case of conflict merchant ships were commandeered as needed. Henry VIII had a standing navy built and by the time he died the it counted 40 ships. He also established a Navy Board to oversee the running of the ships, which by then were much bigger in order to accommodate the cannons and large crews as well as supplies.

However, shipping declined in Cumberland and Westmorland during the reign of Elizabeth. Records mention four small boats of ten tons called pickerdies that sailed from Ravenglass. They caught fish which they traded at Chester and Liverpool, returning with salt. In 1566 there is a report of one vessel at Whitehaven called *The Bee*. In 1576, there are reports of a ship called *Julyan* at the port of Workington where boats from Chester, Bristol and Isle of Man called.

In 1577, Elizabeth I issued a royal warrant requesting a survey of all the ports and creeks of England. That survey mentioned eight ports: Millum, Ravenglass, Calder, St Bees, Whitehaven, Workington, Skinburness and The Water of Sowey. Cumberland came last of all the maritime counties with twelve small ships under 80 tons.

In 1588, the English fleet facing the Spanish Armada consisted of 34 naval vessels and about 200 merchant ships.

***Harrington Harbour Coastal View,* William Daniell, 1816**

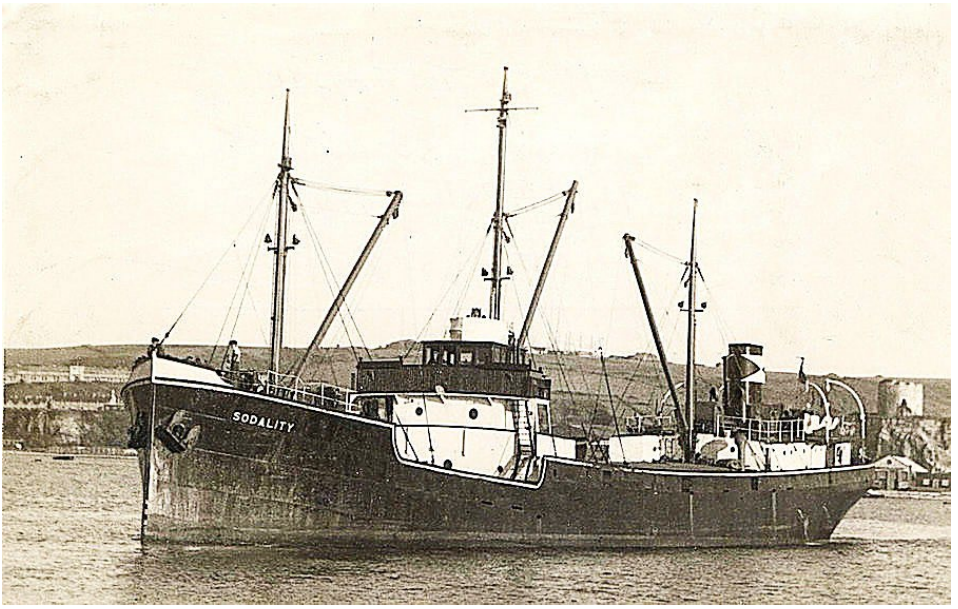
Only one ship was found at Whitehaven and it was probably used as a supply ship. It was probably *The Bee* mentioned by James Eyre Weeks in his poem *Poetical Prospect of Whitehaven* of 1752.

The rise of Whitehaven and other ports

Whitehaven would become the most important of Cumberland's ports in terms of trade and shipping. Its transformation from a small hamlet to a busy port began when Sir Christopher Lowther (1611-1644), a merchant and landowner, inherited the Whitehaven and St Bees estate and started exploiting the coal reserves which were conveniently located near the sea. The coal would be exported to Dublin. He also developed the salt works near the town.

In 1633 when the first pier was built, Whitehaven's population numbered 250. By 1736 its population grew to about 1000. *Prospect of Whitehaven from the Sea* (1686), a painting by the Dutch artist John Wykes shows the drift mines on the hillside above the town and boats queuing in the harbour. By 1738 Whitehaven overtook Penrith, Kendal and Carlisle with a population of 6000. The painting *A Birds Eye View of Whitehaven* c.1738 by Matthias Read who settled in the town shows a harbour with three piers and the town planned along a grid system. A map dated 1774 shows that by then there were six piers in Whitehaven. For a time, Whitehaven became the second largest port in England; in 1770 it exported 187,000 tons compared to London's 212,000 tons. A long list of ships arriving at and sailing from Whitehaven in one week in September 1777 documents the thriving shipping and trade.

Whitehaven continued to grow thanks to its busy harbour and the transatlantic trade. The ships that sailed to North America (Virginia, Halifax) and the West Indies exported manufactured goods such as spades, clothing and pottery and brought back tobacco, sugar, rum and timber – the produce of slave plantations. Whitehaven's involvement in the slave trade was limited to the years from 1710-



***MV Sodality*, built in Workington, 1938**

69 when 69 voyages carrying a human cargo were made.

In the mid-18th century Whitehaven was the largest importer of tobacco. It had to be sold and shipped within a month while still fresh – mainly to France, Holland and Ireland. Every week pack horses transported tobacco to Kendal. The town's Georgian architecture featuring merchants' houses and offices is the legacy of those prosperous times. Alan Bell showed us a number of paintings and prints depicting the ports of West Cumberland including the work of the Whitehaven-born marine painter Robert Salmon (1775–c.1845) and topographical artist William Daniell (1769–1837)..

Whitehaven's eventual decline was due to its small harbour that could not accommodate the larger ships being built. The failure to launch the four-masted, 3000-ton brig *Alice A. Leigh* built by the Whitehaven Shipbuilding Company in 1889, meant it had to be tugged by ships from Liverpool and eventually bankrupted the company.

The talk concluded with a brief overview of other West Cumberland ports such as Workington, Harrington and Maryport. Workington was a well-established coal port with shipyards at the mouth of the river Derwent since the 18th century. Workington Hall was the seat of the Curwen family whose collieries drove the expansion of the town and shipping. In the second half of the 19th century the iron and steel industries brought prosperity to the town and the rapid growth of its population. The Williamson Shipyards transferred from Harrington to Workington in 1880 and were responsible for building 242 ships over the 100 years they were in business. Their last ship *MV Sodality* was launched in 1938; she took part in the evacuation of troops from Dunkirk in 1939 and was also involved in D-Day landings. She remained part of the Everard Fleet until 1958 when she was broken up.

Harrington's economy was also built on coal and its port was of some importance in the 19th century exporting coal to Ireland and bringing in iron ore. The 18th century town of Maryport was established by the Senhouse family and was founded on coal, iron and shipping.

The construction of the Elizabeth and the Senhouse docks in the 19th century allowed larger ships to trade. The decline set in at the turn of the century when Workington took over as the leading port.

In conclusion, the development of ports and shipping in maritime West Cumberland was brought about by a number of factors. Firstly, the dissolution of the monasteries released land for development. Second and third, the location of substantial coal deposits close to the coast and the presence of wealthy entrepreneurs such as the Lowthers, the Curwens and the Senhouses, who were ready to exploit those advantages and invest their resources in the building of harbours. Among the reasons for the decline of the once thriving West Cumberland ports was the fact that unlike Glasgow, Liverpool or London they were not built on large rivers and could not accommodate large ships.

In total, nearly 2000 ships were built in West Cumberland. One of the last surviving to this day is a fully-rigged steel ship the *Dunboyne* built in 1888 by the Whitehaven Shipbuilding Company, later renamed A F Chapman, that made many voyages between Europe, Australia and North America. It is nowadays moored in central Stockholm and is serving as a youth hostel.

Alan Bell's wide-ranging talk with its wealth of information was very well received by an appreciative audience.

Lena Stanley-Clamp

Dunboyne*, built in 1888 in Whitehaven, later renamed *A F Chapman

Articles

Using the Leconfield Digital Archive

by Derek Denman

As reported by Charles Lambrick in this *Wanderer*, Society members spent four days last October at Cockermouth Castle, having been granted access to the archive of the Leconfield Estate. Access to these important records through Cumbria Archive Service was ceased in 2018 and this study week allowed both members' personal research and the bulk photography of many unique records which are important to studies of the history of our area. Those images, together with others contributed, have been combined into the L&DFLHS Digital Archive of Leconfield Sources, DALS, which is available to members to borrow on a flash drive. The purpose of this article is to provide a brief guide to the archive at Cockermouth Castle and its importance to our society, and to describe the content and use of the DALS.

Origin and development of the archive at Cockermouth Castle

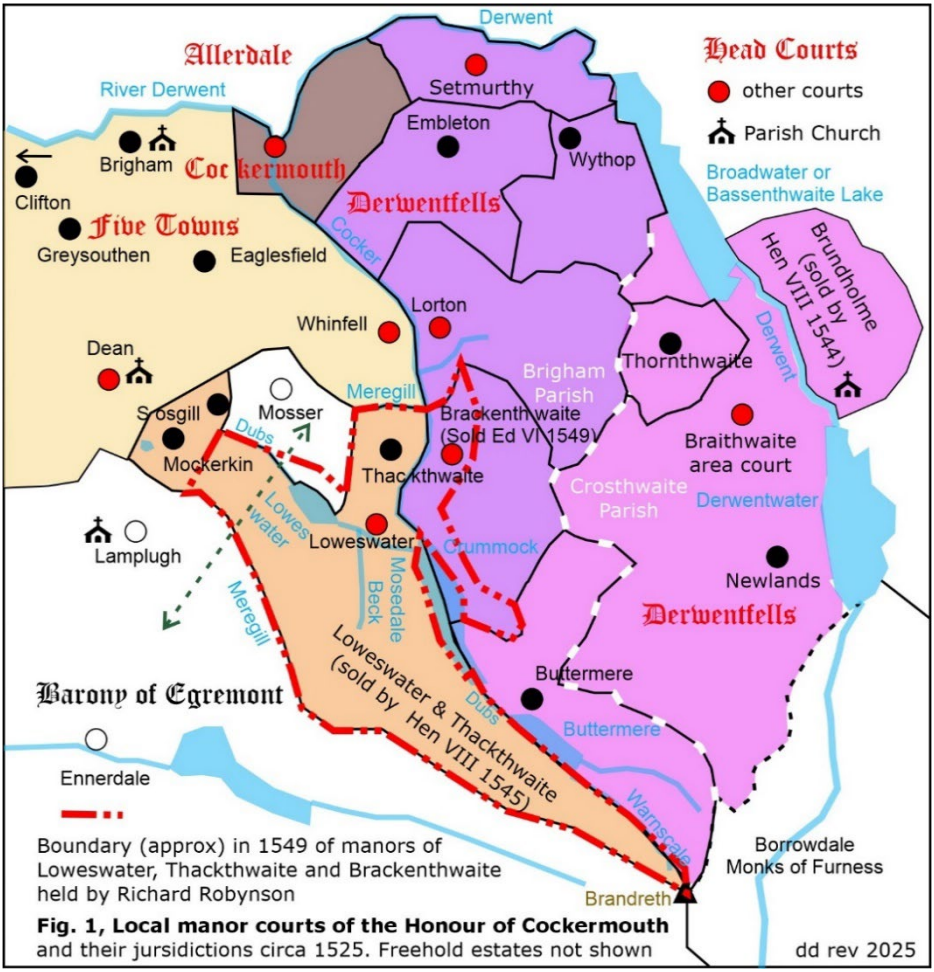
Essentially the collection at Cockermouth Castle covers the manors and estates that have been managed from the castle since around 1400. The castle itself was commenced in the mid-twelfth century, when the old seat of the lord of Allerdale was moved from the Roman fort at Papcastle to a new location at the confluence of the Derwent and Cocker. Cockermouth was a new planted borough, i.e, created to be a market town serving the castle and the manors held by the lord there. At that time the Honour of Cockermouth included almost all the area covered by our society. One can think of the relationship of Cockermouth to the castle as equivalent to that of the civilian vicus to the Roman fort at Papcastle.

Without detailing the complex early history, the records start with transfer of the estates through marriage from the resident Lucy family to the Percy family, earls of Northumberland circa 1400. From at least that time the castle would not have been required for the lord's residence. Its landed possessions would be managed by resident stewards of the earls of Northumberland and their successors, whose stewards would of course keep records – for six hundred years. Those records that survived are still at the castle, and mostly only at the castle. They are owned by Lord Egremont, and managed through Leconfield Estates.

The Society's area and the Honour of Cockermouth

Figure 1 gives a plan of our local manors within the Honour of Cockermouth. There were three head courts, Cockermouth, Derwentfells and Five Towns, these last two covering a wide area, including a number of smaller manors and sub-courts. And then there was Loweswater until 1545, when it was sold off by Henry VIII.

Some explanation of how this structure came to be would be helpful here. After 1092, when the area was brought into England by the Norman king, William II, the dividing line between the Baronies of Allerdale and Coupland was the River Derwent. The lord of Allerdale, at Papcastle, was a strong native lord, while the barony of Coupland appears to have covered a less well settled and developed area. It was controlled from a new castle and settlement at Egremont, which became the name of the barony. For reasons which were unclear, but which look like weakness, two well-settled parts of the barony of Coupland were ceded to Allerdale in the early twelfth century, becoming Allerdale Above Derwent. One area was Derwentfells, which was the land between the Derwent and Cocker rivers. The other was Five Towns, which lay to the



south of the Derwent and the west of the Cocker. The five towns were Brigham, Clifton, Greysouthen, Eaglesfield and Dean, but the territory also included Whinfell.

By the mid-twelfth century, the seat of the lord of Allerdale was moved across the Derwent to a new castle at the confluence, and Cockermouth was created. The three head courts of Cockermouth, Five Towns, and Derwentfells all derive from that acquisition of part of the barony of Egremont, and provided a stable structure for the archives into the twentieth century. They were the geographical and administrative basis of the three sets of records which teams of members photographed in October.

Loweswater, Thackthwaite, and Mockerkin differ in that they remained in the barony of Egremont into the thirteenth century, until in 1230 they came to Alan de Multon through his marriage to a Lucy heiress. Their son took the Lucy name and his descendants combined Loweswater, Thackthwaite and Mockerkin, then called

Balnes, with the Honour of Cockermouth in the fourteenth century.

The early charters of many of those Lucy properties are contained in the Lucy Cartulary, which we have in the DALS, in both the original, circa 1400, and a modern transcription.

Contents of the Leconfield Archive

The majority of the records are concerned with the management of the landed property which comprised the honour of Cockermouth. The principal parts are the manorial records and the estate records. These are primarily of value for local history studies rather than family history, but if the family held property then these records can be an invaluable and often unique source of early family information.

The manorial holdings included the mineral rights, and the leases for mineral workings became an increasing source of revenue and records as the income from manorial tenants declined.

Additionally there are records of the castle itself, but not the personal and political records which would be expected if the owners were resident.

Contents of our DALS Archive

The Leconfield archive is vast, with over 300 metal boxes plus an Estate Office full with files and plans. The archive currently contains the digitised contents of only about sixteen boxes, or only 18,000 images. However, the content has been carefully chosen by ourselves and the Cumbria Archive Service to provide the most useful selection of general records of the estate plus particular records for our area of interest.

The foundational Lucy Cartulary of around 1400 is included, with a translation. Then there are two comprehensive and detailed surveys of manorial property. The Percy 'Great' Survey of 1578 describes every manorial holding in detail, and in English. While Browne's surveys of 1758 give a second detailed survey and valuation of manorial tenements, made for the purpose of offering the tenants the option to buy their freeholds.

Those listed above were digitised by George Platt for the Estate, while our photography focussed mainly on some key records for our area, such as:-

- The runs of manorial records of the manor courts.
- The working papers for the enclosures of the commons in the early nineteenth century.
- The records of mineral leases.
- The legal records of the burgage properties in Cockermouth.

The DALS comes with a contents list and a collection of supporting material. The contents list of this first issue will be placed on our website at *http://www.derwentfells.com/sources*

Availability

The DALS will be available from me in February, preferably requested by email at *derekdenman@btinternet.com.* As with our collection of general material in the Digital Archive of Historical Sources, DAHS, it can be borrowed on a flash drive, which should not be downloaded and which remains the property of the Society. It can usually be kept until no longer required, or updated. Images are shared in accordance with a formal agreement with the Leconfield Estate which specifies that the images shall not be published without permission, nor used for commercial purposes.

The two digital archives, the DALS and the DAHS are separate but can both be borrowed on one flash drive. The DAHS will be updated to Issue 3. Together they provide a very comprehensive collection sources for local and family history projects in our area.

Scenes from the River Cocker

by Gloria Edwards

Cockermouth stands upon the confluence of two rivers – the Derwent and the Cocker – and the rivers have been significant in the development of the town, not always for the best of reasons, as evidenced by the long history of flooding in Cockermouth. Additionally, Tom Rudd Beck and Bitter Beck, flowing into the Cocker, contributed to the development of industries where water-power was important. There were many mills and industries making good use of the abundant water power.

One of the mills on the Cocker was Rubby Banks. Bernard Bradbury tells us that there were two three-storey mills there at one time between the houses and the river, along with Tinker's Dam, used for different purposes down the years, including corn-milling, fulling and dyeing cloth, flax- milling and later wood-turning. Hat manufacture was also carried on there in the nineteenth century by William Smethurst. William had come to Cockermouth with his wife and young family from Salford in Lancashire. It is possible he may have done so as part of the contingent of Lancashire hat workers who came to work in Cockermouth in the 1840s for Thomas Wilson, a hat manufacturer operating from premises further downriver near to Cocker Bridge. Thomas Wilson's hat manufactory at its height was producing in the region of around 4,000 hats per week. Thomas had been born in Cockermouth in 1791 and succeeded to his father's hat business. The 1851 census shows him in residence

Rubby Banks Mill, 1880

at Grecian Villa (now Manor House Hotel), which he had had built as a family home. He is described as a hat manufacturer, employing 234 hands. So he was an important, and well-respected, employer in the town.

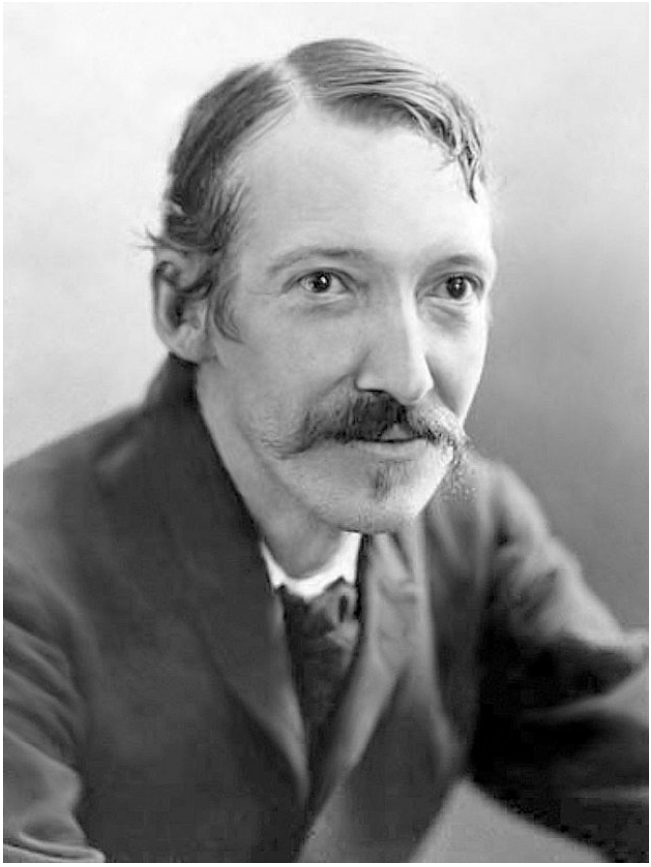
William Smethurst, further upstream at Rubby Banks Mill, was operating as a hatter in 1841, and by 1851 his son William Henry was working with him as a hatter's apprentice. William's business was clearly growing, since he was an employer of six men by 1861, with daughter Annie working with him as a Hat Trimmer. By 1881 (the year in which he died, aged 68) he was described as a Hatter, Manufacturer of Soft Felt Hats, and son John was a Hatter of Soft Felt Hats.

It seems that a regular feature of life living by the river was the rescue of unfortunate souls falling in and needing to be rescued. The Weekly Spectator and Cockermouth Advertiser (Saturday, 21 July 1855) reported a narrow escape from drowning by an old man. One of the Smethurst daughters was playing near to the wooden bridge of Rubby Banks. The wooden bridge at one time provided a crossing-point over to what is now Harris Park and where early golfers enjoyed the game before the advent of the Cockermouth Golf Club at Embleton. The girl had seen something in the water go over the weir and realised it was a man. She ran screaming to her mother to come and help:

'Fortunately, W H Smethurst [the 19 year-old son of the family] was present and, with his mother, hastened on to the bridge, and there saw a well-known hatter of the name of Harry Garghen, lying at the bottom of a deep pool in the clear water. Young Smethurst immediately dropped down the steep rock, plunged into the water, and brought him safe to land and, with the assistance of his mother, restored old Harry to life. Another minute, and he would have perished …'

Harry's tale was that he had been walking by the side of the Cocker and fell in. Apparently, this was the fifth case within twelve months in which Mrs Smethurst had been the means of preventing a drowning: 'One fine little fellow last summer was gone too far before she saw

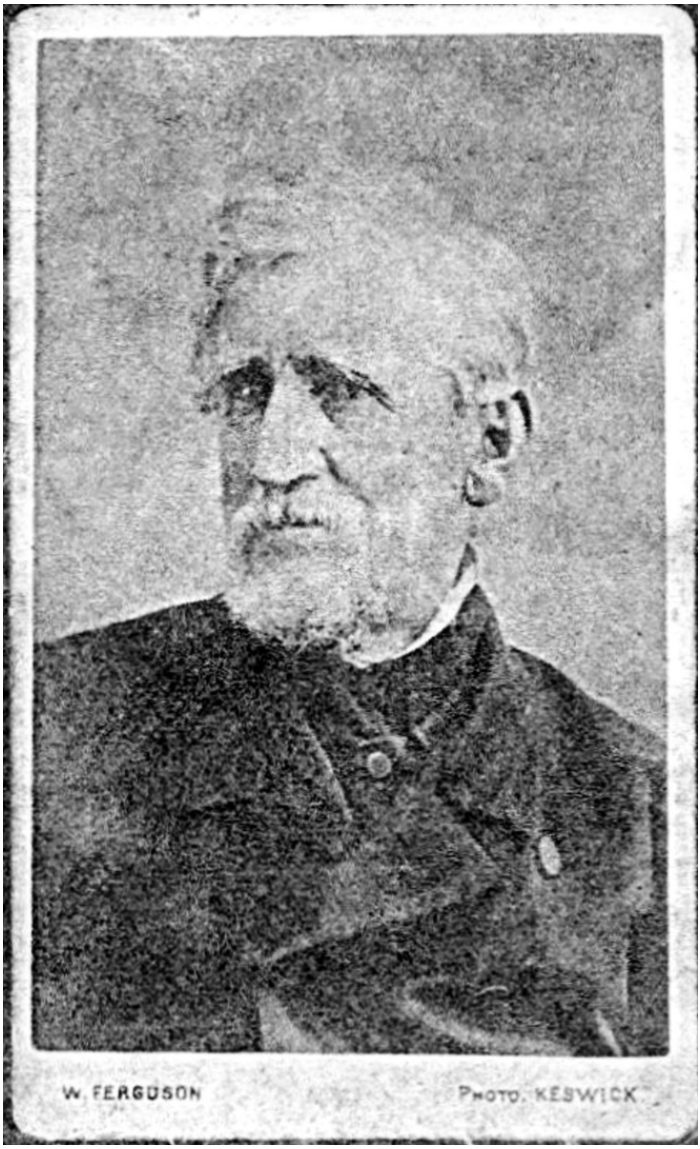
Robert_Louis_Stevenson,_1893 by_Henry_Walter_



him, being the only case she has not brought round!'. The lady in question, who deserves to have her name recorded, was Lydia Smethurst.

During the time that the Smethurst family were living at Rubby Banks Mill a young Robert Louis Stevenson came to visit Cockermouth. This was in 1871 when he stayed at the Globe Hotel on Main Street.

One day he took a walk along the River Cocker, reaching Tinker's Dam and Rubby Banks Mill. In his Essays of Travel he wrote about his visit to the town, giving a unique insight into the time and people he met. He describes his evening walk thus:



William Smethust

'Wandering in this aimless humour, I turned up a lane and found myself following the course of a bright river. I passed first one and then another, and then a third, several couples out love-making in the spring evening; and a consequent feeling of loneliness was beginning to grow on me, when I came to a dam across the river, and a mill - a great gaunt promontory of a building, half on dry land and half arched over the stream. The road here drew in its shoulders and crept through between the landward extremity of the mill and a little garden enclosure with a small house and a large signboard within its privet hedge. I was pleased to fancy this an inn, and drew little etchings in fancy of a sanded parlour, and three- cornered spittoons, and a society of parochial gossips seated within over their churchwardens; but as I drew near, the board displayed its superscription and designation of 'Canadian Felt Hat

Manufacturers.' There was no more hope of evening fellowship and I could only stroll on by the riverside, under the trees. The water was dappled with slanting sunshine, and dusted all over with a little mist of flying insects.'

He returned to the Globe for his dinner and bed, but next morning retraced his steps along the riverbank and this time he met Mr Smethurst at the doorway of his mill, brushing a Canadian felt hat:

'As I drew nearer he came sidling out of the doorway to accost me, with so curious an expression on his face that I instinctively prepared myself to apologise for some unwitting trespass … But the good man's heart was full of peace, and he stood there brushing his hats and prattling on about fishing, and walking, and the pleasures of convalescence, in a bright shallow stream that kept me pleased and interested. I could scarcely say how. As he went on, he warmed to his subject and laid his hats aside to go along the water-side and show me where the large trout commonly lay, underneath an overhanging bank; and he was disappointed, for my sake, that there were none visible just then … At last he made a little speech to me, of which I wish I could recollect the very words, for they were so simple and unaffected that they put all the best writing and speaking to the blush; as it is, I can recall only the sense, and that perhaps imperfectly. He began by saying that he had little things in his past life that it gave him especial pleasure to recall; and that the faculty of receiving such sharp impressions had now died out in himself, but must at my age be still quite lively and active. Then he told me that he had a little raft afloat on the river above the dam which he was going to lend me, in order that I might be able to look back, in after years, upon having done so, and get great pleasure from the recollection … there was something singularly refined in this pleasure that the hat-maker found in making reminiscences for others; surely no more simple or unselfish luxury can be imagined …'

So Robert pushed off in the loaned raft so kindly offered, and later reflected how he recalled Mr Smethurst with great admiration. At a difficult period in Robert's life that chance meeting provided what he needed: 'a happy-minded Smethurst placed here and there at ugly corners of my life's wayside, preaching his gospel of quiet and contentment.' Later Robert took a third-class carriage from the railway station for Keswick, having paid attention to the words of the waitress at the Globe not to bother visiting Whitehaven because there was nothing to see there!

William Smethurst died in 1881 and after that time hat manufacture ceased at Rubby Banks Mill – by 1891 a son (John Edward) had moved with his family to work in Carlisle as a Hat Finisher.

The River Cocker comes into focus again in 1895 when, during a severe winter affecting the whole country, it froze so hard that people were able to walk and skate on the ice. The Great Freeze, as it came to be known, meant that blocks of ice could be cut to build an ice house on the banks of the Cocker, with refreshments being served to the accompaniment of music from the Mechanics' Band. Because of the harsh winter it meant work was hard to come by, so for the men fortunate enough to be employed building the ice house, it meant at least some money could be earned. A soup and bread kitchen was in operation at the Appletree Hotel (later the Wordsworth Hotel) twice a week, in addition to voluntary efforts by individuals offering food to destitute families. For many families it was a desperate time but for those able to enjoy the frozen Cocker, it provided some magical moments as the images on the next two pages show.

Note: R L Stevenson's *Essays of Travel* is available to read at the Internet Archive, *https://archive.org/details/e00ssaysoftravelstevrich/page/6/mode/2up*

The frozen Cocker, 1895

Skating on the Cocker, 1895

The frozen Cocker and ice house, 1895

The ice house, 1895

The Road between Cockermouth and Keswick – finding the route before 1760

by Derek Denman

The building of the turnpike road through Lorton, between Cockermouth and Keswick and on to Kendal, transformed Lorton from the 1760s by providing excellent communications. Before that, the old road over Whinlatter, built by the Romans and patched for 1500 years, was a road to be avoided.

Some twenty-five years ago the Society's Roman Roads Group sought the remains of the second-century Roman Road coming over the Whinlatter pass, and going either to the fort called Derventio at Papcastle, or to Moresby, or to both. No published map showed the old route before the turnpike. The Hodskinson and Donald map of Cumberland, surveyed in 1770, showed the newly-completed turnpike road.[1] There was just one map of 1762 listed in the Leconfield archive at Cockermouth Castle, and the late Michael Grieve and I ordered it, Michael having a very keen interest in old roads and maps.[2] Unfortunately it was then not to be found.

So in October 2024, as part of our study week at Cockermouth Castle, I thought I would ask for it again, expecting another 'not found'. But there it was, and it showed the proposed new route and the deviations from the old road, together with estimates of the land to be purchased to make the turnpike between Kirkgate in Cockermouth and Dale Bottom, beyond Keswick. This article takes account of the new information.

The turnpike road[3]

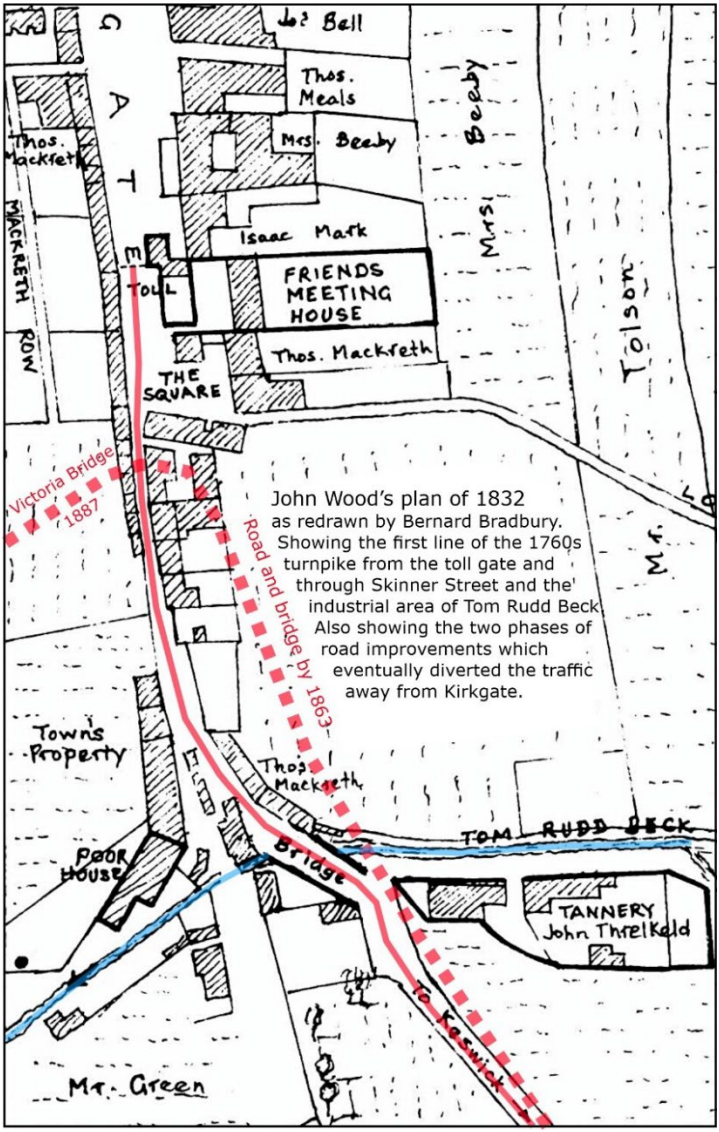
Before the eighteenth Century it was the responsibility, formalised in 1555, of the townships, such as Embleton and Lorton, to repair the highways in their areas, though the County was later made responsible for maintaining key bridges. There was no overall highway authority and so roads went from village to village with no general standard until 1691, when roads to market towns were to be at least eight feet wide. The main network was essentially a continuation of the Roman network, locally maintained and deviating where convenient. In rural areas such as ours people walked or went by horse, and goods were transported by animals, rather than by the carts that would need good roads.

Though the route over Whinlatter had Roman origins, it was poor and difficult, and certainly not suited to wheeled traffic. John Ogilby labelled it the 'worst way' for travellers in 1675, favouring the easier but longer route east of Bassenthwaite Lake, then called Broadwater, and over Ouse Bridge.[4]

The creation of turnpike roads followed the increasing need for faster and better roads to support a developing commercial economy. Under an Act of Parliament, new or improved toll roads over longer distances could be created by private trusts. The costs of construction and future maintenance were to be covered by the tolls for usage.

The first turnpike Act in England was passed in 1663, covering part of the Great North Road, but it was from 1750 that the numbers increased greatly. The first Cockermouth turnpike Act, to Workington, was passed in 1753. Then in 1761 there were two more, the Cockermouth-Heskett-Penrith and the Cockermouth-Keswick-Kendal, which went through Lorton. These last two could have had a shared route from Cockermouth to Ouse Bridge, but it seems that in 1744 the Keswick people promoted the shorter but

[1] Thomas Donald and Joseph Hodskinson, *The county of Cumberland surveyed … ,* 1774
[2] DLEC/Plans/Derwentfells 1
[3] See Paul Hindle, *Roads and Tracks of the Lake District*, Cicerone Press, 1998, for full information
[4] See Hindle, *Roads and Tracks,* pp.68-9



more difficult route via Whinlatter and Lorton.[5] Perhaps Keswick people would favour the Whinlatter route because it greatly improved their communications with Whitehaven, via Lorton and Loweswater.

The Cockermouth-Keswick-Kendal turnpike was completed by 1770, and Whinlatter became the main route between Cockermouth and the South, now supporting the carriages which would enable tourism. Lorton, especially High Lorton, was given a large boost.

From Cockermouth to Lorton before and after the turnpike

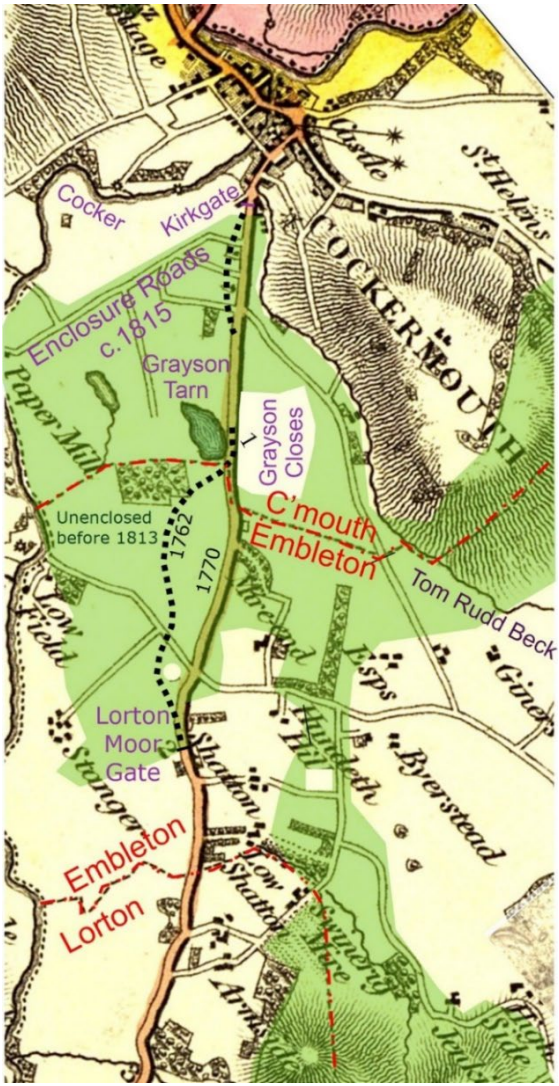
Coming out of Cockermouth, the turnpike followed the old route and started with a tollgate at the top of Kirkgate. As shown on Bernard Bradbury's figure, it crossed Tom Rudd Beck using Skinner Street.[6] The current higher bridge of Lorton Road and the later left turn into Victoria Road is all Victorian, completed in 1887. Before 1887 traffic from Lorton would go down Kirkgate.

Going across Tom Rudd Beck the turnpike road passed through possibly the smelliest part of Cockermouth, where the skins of market animals were removed and were turned to leather in tan pits. The old poor house stood by the road, to be replaced

[5] TNA/ADM67/10, p.245, General Court of the Greenwich Hospital, 1744

[6] Bernard Bradbury, *Cockermouth in Pictures - 8, maps and plans*, 1990, p.17

Right: the old and new routes from Cockermouth to Lorton, based on the Greenwood map surveyed 1821.
Land shaded green was unenclosed in 1770.



later by the union workhouse. Shortly after the unpleasantness of Tom Rudd Beck, the road went through a gate onto Cockermouth moor, and the turnpike trust was then free to follow the course of the old road, or take a better route. The plan, right, based on the later Greenwood map of 1821-3, shows one small straightening of the route before meeting Grayson Tarn. Grayson Tarn? In 1760 and up to at least 1814 there was a large tarn on Cockermouth Moor. It was lost after the moor was enclosed after 1813, the moor being drained and improved for agriculture when grain prices were high due to the Napoleonic Wars. Unfortunately, they left it too late. The tarn is now remembered by the names Tarnclose and Graysonside Farm.

The turnpike followed the earlier road's course to the east of the tarn, and really had no other choice at this point because the ancient Grayson Closes lay immediately to the east of the road. In his valuable study of the land use in medieval Cockermouth, Angus Winchester found Grayson Closes enclosed by 1492.[7] Immediately after the tarn was the boundary with Embleton, and from this point the rediscovered plan shows that the old road took a large diversion over the moor to the West, towards Stanger, before heading back towards Lorton Moor Gate. Perhaps the reason for this was that Stanger was in Embleton and its landowners would be responsible for repairing the road. They would be keen to serve Stanger.

The turnpike trust, however, would be keen to go straight from Grayson Tarn to

[7] Angus Winchester, 'Medieval Cockermouth, *Transactions CWAAS*, 1986, pp.110-128, p.120. Available at: https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2055-1/dissemination/pdf/Article_Level_Pdf/tcwaas/002/1986/vol86/tcwaas_002_1986_vol86_0011.pdf

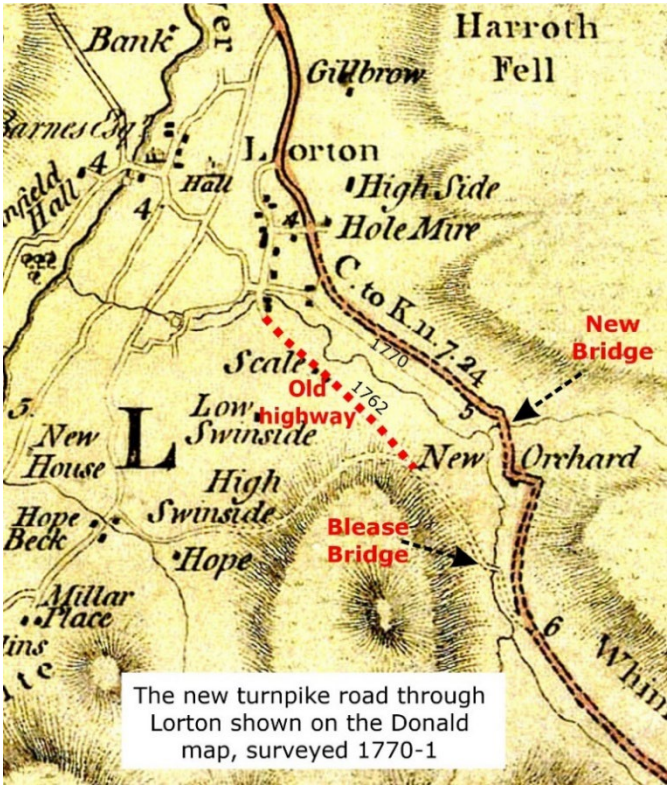
Lorton Moor Gate, saving the cost of building 94 yards of road. An interesting consequence was that the location of the crossroads with the road to Southwaite Bridge, at four lane ends, must date only from the 1760s. Before that the crossroads would have been to the West of Round Close.

The road from Cockermouth to Lorton is roughly one mile in Cockermouth, one mile in Embleton and two miles in Lorton. When the road reached Lorton Moor Gate at the enclosed land at Shatton, it still had half a mile to travel in Embleton, as Shatton Lane, before reaching Lorton at Armaside. The landowners of Embleton had to maintain Shatton Lane even though the great majority of users were from Lorton and beyond, which is probably why Lorton Moor Gate was not called Embleton Moor Gate. Embleton landowners resented this expense and Shatton Lane was notoriously bad. In the 1760s the landowners neglected it and awaited the improvement and widening to twenty feet by the turnpike trust.[8]

The Lorton bypass.

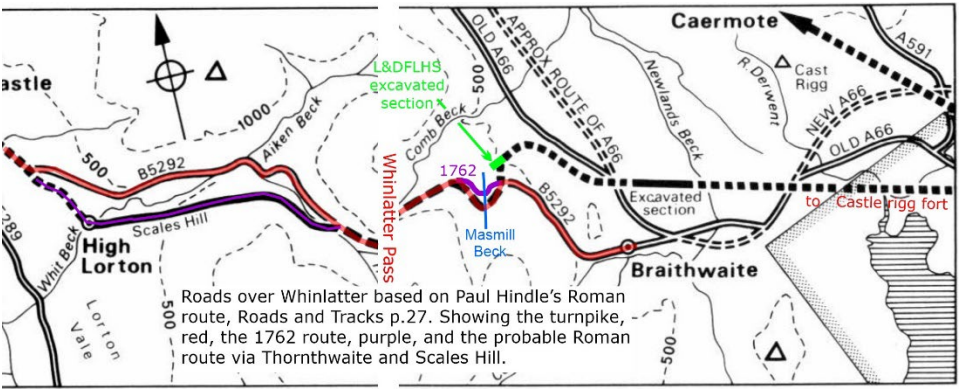
Even without the lost plan we knew that the new turnpike did not go fully through High Lorton but branched off through old enclosures to reach the common at the top of Holemire Lonning. There was built the Rising Sun, a new coaching inn which would be the stopping point for Lorton. Further on the turnpike crossed the ravine by means of the Italianate New Bridge, which was new in 1770. But where did it join the old road over Whinlatter?

The old highway went through High Lorton as far as Whit Beck, but then there were two routes to Keswick; one via Tenters Lane to the north of Whit Beck, and another across Whit Beck at High Lorton bridge and going via Boonbeck and Scales. This latter route seemed most likely because both High Lorton and Blease bridges were County bridges in the 1750s, to be maintained by Cumberland for national communications. The plan confirms that the old highway was the current road through Boon Beck and Scales and it crossed Blease Beck to meet the new turnpike at the present fork. The



The new turnpike road through Lorton shown on the Donald map, surveyed 1770-1

[8] Derek Denman, '"T'moor yeat" and the repairing of Shatton Lane in 1769', *Wanderer* 35, Feb. 2020



Roads over Whinlatter based on Paul Hindle's Roman route, Roads and Tracks p.27. Showing the turnpike, - red, the 1762 route, purple, and the probable Roman route via Thornthwaite and Scales Hill.

turnpike through Lorton required the building of about 3.5km of new road and a substantial new bridge over Aiken Beck, but it will have created a much quicker route to travel. For much more detail on the turnpike route through Lorton please see our *Journal 42*, August 2008, which is now proved correct.[9]

Knott Head and the Roman Road

The Lorton Roman Roads Group did not find any definitive Roman road remains on the Lorton side of Whinlatter, though the straight road through and above Scales has Roman characteristics. However, on the eastern side of Whinlatter the group found and excavated an old road between Thornthwaite and Knott Head, which had Roman construction features. When the report was published in CWAAS Transactions in 2005, the fort at Castlerigg had yet to be discovered and so the old road could not be claimed as Roman, nor was it certain that a Roman route had gone over Whinlatter.[10]

The later discovery of the Roman fort Near Castlerigg Stone Circle, and its alignment with the Roman causeway at Braithwaite and with Knott Head, suggests that the old road we found can be interpreted as a Roman route. The Roman route came through Thornthwaite rather than through Braithwaite, which was the route chosen for the turnpike. We had wondered which route the old pre-turnpike road had taken, and the plan confirms that the old road went through Braithwaite rather than Thornthwaite. That tends to confirm our excavated road as Roman, and shows that the turnpike followed and improved the old road on the east side of Whinlatter, with only minor deviations.

Conclusion

The availability of the plan showing the old route in 1762 has confirmed the extent of the changes for the turnpike through Lorton but has also shown that the part through Embleton common was far less direct and more concerned with serving Stanger.

The definite knowledge of the 1762 route over Whinlatter seems to confirm that the old road from Thornthwaite to Knott Head excavated by the Society was probably Roman, as was Scale Hill. There is still no evidence of Roman road remains beyond Lorton, either towards Papcastle or over Whinfell.

[9] Derek Denman, 'Before and after the turnpike' Download at: *https:/derwentfells.org.uk/showrecord.php?refe=PBJN/0042*

[10] Derek Denman, 'An old road to Knott Head from Thornthwaite', *Transactions CWAAS* 2007, pp.219-223. Available at: https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-2055-1/dissemination/pdf/Article_Level_Pdf/tcwaas/003/2007/vol7/tcwaas_003_2007_vol7_0017.pdf