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Society News

Message from the Chair

It's pleasing that there have been several recent Society outdoor events where Members have been able to meet and talk in person, and this has been a very welcome return to a more normal pattern of the Society's activities. However, the prognosis for physical meetings at Talks regrettably remains uncertain at the time of writing.

A full programme of Talks for 2022 has been arranged by Tim Stanley-Clamp. After careful consideration the Committee has decided that the exact arrangements will need to be decided nearer to the respective dates. However, I can state with confidence that Talks will either be 'hybrid' occasions live-streamed to Members using 'Zoom' simultaneous with their delivery to those physically present in the Yew Tree Hall, or there will be no physical meeting and they will be streamed to all Members who use the emailed link, as has been the practice during 2021. Members will be notified by email about specific arrangements for each Talk approximately a fortnight before the relevant date.

This month's Wanderer is another large edition (28 pages) with a wide variety of articles, reports, and information. I hope Members will find much of interest in it. January marks the start of the Society's financial year and, after the 'roll-over' of subscriptions from 2020 to 2021, payment of annual subscriptions for 2022 will be due on or before 1st January. A separate request for subscriptions will be found with this Wanderer, and I hope Members will agree that membership remains good value for money. Please use a bank transfer, if possible, for payment of the amount due in accordance with the straightforward arrangements set out in the sheet. This is not only convenient but is also all the more important to use since there will be no physical November Talk at which to pay.

Charles Lambrick

Our future programme 2021/2

11 Nov 21	'Cumbrian dialect in the nineteenth century'.	Professor Matthew Townend
13 Jan 22	'Who Killed Percy Topliss? The True Story of the Monocled Mutineer'.	Dr Jim Cox
10 Mar 22	'Common Ground: the history of common land'.	Professor Angus Winchester
12 May 22	'Cumbria and the Jacobites'.	Dr Bill Shannon
9 Jun 22	'World War Two: Earning a Crust'.	Ambleside Oral History Group
14 Jul 22	Early Naturalists in Lakeland	Professor Ian D. Hodgkinson,.
8 Sep 22	'Harriet Martineau, writer, social theorist and abolitionist who made her home at Ambleside'.	Dr Christopher Donaldson
10 Nov 22	'The impact of motor transport in Cumberland and Westmorland 1900-39'.	Dr Jean Turnbull

Talks are at 7.30 pm and will continue to be delivered using Zoom until further notice.

Officers and Committee 2021/22

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Fiona Lambrick <i>Committee members</i>	Hugh Thomson James Lusher - walks

The next issue of the *Wanderer* will be published on 1 Feb 2022. Please send any short items to the Editor, Derek Denman, in early January.

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

<http://www.derwentfells.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/Lortonlocalhistorysociety>

Talks in 2022

The Talks programme for 2022 begins with what promises to be an intriguing piece of

historical detective work when Dr Jim Cox will try and answer the question, Who Killed Percy Topliss? Our President, Angus Winchester will deliver the March talk on the subject of common land, in its social

and cultural role as well as a resource for agriculture. Then in May Dr Bill Shannon will examine the support for the Jacobite cause in Cumberland and Westmorland.

Thereafter, we can look forward to a visit from the Ambleside Oral History Group sharing material on World War 2, and in July to a fascinating account by Professor Ian Hodgkinson of the work of notable naturalists working in our region over past centuries. In September, Dr Christopher Donaldson will speak on Harriet Martineau, and finally in November we have Dr Jean Turnbull analysing and illustrating the development of motor transport in the first decades of the last century.

Of course, we are cautiously optimistic that normal service at the Yew Tree Hall will resume very soon but, in any case, there will be opportunities to listen in on 'hybrid' talks delivered both in person and online.

Tim Stanley-Clamp

Meeting Reports

Historical Walk 'A Tour of Early Lorton'

This walk on 15 August was an excellently organised Society occasion which, with his deep historical knowledge of the locality, was led by Derek Denman. Notwithstanding a little fine drizzle and low cloud to begin with, approximately 30 members assembled on and around the Poundfold in High Lorton for the start at 2.00pm. James Lusher had organised the event and acted as Society host, while Pip Wise and Chis Mills had volunteered to act as marshals, a role that was important, and indeed vital, given that most of the walk was inevitably on public roads.



With the famous yew tree and its eponymous Hall close at hand by Whitbeck, Derek began with an introduction to the afternoon by explaining that he would be leading participants on a roughly circular walk around High Lorton and Low Lorton, pausing at 15 'stations' where he would speak about the significance of the particular location in the wider historical context. He also took the opportunity of providing preliminary general historical background to the settlements of High Lorton and Low Lorton.

Before setting off from the Poundfold everyone was handed a very attractively produced 16-page colour printed booklet entitled 'Discovering Lorton's Early Village History'. On the back there was a useful map, being a reproduction of an extract from the first, 25-inch, Ordnance Survey's relevant sheet of 1863 with the route that was to be followed and the whereabouts of the various 'stations' superimposed on it.

**A living roof on a building, since developed, at High Mill, L&DFLHS Archive.
The mill is the oldest recorded place in Lorton**

The booklet also contained two plans based on the 1827 pre-enclosure survey which usefully assisted in understanding aspects of the evolution of land ownership in High and Low Lorton respectively. And apart from the map and the two plans, the booklet also had in it interesting historical photographs to accompany the text.

At each station Derek explained its specific historical significance and took the opportunity in some cases to expand on more general points about Lorton history. The afternoon gradually brightened as participants made their way from High Lorton to Low Lorton. Apart from providing information about the historical background to the buildings and land to be seen during the walk, Derek drew to attention the fact that in the past in one or two locations buildings had existed of which there is now no trace, a notable example being several at Lorton Cross in Low Lorton. At several of the stations Derek linked the place concerned with the history of ownership and the lives of the people associated with it, thereby adding human interest to the narrative of the evolution of the two settlements.

Derek had clearly given much thought and care to the way in which he was to cover so much history of the locality during the walk. There is in fact a great deal of history to explain, and to do so in a way that strikes the right balance between what is straightforward to understand during a walk on the one hand and not overburdening people with too much detail on the other is a fine one. I thought Derek successfully achieved the right balance, and it was a shame that towards the end of the walk the weather began to deteriorate with the result that there was a consensus among the remaining participants that it would be best to bring the historical walk to a close before the final two stations could be visited. However, with the booklet in hand, members present were able to inform themselves of some of the history associated with those stations notwithstanding it would be without the

benefit of what Derek would have said at each one.

Although the comprehensive content and the large group made for a longer walk than time allowed, I felt that one of the merits of what Derek had devised for the afternoon was that the history of both Lorton village settlements was considered and treated as a whole. The result was that both shared aspects and individual aspects of their respective pasts could all the better be understood, just as being physically close on the walk to specific subjects of interest enhanced historical understanding. Derek plans to retain the overall walk as a shorter publication and to extract and add the later development of High Lorton as a second walk.

Several members said how pleasing it was to have the opportunity of meeting each other at a Society event for the first time for almost 18 months. At the close of proceedings grateful thanks to Derek, James, Pip and Chris for a most informative and well-managed afternoon were expressed before participants dispersed.

Charles Lambrick

Talk, 'The Pilgrimage of Grace in Cumbria'

This talk was given on 9 September, using Zoom, by Dick O'Brien, Chair of Kirkoswald and Renwick Local History Society

The 1536-7 uprising known as the Pilgrimage of Grace was short-lived and quickly suppressed with little to show for its twenty-two months of protest and resistance. It seems a relatively minor episode in the steady accumulation of power to the throne and subjugation of the Church during the 16th century. Yet Dick O'Brien's stimulating talk brought it vividly to life and placed it in the broader historical context of which it is a part.

There had been mass resistance to the Crown's attempts to wrest control of taxation from Parliament and increase its

revenue well within living memory, in 1497, 1513 and 1525. Henry VII's Statute of Uses, 1497, had been devised to prevent property owners redesignating the use of their land to avoid taxation on it, and the King's renewed attempts to make use of it were bitterly resented. It came as the country – especially in the North – was dealing with combined effects of a growth in the population which the nation's agriculture had not the resources to feed and a disastrous harvest in 1535 while Cromwell's attack on the monasteries reduced the levels of support given to the poor. Meanwhile, the country, especially in the north, was not reconciled to the Church's rift with Rome and in large parts of the country there was mistrust of, even contempt for, the King who had brought it about.

Against this background, an alliance of landowners resisting attacks on their property, clergy leading the devout in a fight for the preservation of religious customs which they held dear, and a large group who were simply poor and hungry, rebelled against the King's rule. The name they chose had in it both a compliment and an accusation – 'Grace' might have meant either his power to be generous and make concessions or, equally, the divine grace which many felt he was subverting by his actions.

To begin with, in Lincolnshire, the rebels did reasonably well and a kind of stand-off resulted in which Henry pardoned the perpetrators of the uprising without conceding very much. The treatment of Cumberland and Westmorland was rather different. It was then, as so often since, a neglected part of the kingdom, sparsely populated,



struggling to farm the arid soil, suffering a decline in its mining industries with incomes across the social spectrum badly damaged by inflation, and ever vulnerable to the depredations of bandits raiding from the north. It was ripe for rebellion when famine struck in 1535 and an army of some 30,000 was assembled, nominally under the command of the Percy family but in fact lead by clerics, minor gentry and, unlike elsewhere, by commoners. Clergymen who refused to join were threatened, the Crown's officials were molested – in Cockermouth very nearly killed – and by February 1537 Cumberland and Westmorland were in uproar.

The King's military response was brutal. 'Prickers', armed mercenaries from the borders beyond the two counties, were specially recruited and full use was made of their savagery. On one occasion a group of borderers, led by Lord Dacre, massacred between 600 and 700 commoners. The Duke of Norfolk was given direct instructions by Henry to kill everyone he could find who was in any way associated with the movement. To facilitate this, the whole county was declared 'traitorous' which made everyone living here liable to the harshest punishments. Mass trials and mass executions followed merciless military action. None of those tried was acquitted, all were executed, by hanging, drawing and quartering, by burning and by hanging in chains. In a month in early 1537 there were 74 executions, 11 of people from Cockermouth.

The particularly harsh treatment of Cumberland and Westmorland seems to have been provoked at least in part because the movement had far more commoners taking part in it, although the success Henry had in suppressing the North-West prompted him to revisit the earlier uprising in Lincolnshire where pardons were revoked and nearly 200 further executions were carried out.



The Society group at Coniston, photo James Lusher

Dick O'Brien's talk provided a striking, often harrowing, narrative with a richness of local detail which brought the events vividly to life. In addition, he was careful to place the story of those tumultuous two years in the much broader sweep of a context which included the Tudors' victory fifty years earlier and the Stuarts' defeat just over a century later. The imposition of increasingly centralised Royal power on a population which was discovering ideological justifications for advancing its own interests would be a major theme of the seventeenth century and the first signs of that can be detected here in the rebellion known as the 'Pilgrimage of Grace.'

Tim Stanley-Clamp

Historical Walk 'The Mines of Coniston'

On 12 September an intrepid party led by Mark Hatton exploited the good September weather to explore the huge vein of copper that runs through the fells behind Coniston. The purpose was to understand the industry that had exploited this valuable resource over the ages.

We started in Coniston Village and walked up the Coppermines Valley to The Bonser Mill, where copper ores had been separated from the rock using water powered machinery and hundreds of men, women and children.

We passed the entrance to Deep Level, the longest and lowest drainage and haulage level of the mine, then walked up Red Dell passing the seventeenth-century mill to the oldest wheelpit on the set at East Bonser.

Then along past the Old Engine Shaft, up the Thriddle Incline and over to Levers water

Hard hats were worn and an exploration of some of the more accessible mine chambers took place, still with Victorian lifting and pumping gear. These areas are inaccessible to walkers. The scale of the mining is remarkable extending from high in the fells to a drop far below the level of the village itself. My thanks to our excellent guide, Mark Hatton for a fascinating insight into how industry through the ages has shaped this beautiful valley.

James Lusher

From the Bookshelf

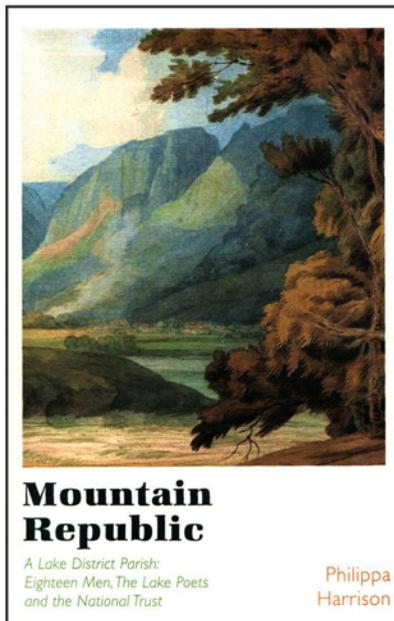
An occasional series about old and new books relating to the history of our area.

Mountain Republic

by Philippa Harrison

This is a remarkable book with great merit, but unusual and resistant to classification. After an illustrious career in publishing, Philippa Harrison retired to the iconic parsonage at Crosthwaite and set about the detailed ten-year historical study of the area and its significance. This book is the result of that work and answers the questions that Philippa asked herself, together with other connected topics, in a comprehensive way, well researched and well referenced.

It can be considered as a parish history of Crosthwaite in Cumberland. People think of Crosthwaite as a small place on the outskirts of Keswick, a Church and a school, while in fact it was the town of Keswick that was in the parish of Crosthwaite, some ninety square miles south of the River Greta containing also Thornthwaite, Braithwaite, Portinscale, Borrowdale, St. John's, etc. Plus Derwentwater and the peripheral mountains, which changed Keswick from a dilapidated market and mining town into



the visitor centre for the northern lakes, which is its current role.

Parish histories tend to draw geographical boundaries and just elaborate the history of what is inside, but this is very different. In wishing to understand and test Wordsworth's 'perfect republic of agriculturalists and shepherds', the work takes a social and economic approach, and focuses an internal perspective on the development of the role of the eighteen men of the select vestry. The result is a well-written work which provides a valuable chronicle of the interplay over centuries between local management and national and regional controlling institutions, which is relevant to so many local parishes and townships.

The hardcover version of the book is currently available at a list price of £35, but Amazon, for example, will make it much easier to deliver a seasonal gift.

Published by Head of Zeus, 2021, ISBN: 9781838931872, 750 pages.

DD

Articles

Village Refreshments in the 1950s

by Walter Head

As a young boy in the 1950s setting off for a cycle ride from Dean on a warm summer's day, it was useful to know where refreshments could be obtained in the various local villages.

Dean did not have a shop but in common with other village pubs the Royal Yew was a small family affair with a number of small rooms. The proprietors, Mr & Mrs Jack Mounsey, lived in one end of the pub, and a knock on the family accommodation door enabled a young boy to purchase lemonade, even when the pub itself was closed. Most other village pubs were the same.

At Branthwaite, in addition to the Star Inn and Globe Inn, now the Wild Duck, there was a branch of the Jane Street Coop, but the first stop on entering the village was at the small shop run by widow Mrs Ann McLennan. She sold home-made cakes, sweets, and lemonade as well as groceries and cigarettes. The front door had a large distinctive bullseye glass pane.

**The shop at Low Lorton, looking South.
Note the Packhorse barn. L&DFLHS archive**



At Ullock Mrs Armstrong at Mill House, late of the Fangs Loweswater, sold sweets, crisps and drinks etc.

At Mockerkin lemonade could be bought from Mrs Annie Birkett at Tarn View.

At Loweswater Mrs Willis at Thrusbank sold lemonade and below the vicarage at Rose Cottage Esther and Bella Beck sold cakes and lemonade. They also sold paraffin for local household use.

At Buttermere drinks were sold by Mrs Mary Clark at High Cragg.

The ride over Newlands Pass was too daunting and so retracing our route and going via Hopebeck it brought us to Lorton. Here we had a choice, the village shop at High Lorton run by Leslie Milburn sold a wide range of goods including sweets and drinks. This shop however was closed on Sundays. At Low Lorton the small shop next to the Wheatsheaf Inn run by Mrs Dora Kennon was always open and sold drinks, sweets and ice cream.

After this it was either a 'dry' run home via Rogerscale, Brandlingill and Pardshaw. Or alternatively via Rogerscale, Paddle School and Eaglesfield, where the village shop and Post Office occupied by the Billington family sold groceries, drinks etc.

Then back home through Deanscales to Dean. Exhausted but happy.

Dora and Joe Kennon in the Low Lorton shop. Who are the boys? L&DFLHS archive



Lorton Village Shop: the Shed with a View

by Walter Head

Early in 1915 during WW1 it became obvious that large quantities of cordite were required for the war munitions production. So the government constructed a large manufacturing complex at Gretna. Initially staff accommodation and offices were housed in wooden huts until permanent buildings could be constructed.

In the early 1920s these wooden buildings were no longer needed and so were sold. Leslie Milburn bought one of these buildings, which he erected on a rented area of land at the East side of the field known as Broom Field in High Lorton, situated between the Yew Tree Hall and the school. Leslie was helped to erect the shop by a young John Shields. Leslie chose Lorton for his shop because at one time he had lived with his family at White Ash, before moving to Cockermouth to live with his married sister. Leslie started to stock the shop with all the items you would expect to find in a general store, except bread and cakes which were baked and sold by the Moffat sisters at Corner Cottage, where they also ran the Post Office.

During WW2 the shop was closed while Leslie served in the army. During this time it was used to store items for the Lorton Home Guard. On his demobilisation Leslie re opened the shop to supply general goods. On 26 November 1948 Leslie bought the land on which the shop stood, plus an extra section of

land behind the existing shop, from the then owner Nicholas Stephenson. Mr Stephenson, formerly of Bram Cragg Farm at St Johns in the Vale, had bought Boon Beck Farm, Lorton, in 1935 for £2,100. The extra piece of land was fenced off to give a small grass area behind the shop. Leslie who still lived in Cockermouth travelled to work each day on a 1937 250cc BSA motorcycle - one of the first to have a foot gear change instead of a hand gear change lever. Leslie attached a second small shed behind the original building to house his motorcycle, but later this was converted to an office and storeroom as his range of products expanded.

In addition to the groceries, he also ran a reading-book lending-library and he installed a cigarette vending machine outside the front of the shop for use outside opening hours. This dispensed Woodbine cigarettes, eleven and a half-penny for twenty cigarettes. A shilling in the slot delivered a packet of twenty cigarettes with a half-penny change. A sixpence piece delivered ten cigarettes.

On 17 October 1949 Leslie married Mabel Head and moved to Hopebeck to live, travelling to the shop by bicycle. Leslie Milburn retired on 11 August 1969. The shop was put up for sale and was bought by the Eland family.

Lorton Village Shop



Mrs Eland with the help of her daughter Sandra then ran the shop and took over the Post Office business in 1970, which they continued to operate until October 2000 when the sub Post Office was closed. Sandra then took over the running of the shop from her mother and continued to trade until 2013, when the shop was put up for sale.

In October 2014 the shop was bought by Lee Smith and Arwen Heaton, who moved to the area with their daughter Kelda from South Barnsley. They physically received the keys to the shop in January 2015.

They enlarged the shop, altered and modernised the internal configuration, and opened for trading in October 2015. They also served coffee and cakes and provided seating areas both inside the shop and outside at the rear, which was a boost to the many cyclists and visitors passing through the village.

During the Covid 19 pandemic the shop stayed open and provided a vital lifeline to the villagers who were self isolating, becoming a focal point for the community.

Memories of Lorton Fifty Years Ago

by a Member of Lorton W.I

In his autobiography Arthur Koestler says that there are two kinds of autobiography; the first is the "Chronicler's" and the other is the "Ecce Homo". "The Chronicler", he says, "is driven by the fear that the events of which he is a witness and which are part of his life, will be irretrievably lost to the future unless he preserves them. The Ecce Homo motive, on the other hand, urges men to preserve the uniqueness of their inner experiences and results in the confessional type of autobiography, St Augustine, Rousseau, de Quincey".

Here then are some "valley" memories, a chronicler's record pictured through the experiences of valley people.

Many things here are centuries old; habits and dialects persist, yet there has come in the last two generations a levelling influence, and may people live here now who came from "foreign" parts; in fifty years electric lights have appeared to shine out of distant farmstead windows where formerly candles lit the gloom; the now derelict tracks of old railways – the deserted stations, show that the railway has mostly waned in importance; even the scheduled bus goes past empty on its way to Cockermouth while strings of cars swing round the corner by the ancient yew at week-ends in the high season.

What changes do the old people see? Fifty years the well-to-do farmer kept several horses to draw his waggonette and "digby" governess cart to market on a Monday. The farmer's wife could handle and drive the little "digby" and often trotted up and down to interview the many makeshifts who replaced the invaluable "man" called up to do war service; She remembers the twice yearly "hiring" fairs which only died out after the first World War; the men to be hired stood about in Station Street with straws in their mouths; the girls were in a hall nearby – many of them came from the mining villages on the coast and not infrequently were pregnant – a fact which they stoutly denied and tried to hide until the moment of truth resulted in their ignominious dismissal – probably to the workhouse – no Moral Welfare homes for "expectant mothers" then! She remembers the great 'flu epidemic of 1919 – which caused more casualties than the War had brought to the valley; as she and her husband lay in bed there was a real problem about who was to churn the butter for market, but as usual, the family stepped into the breach and "mother" was there to see the crisis through.

There are two general stores in Lorton now (one of which is the Post Office), but the smithy, the carpenter's, the cobbler's – all the general services have disappeared, though there is a flourishing

garage with gay yellow petrol pumps in front of mid-town farm.

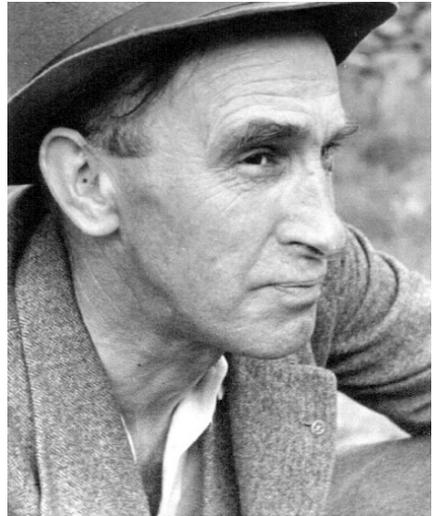
Two great men of the village must be recorded: one was the schoolmaster for 21 years and retired about 1921 – Mr. Oglethorpe who campaigned for sewage and piped water, who organised the famous Lorton Sports, got up concerts and evening classes for wood-wind and strings. At the conclusion of his time at the school he wrote “To-day concludes my 21 years’ service at Lorton School – years of stress, of change and often of worry. I came here an active young man of 25 – to-day I am nearing my 46th year feeling, especially if late – much impaired both physically and mentally”. But to-day he is still remembered with love and respect. He only had to walk through the ranks of young people gathered at the Yew Tree Hall for a concert or a party for them to shuffle respectfully and lower their voices; when the school leaving age was raised in 1918 to 14 there were some big louts in the school, quite tall enough to threaten the school master, but he cowed them with his glance – and if need be with his cane!

The other jovial benefactor of the village, George Scott came about 1912 to lodge in Rose Cottage; some of the War years he spent on the Isle of Man. Later when he opened his garage in Lorton and brought the first Ford chassis up from London to be converted in Cockermonth into a bus called Happy Days it was natural that he should use his connections to the Island and organise trips to the T.T. Races annually from Fleetwood – all-in expenses for the week-end including board at one of the Island’s boarding houses was £2. But if you hadn’t the money for such trips there was a Sunday afternoon outing to Sillioth (2/6d. for the family – which might mean eight children) or 6d. for a ride to Cockermonth.

The W.I. in Lorton dates back to 1922, but I should like to record the story of one special concert in its early days as told by the first Secretary (now 86); in those days she was the Post Mistress and a very active woman with a snub-nosed Morris; she lives still with her sister in the little cottage [Corner House] where they kept the Post Office and General Store and did all the baking for the village in their brick



George Oglethorpe in 1929



George Scott



George Scott's first bus, built on the Ford chassis and registered AO 6489 in 1921

oven. In those days the sitting-room was the "shop" and there was even less room than now for visitors, but they did not mind doing their bit when eight performers had to be given hospitality.

Miss Moffatt: "Mrs. Stanley-Dodson – she was our President – she was very fond of singing – and she got this "Arts League of ... something" (I think they were people who had been in the theatre) and they came and gave an address on singing and how songs should be sung; and four of us had arranged to put them up and we had two, and Mrs. Jackson had two and Mrs. Stalker had two and where the others went, ... oh, probably it was Mr. Dodson's; well, the morning it was going to be I was down with a telegram at Armaside and Mr. Dodson said 'I hear you are putting two up, Miss Moffat,' and I said. 'Yes, but I do hope they haven't been at Lady Mabel Howard's. because if they come to our

place they'll think they're rats in traps", but Mr. Dodson said, 'Well if I were going to come I would pick your place because' – he says – 'Greystoke Castle, it's starvation!' he says – they'll be all right'; and Mrs. Jackson says to me, 'What art tha giving them to eat?' and I says 'Fried fish!' and she says 'Well, when you go into Cockermonth get some for me and I'll give mine fried fish too'. Well they came along and I was feeling rather shy about it and they said 'What's your President like, Miss Moffatt' and I said, 'It's Mrs. Stanley Dodson, and she's very nice when you get to know her ... and I was up there this morning and I said to Mr. Dodson, well I do hope the ones that come to me weren't at Greystoke Castle, for they'll think they're rats in traps when they come here;' and they looked at one another and laughed and said, 'Well, we were!'

So perhaps I will not include those other memories from the outside world but leave the valley to its private memories – which still bring a gleam of enthusiasm to the eye; "Yes," they say " we made our own fun in those days – the young people nowadays don't think much of it but they don't remember how to amuse themselves" – or should we realise like Proust in "Time Remembered" that "what is of a world we shall never see again; but as we go on it is soon we ourselves who are on the horizon for the generations behind us, the horizon continues to recede and the world which seemed finished begins again".

Who wrote these memories?

I believe that our archive copy of the memories recorded above came from the Carlisle Archive Centre, though there is no reference. It has been printed here verbatim. We can date it to 1970 from the age given for Ann Moffatt, who was 100 on 26 December 1983. So, the memories are now of one hundred years ago.

Who was the author? This W.I. member provides an early equivalent of the many anonymised oral histories which the society did from 2000, and which can be read in transcript on the Ambleside Oral History Group website at www.aohg.org.uk. The author wishes us to know that she is an educated and literary person, framing the piece with Koestler and Proust. She carefully positions herself as observer and recorder, perhaps an offcomer. However, there is a strong element of the *Ecce Homo* approach as she confesses her own interests and concerns as an older middle-class woman, through how she selects and presents the memories.

None of us is a totally disinterested chronicler. Can anyone put a name to this writer?

Derek Denman



The Moffat family at Corner House soon after 1900. Ann left or right?

Lorton WI members as Native Americans at Greystoke Castle, 1924.



The Williamsons of South Lodge, Cockermouth: shipbuilding and philanthropy

by Lena Stanley-Clamp

The South Lodge mansion could be likened to a ship sailing through time with its successive residents embarking on new voyages. It is perhaps fitting that the continuation of this journey will reveal the story of a family of shipbuilders and mariners.¹ The Williamsons moved to South Lodge in 1894 but before we join them there, we shall go back in time and visit the harbours of Harrington and Workington.

A dynasty of shipbuilders

Harrington became a busy port after the quay was built there in 1760. Its shipbuilding industry developed to meet the demand for new vessels. There were well-established shipbuilders at all Cumbrian ports by the end of the 18th century. The Williamsons' firm lasted 100 years and was the longest in existence on the West coast of Cumberland.² Seventy-three merchant ships which sailed all over the world were built by the Williamsons in Harrington. They had their own yard there and their vessels were built under cover which earned them a high classification by Lloyds. From the beginning the firm acquired a reputation for good workmanship and orders kept coming. An old map of the Harrington shipyard shows Williamson Street running down to the harbour.

Richard Williamson of Whitehaven (1800-59), one of three brothers, was probably building ships from an early age. The family owned the business in Harrington since at least 1839 when the firm's first vessel, the *Union*, was launched. Richard's partnership with his

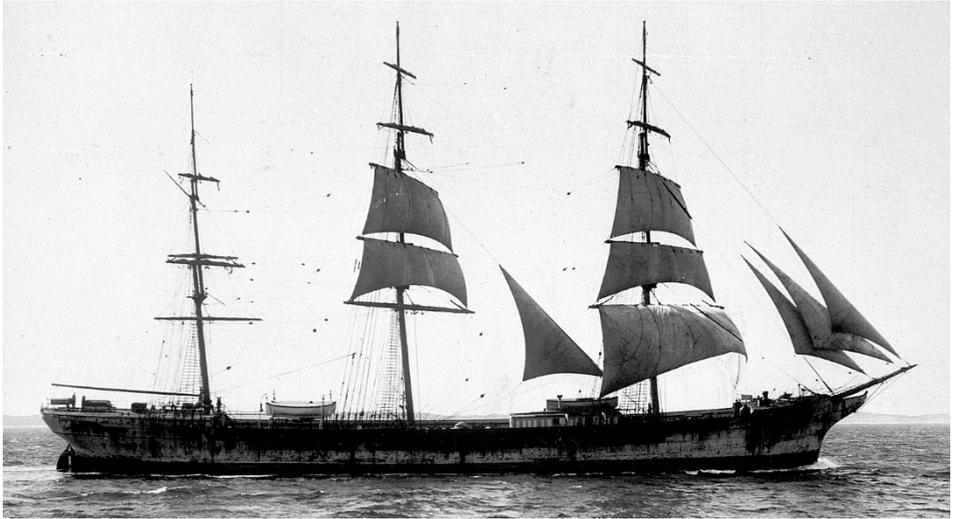


brother William was dissolved in 1847 after the latter's death and the firm moved to new premises in Harrington. An announcement in the *Cumberland Pacquet* stated that 'Mr R. Williamson begs to intimate to his Friends and the Public generally, that he has taken the above Premises, where he intends carrying on the Business of Building and Repairing Ships; and hopes by strict Attention to Easiness, to merit a Share of that Patronage which has been so liberally bestowed on the late Company.'³ In 1854 Richard took his son Thomas Williamson (1830-1909) into partnership and the firm became known as Richard Williamson & Son. The same year a 482-ton clipper ship, the *Mindanao*, was launched from their yard: 'The vessel has been built for Captain J. Ponsonby of this town and no

¹ See 'From Antigua to Cockermouth: The Story of South Lodge and its Residents', *Wanderer*, August 2020 and 'The Robinsons of South Lodge', *Wanderer*, February 2021.

² Herbert and Mary Jackson, *Seagoing West Cumbrians*, Hirst-Jackson, Maryport, 1995.

³ *Cumberland Pacquet*, 25 and 31 August 1847.



The Grassendale, 1885

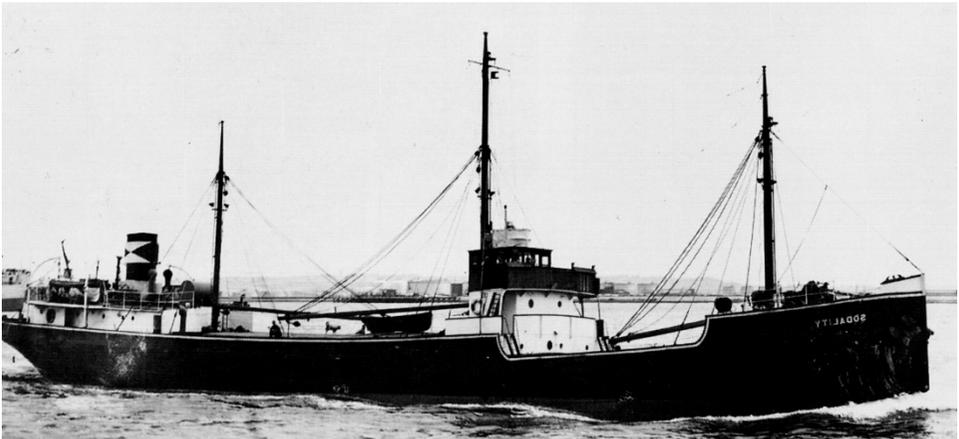
expense has been spared, or skill in architecture wanting, to make an ornament to the county, and fully a match for any of the noble clippers, whose swiftness is the admiration and boast of the age'.⁴

Thomas Williamson took over the running of the firm after his father's death in 1859. The firm's first iron ship, the Lorton (519 tons), destined for the China

trade, was built for Nelson & Alexander, a Liverpool shipping line, and launched in 1862. Over the years the Williamsons built their ships for many shipping lines including Brocklebank, Leyland & Co, W.S. Kennaugh & Co, the West Coast Shipping Line, and Lancaster Ship Owners Co.

Thomas Williamson and his sons Richard and Robert Hardy, were quick to realise that the future of shipping lay in

The Sodality, 1938



⁴ *Cumberland Pacquet*, 16 May 1854.

iron, and later steel, ships propelled by steam engines.⁵ This was probably the decisive reason why in 1880 they moved their shipbuilding to Workington where several ironworks were in operation. Their main supplier was the West Cumberland Hematite Iron and Steel Company, which produced steel of suitable quality. Thomas retired shortly after and gave his business together with a sufficient working capital to his two sons, Richard and Robert Hardy Williamson (1857-1938). The brothers worked in partnership with Richard as the senior partner.⁶ The firm continued to be known as Richard Williamson & Son.

Fuelled by the rapid growth of iron and steel industry, Workington became a busy industrial centre whose population quadrupled in the course of the second half of the 19th century. In 1875 the *West Cumberland Times* described it as possessing 'the reputation of being the richest town of its size in the kingdom', although its prosperity was to be affected by trade fluctuations.⁷ The historian J.D. Marshall remarked also on Workington's marked civic sense. The Williamsons were important employers and the town took pride in their ships. The launch of a ship was a cause for celebration. The launch of the Grassendale, an impressive 1800-ton full-rigged three-master was Williamsons' first ship built in Workington. Its launch in 1881 attracted thousands of people to the harbour and drink flowed freely in the town's public houses after the event. One source gives details of 19 vessels ranging from 1,798 to 2,958 tons that were launched from the Williamson yard in Workington between 1882 and 1906.⁸

Many more ships followed. The *Lancashire Evening Post* reported in 1930 that 242 ships were built in the Williamson shipyard by then.⁹ It is interesting to note

that many of the firm's vessels were named after Cumbrian locations: Embleton, Aira Force, Cumberland, Lowther Castle, Greystoke Castle, Wray Castle, Scale Force, Colwith Force and others. The ships sailed to all corners of the world with their cargos, some were re-named, some lost at sea in dramatic circumstances or broken up after a long service. The last ship built in the Williamsons' yard was the *Sodality* in 1938.

At home and at work in Cockermouth and Workington

Around 1879 the family left their home in Harrington and moved to Oakhurst in Cockermouth. The 1881 Census lists Thomas, aged 51, as the head of the household and 'shipowner in Navy Service on Shore'. The household included Richard, 25, Robert Hardy, 24, and their sister Annie Mary, 21. Thomas's wife Sarah née Hardy (1826-1882) was away from home visiting their married daughter Fanny Kennedy Ellison, who would later settle with her family at Holmwood in Cockermouth. This was a close-knit family judging by the fact that the adult sons Richard and Robert Hardy lived for many years at Oakhurst with their widowed father. The two brothers appear to have been close, sharing interests in golf, photography and charitable funding.

Richard Williamson, who was the chief partner of R. Williamson & Son, is also the principal character in this history of South Lodge, Cockermouth. It is therefore time to take a closer look at this remarkable man. Sources reveal that he was born in Harrington in 1855 and brought up there. Like his younger brother, he most likely attended the Croft House School in Brampton, which had a

⁵ *Whitehaven News*, 30 October 1862

⁶ *Workington Star*, 17.9.1909.

⁷ J.D. Marshall and John K. Walton, *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the mid-twentieth century*, Manchester University Press, 1981,

p.128. The population of Cockermouth remained the same during that period.

⁸

www.bruzelius.info/Nautica/Shipbuilding/Shipyards/Williamson.html

⁹ *Lancashire Evening Post*, 13 February 1930



The Williamson Children, 1866.
(Victoria State Library)

reputation for providing first-class education.¹⁰ Richard served a four-year apprenticeship at Fletcher, Jennings and Co., a well-known engineering company in Lowca near Whitehaven. He also spent a short time at sea. In 1876, aged 21, he became manager of the shipbuilding works in the family firm, the senior partner in 1880, and later a shipowner. He achieved distinction in his professional career: he was elected to the membership of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in 1883, and served on its Council from 1917 to 1930.¹¹ At a later date, he joined the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Institution of Naval Architects and the Institute of Marine Engineers.

Newspaper reports provide a glowing impression of the relations between the hardworking employers and the workforce

in the Williamson Shipyard. On festive occasions, the workmen 'with their wives and sweethearts' were entertained for suppers and dancing late into the night.¹² However, on 7 September 1889 the carpenters and riveters at the shipyard went on strike over pay.¹³ The dispute threatened to take a bitter turn when Mr Williamson allegedly asked the Barrow Shipyard to discharge some of his men who found work there during the strike. In any case the attempt was blocked when the Barrow workmen 'took it up'. A month later the dispute was settled on the workers' terms and the men returned to work.¹⁴ As a consequence of the strike, the workers joined the Shipwrights Association and Mr Williamson acknowledged the union and its chief secretary.¹⁵

Rejoicing in Workington

In 1893 the South Lodge mansion was advertised for rent as 'a capital old

¹⁰ 1871 Census (Richard, aged 16, would have left school by then).

¹¹ *Graces Guide to British Industrial History*, https://gracesguide.co.uk/Richard_Williamson

¹² *Maryport Advertiser*, 27 January 1882.

¹³ *Hertford Mercury and Reformer*, 9 October 1889.

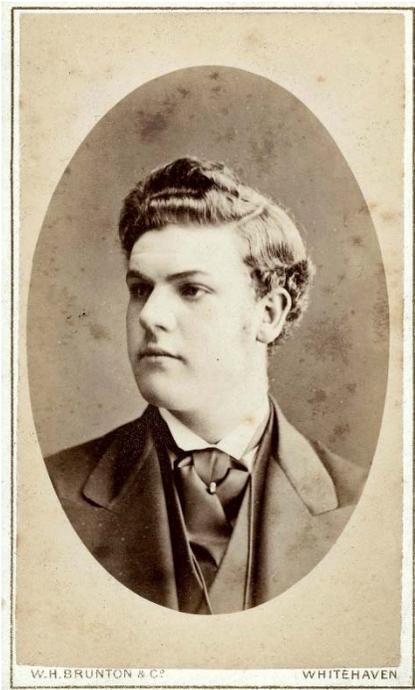
¹⁴ *Bradford Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 1889, *Workington Star*, 11 October 1889.

¹⁵ *Workington Star*, 11 October 1889

Residence with 45 acres or less, 12 Bed and Dressing Rooms and 5 Stalls' at a rent of £100 per annum.¹⁶ Richard Williamson, then aged 38, took over the lease for the property in early 1894 following his marriage in December 1893 to Miss Marian Jackson, aged 27.¹⁷ The wedding took place in Newcastle and the bride and groom travelled to the South of France on their honeymoon.

The *West Cumberland Times* reports spoke of "rejoicing in Workington and a celebration of the marriage a few days later for shipyard employees and their wives. A substantial knife and fork tea was served for over 350 guests and the ball was a conspicuous success with dancing continuing till four in the morning. Mr R.B. Hodgson, who proposed the vote of thanks to Messrs Williamson for the treat they provided for their workpeople, referred to "the excellent way in which the shipyards had been kept going all through the severe depression. Mr [Robert] Hardy Williamson, in responding said 'He trusted that a good feeling would continue to exist between the employers and the workmen, because in these days of strikes a great deal of harm was done and injury inflicted. The interests of the workmen were bound up in those of the employer". (...) He thanked them on behalf of his brother for their hearty wishes for the health and happiness of the newly wedded pair'. Flags were flown in the Shipyard and by ships in the harbour as well as at the Conservative Club.¹⁸

Victorian women lived mostly in the shadow of their husbands. In public life Marian (or Marrian) was known as Mrs Richard Williamson with no mention of her own name, background or accomplishments. The sources suggest



**Richard Williamson in 1873
(Victoria State Library)**

that her family lived for an extended period in Liverpool where she was born in 1867.¹⁹ Her father, Donald Jackson, was a marine engineer and a seaman.²⁰

We get a more intimate glimpse of this young woman in a report of a concert: 'The Public Hall, Cockermouth, was crowded to the doors on Wednesday night, when a concert was given in aid of the All Saints' Parish Magazine fund. ... among the most enjoyable features of the long

¹⁶ A newspaper cutting from the Robinson family archive, dated 1893. South Lodge was owned by Mrs Shore Nightingale (née Helen Joanna Spencer-Bell) who inherited the property from her mother. Confirmed by the Valuation Register 1909-15, New Domesday Digital Resource, Lorton & Derwent Fells LHS

¹⁷ *West Cumberland Times*, 27 January 1894 and 16 December 1893.

¹⁸ *West Cumberland Times*, 13 and 16 December 1893.

¹⁹ England & Wales Death Index 1916 -2005 and 1881 Census

²⁰ 1881 Census

programme was the singing of Mrs Williamson (South Lodge).²¹

In addition to taking care of her household, Mrs Williamson's life in Cockermouth was devoted to good works and social events as well as attending ship launches at Workington. The papers reported that she performed the christening ceremony of the Queen's Channel, the first of a line of channel steamers to be built in the Williamson shipyard²² and later of the Carmanian, an 1800 ton three-mast sailing ship, with thousands of people lining the pier.

The Williamsons were Methodists. In retirement, Thomas became a preacher of the 'God's Elect', preaching in his front room to small groups of followers. He occasionally gave voice to his strong religious convictions in the correspondence pages of the local papers. Richard and his wife Marion were members of the Wesleyan Methodist church in Harrington. Photographs taken by Richard record Sunday School and other Wesleyan church outings in Eskdale and Borrowdale. Mrs Williamson played a role in organising Sunday School Teas and charity bazaars for the congregation.²³ It seems that Richard and Marion were rather ecumenical in outlook, supporting the All Saints Church on a number of occasions, perhaps under Mrs Williamson's influence.

The Williamsons had three children, all born in Cockermouth: Margaret Eudora in 1897, Marian Vida in 1899, and Richard Dudley in 1901. The South Lodge household included also four domestic servants: a nurse, a cook, a parlour maid and a housemaid.²⁴

A father's conscientious objection

Richard Williamson and his two infant daughters were subjects of newspaper reports from the Cockermouth Police



Anti-vaccination cartoon, 1894, The Historical Medical Library of The College of Physicians of Philadelphia (The Atlantic, July 2015)

Court when he applied in 1899 for a vaccination exemption: 'The Chairman: I suppose it is really conscientious? Applicant: Yes, sir.' The certificate was granted.²⁵

We should be reminded that smallpox was a common killer in the 19th century. In England, the 1867 Act introduced compulsory vaccination for all children below 14. Widespread opposition to this law led to the foundation of the Anti-Vaccination League in Leicester in 1869, and a mass protest in 1885 in the same city. Prosecutions for non-vaccination grew rapidly providing publicity to the anti-vaccination movement. Eventually, a new Vaccination Act in 1898 introduced an exemption clause on the grounds of conscientious objection. Interestingly, many opponents of vaccination held non-conformist beliefs and were supporters of temperance, which fits rather closely with Richard Williamson's profile.

Ten years later, the Williamson girls come to our attention again with the 1911 Census which reveals that Margaret, aged 14, and Vida, 12, were then at boarding school at Seascale. After the development of the Furness Railway in 1850, Seascale

²¹ *West Cumberland Times*, 24 November 1894.

²² *West Cumberland Times*, 10 February 1894.

²³ *West Cumberland Times*, 5 April 1899.

²⁴ 1901 Census.

²⁵ *West Cumbrian Times*, 16 April 1899 and *Whitehaven News*, 27 April 1899.

became a holiday resort with a fine beach and bathing machines. The Calder Girls School had good reputation for providing a modern education 'on the public schools line' in a healthy environment. It was built in 1882 and originally run by four sisters, the Misses Wilson. The two principals were educated at Newnham College, Cambridge and the staff included graduate teachers of science and art.²⁶ The school closed in 1967 when applications for places dropped dramatically after the Windscale incident. The Williamson's son, Richard Dudley was still at home in 1911 under the care of a nurse/governess. The following year he went to a preparatory boarding school in Grange-over-Sands, the Charney Hall School. He later attended the Shrewsbury public school.²⁷

Philanthropy and civic engagement

Richard Williamson continued to manage the affairs of the Williamson shipyard for the rest of his life. His involvement in the civic life of Cockermouth and Workington was also impressive. In 1903-4, he served on the Committee for the building of a Free Library and Lecture Hall in Workington. A gift from Andrew Carnegie, a US steel magnate who funded thousands of free libraries all over the world, made the project possible but further funds were required. A generous contribution of £200 was promised by the brothers Williamson and it was hoped that others would follow their example.²⁸ A keen advocate of reading, study and temperance (which he believed went closely together), Richard Williamson was also involved with the Wordsworth Institute in Cockermouth. In 1907, he chaired a lecture on 'Robert Louis

Stevenson: poet and essayist' in Christ Church Parish Rooms. Two years later, at the annual meeting of the Institute, he was elected President. It was he who introduced the idea of photography to their programme, 'in which subject he was an enthusiast, and they might say, also a professor.'²⁹

The Royal Photographic Society

Williamson's passion for photography started in the 1890s as a recreation. He became expert in producing lantern slides of outstanding quality and developed a particular interest in night-time photography to which 'he devoted all the time he could spare from his business'.³⁰ He was a very active President of the Derwent Valley Photographic Society in Cockermouth where he promoted competitions and outings, and funded valuable prizes and equipment.³¹

Richard Williamson was elected a member of the Royal Photographic Society in 1912, and was admitted as Fellow in 1914. He took a keen interest in research and wanted to help younger generations of photographers. In 1922 he endowed, together with his brother Robert Hardy, the annual Williamson Photographic Research Award for research published during the year by candidates under 35 years of age. The awards were made in collaboration with the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.³²

The Cockermouth Golf Club

Richard Williamson was elected President of the Cockermouth Golf Club in 1903 at their annual general meeting and remained in this post for many years.³³ His

²⁶ *Carlisle Journal*, 21 December 1906 and 20 August 1909.

²⁷ National School Admission Registers & Log-Books 1870-1914; Britain, School and University Register Books, Shrewsbury School Register, 1916.

²⁸ *West Cumberland Times*, 12 September 1903.

²⁹ *West Cumberland Times*, 10 April 1909.

³⁰ *The Photographic Journal*, July 1939, p.478.

³¹ *West Cumberland Times*, 20 December 1902, 4 May 1904

³² *The Photographic Journal*, volume 79, November 1939

³³ *West Cumberland Times*, 18 March 1903. Richard served as president until at least 1912 according to the *West Cumbrian Times* of 20 April 1912. His brother, R.H. Williamson, succeeded him in this post, *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30 April 1921.



**Outing to Eskdale, 1899
(Photograph by Richard Williamson)³⁴**

wife Marion was also a member as was Robert Hardy who served as captain. In earlier times golf was played in Cockermouth in the vicinity of South Lodge in the fields adjoining the Cocker. The course could be approached by a footbridge at Rubby Banks Mill.³⁵ The club moved at the turn of the century to Embleton where new links, designed by the renowned Scottish golf course architect James Braid, were built. The Embleton links were opened formally with a match played in August 1905 in very poor weather. A detailed hole-by-hole account in the paper mentions that among those who braved the elements was Mr R. Williamson, president of the club. 'Mr Williamson expressed his pleasure at the match they had had and the somewhat belated opening of the links. Golf, he considered, "was a good healthy game that deserved support. (...) It helped them

to forget their worries and trials of everyday life and brought them out into the fresh air."³⁶

A report on the success of the county competitions held at the Club in the *West Cumberland Times* of 20 June 1912 praised Mr Williamson for the smooth running and congenial atmosphere of the event. It stated: 'In Mr Richard Williamson the club has a President who is not merely content to occupy a position of honour, but is always to be found foremost amongst those who undertake the spade-work whenever such is required.' Over the years Mr and Mrs Williamson offered prizes for competitions and were active on fundraising Committees. The Williamson Ladies' Trophy is played at the club every year to this day.³⁷

The Williamson family were also benefactors in the provision of medical care. In 1902, the *Maryport Advertiser* reported that Mr Thomas Williamson, Oakhurst, Cockermouth, has generously given a house [Harford House] and

³⁴ Old Workington public group, Facebook.

³⁵ J. Bernard Bradbury, *A History of Cockermouth*, 1981.

³⁶ *West Cumberland Times*, 2 August 1905.

³⁷ Information obtained from Evelyn McElhinney.

cottage in Crown Street for the purpose of providing a nursing home for the town.³⁸ A year later, a report on the annual meeting of the Whitehaven and West Cumberland Infirmary acknowledged a special donation of £100 by Mr Thomas Williamson.³⁹ Richard was to follow in his father's steps when he became a Trustee of the Cockermouth Nursing Home in 1912.⁴⁰

The First World War

The outbreak of the First World War was followed rapidly by emergency legislation, the Defence of the Realm Act 1914, which affected all aspects of life, including control of communications and the nation's ports. Newspapers were restricted in their coverage of local news to prevent any sensitive information from falling into enemy hands. I have not found any mention of Richard Williamson during that time apart from one report in the *Citizen Daily* in Manchester of 19 August 1914: 'A War Relief Committee has been formed at Workington, and fund has been opened with a donation of £500 by Mr. R. Williamson, South Lodge, Cockermouth, a Workington shipbuilder and owner, who has given £100 to Cockermouth relief fund.'

The Williamson Shipyard made its contribution to the war effort; it is listed among much larger concerns in the Tribute to British Shipbuilding and Repair Industries, 1914-18.⁴¹ The mercantile navy and shipyards were then under the control of the government who determined the allocation of resources such as timber, steel and labour. Debates in Parliament reflect the difficulties the shipyard would have experienced. Representatives of shipbuilding constituencies criticised repeatedly the

short-sightedness of 'Admiralty men, who are necessarily trained to think only along the grooves of naval construction, now really dominate the whole situation, and, as a matter of fact, they have mercantile shipbuilding at their mercy.'⁴²

The rejoicing at the news of the Armistice in November 1918 must have been subdued: nine days after the war ended, reports from Cockermouth stated that almost every family in town was infected with the deadly Spanish influenza following a service of thanksgiving.⁴³

A parting of the ways

The last trace of Richard Williamson's residing in Cockermouth can be found in the Electoral Register of 1915.⁴⁴ By 1921 new tenants, the Armstrongs, were living at South Lodge.⁴⁵ It seems that around 1920 the Williamson family left South Lodge and went their separate ways, suggesting a degree of estrangement. Mrs Williamson lived at Douglas Mansions on West End Lane in Hampstead until her death in 1937, while her adult son and two daughters were listed at their London addresses in the 1939 Register.⁴⁶

Richard Williamson lived at Smedley's Hydro in Matlock for the last sixteen years of his life. The belief in hydrotherapy as a cure for any disease and the popularity of spa towns flourished well into the 20th century. Smedley's Hydro Hotel in Matlock, established in c.1867, continued to attract guests until the Second World War. For Richard Williamson, it was perhaps a convenient location between London and West Cumberland. He remained at the helm of the Williamson shipyard until 1938 when it closed. The newspapers mention that he regularly travelled by train from Matlock

³⁸ *Maryport Advertiser*, 17 May 1902.

³⁹ *Maryport Advertiser*, 7 February 1903.

⁴⁰ CASW/DWM/319/5, Cockermouth Cottage Hospital papers,

⁴¹ www.naval-history.net/WWW1NavyBritish-Shipbuild02.htm

⁴²

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1918-03-14/debates>

⁴³ *The Globe and Mail*, 23 May 2003

⁴⁴ Electoral Register, Cockermouth.

⁴⁵ Lancashire Evening Post, 17 May 1921.

⁴⁶ Probate record 1937; The 1939 Register of the Population of England & Wales.

to Cockermonth and London. 'He was well liked in the vicinity, although he was a man of somewhat eccentric ways.'⁴⁷

The archives of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers record his regular attendance in London at the meetings of their Council on which he served until 1930. As always, he lent his support to research: 'He was a familiar figure at the Institution where he served on various research committees, and contributed financially to the cost of the work carried out by several in which he was interested'.⁴⁸

The news of Richard Williamson's death on 9 April 1939 made the headlines in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Hull, Sheffield and elsewhere: *Kept his Million Secret for Sixteen Years or Left Half a Million but No Will*. The *Daily Mirror* revealed that 'Mr. Richard Williamson lived a simple life in Matlock, Derbyshire. Nobody knew much about him. (...) But with his death has come the news that the man who lived so simply was a millionaire shipyard owner. People in Matlock always had a kind word for Mr. Richard Williamson. He was spartan in his habits and kept to himself; was often content with a ship's biscuit for a meal. (...) An odd pipe of tobacco was his only luxury'.⁴⁹ Other papers reported that he rose early every morning to travel on business to London, Liverpool and elsewhere.

The probate record published in the *Liverpool Evening Express* stated 'Mr. Richard Williamson, of Matlock, and of The Shipyard, Workington, shipowner and shipbuilder, Lloyd's underwriter and financier, head of Messrs. Williamson and Son, manager of the North-West Shipping Co., Ltd., and a director of the Lancashire Shipping Co., Ltd., Liverpool, a member the Liverpool Committee of Lloyds Register of Shipping since 1927, who died intestate, left gross £509,403 with net

£503,581.' Letters of administration were granted to his son Richard Dudley Williamson of Edgware, one of the persons entitled to share in the estate.⁵⁰

The Royal Photographic Society and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers published lengthy obituaries that paid tribute to Richard Williamson and his achievements. 'Those who knew him personally testify to his keen interest in the work of others and his unfailing good humour and his friendliness'.⁵¹

Richard Williamson was buried in Cockermonth alongside his parents and sister Annie Mary. The inscription on the gravestone says simply: In Memory of Richard Williamson of Workington born 16th November 1855 died 9th April 1939.

This history of the Williamson family spans 100 years over the 19th and 20th centuries, a period which witnessed huge transformations in British society. The energy and optimism of the Victorian age was followed by the tragic losses and depredations of the First World War. The end of the war brought also the most significant political and social change: The 1918 Representation of the People Act, which gave the vote to all men over 21, and to women over 30 who met the minimum property qualifications. In consequence, the size of the electorate tripled from 7.7 million to 21.4 million with women accounting for 43% of the electorate. The Act of 1928 extended the franchise to all women over 21 without any property qualifications.

The shipbuilding Williamsons were captains of industry and benefactors in their communities. Their lives and work deserve to be remembered. In Cockermonth, the 1887 inscription on Jubilee Bridge provides a tangible, if modest, mark: it records the names of Thomas and Richard Williamson among the committee of benefactors.

⁴⁷ *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 24 June 1939.

⁴⁸ *Graces Guide to British Industrial History*, https://gracesguide.co.uk/Richard_Williamson

⁴⁹ *Daily Mirror*, London 13 April 1939.

⁵⁰ *Liverpool Evening Express*, 23 June 1939.

⁵¹ *Photographic Journal*, July 1939, vol. 79, published by The Royal Photographic Society.

The Williamsons of Low Lorton and the dated lintel.

by Derek Denman

This investigation was prompted by the problem of preparing a historical walk around Lorton and not knowing the meaning of the oldest dated stone which fronts the highway. This is a door lintel at Becksides in Low Lorton – a modern name to identify a property which has no name in old records.¹ The inscription is a typical record of the family which lived there in 1679. The initial of the family name is 'W', with the husband to the left 'M', and the wife to the right 'A'. So who were they?

One problem with this lintel is that the fine stone door-surround graces an attached shed, rather than a house, while in 1679 it would have been used for a substantial yeoman's house. There must be a suspicion that it has been re-used and may have started life elsewhere. Other dated stones are clearly in their original site, for example on the old Packhorse Inn, built or converted in 1734 by Thomas and Mary Barnes. Some other dated stones

**Becksides, looking North. Photos
Derek Denman**



The inscription over the shed door

have clearly been moved but are usually retained within the farmstead.

The owner and farmer in 1827

The first question about the unexplained stone is 'how old is the shed'? We have a detailed plan of Low Lorton from 1827, made for the enclosure of the commons, and surprisingly that shed was there as the shed shape in 1827, presumably being at that time a dated shed over 200 years old and with a smart door-surround 342

years old.²

Possibly the doorway is the remains of an earlier house, retaining the doorway, or the doorway of an earlier house has been reused, but that cannot be found from historical sources alone.

We can identify the owner of every building and piece of land



¹ This article has been corrected to replace Low Stead with Becksides.

² CACW/DBen/Box282, plans of ancient closes.

in Lorton in 1827, because the survey was required to value every landowner's holding to calculate their shares of the common.³ Seeking the holding which includes the dated lintel leads to the estate shown, in part, on the plan, and to the claim by its owner, John Fisher, in respect of 'a certain dwellinghouse, barn, stable and cowhouse with other appurtenancies thereto adjoining and also about 30 acres of freehold land situate lying and being in Lorton in the manor of Derwentfells ... in the possession of Henry Fletcher as tenant'.⁴ Henry Fletcher owned the farmstead to the south, later to become the Wheatsheaf, and about nine acres of land, also shown on the plan.

This does not explain a family name starting with 'W' in 1679.

Manorial sources before 1827

If this were a property in High Lorton there would be little problem in tracking back to the owner to 1679, because High Lorton was granted as a freehold estate to the Priory of Carlisle in about 1136, and we have excellent manorial records kept by the Dean and Chapter of Carlisle Cathedral (the post-reformation owners) of their manorial tenants and their holdings. From a full Parliamentary survey, without a plan, in 1649 and with the changes going forward into the twentieth century.⁵

However, Low Lorton was granted, or subinfeudated, as a freehold estate in the same period and was then subdivided by 1305 into three smaller estates, none of which owners left records of their handful of manorial tenancies.⁶ Only the names of the freeholders, or mesne lords, were recorded by the superior Derwentfells manor, together with the free rent for each holding. This annual free rent was 3s 4d for a third of the vill of Low Lorton. So that when lands of the

rebellious Percies were occasionally surveyed for the purposes of confiscation, say in 1569 or 1578, the detail goes down only to the mesne lords and their free rents, and not to their actual manorial tenants in Low Lorton.⁷ Except that one sixth of the vill reverted, or escheated, back to the lord of Derwentfells before 1385, perhaps due to the lack of an heir.⁸ So there were three tenements in Low Lorton which became manorial tenements within Derwentfells and can be known tracked in detail. However, this manorial sixth does not include the dated property.

Thomas Williamson, yeoman of Low Lorton

The dividing line between the Low and High Lorton manors was Church Lane, and it can be seen that in 1827 John Fisher held two closes in High Lorton, whose ownership can be tracked back to 1649 in the Dean and Chapter records. John Fisher claimed that all his thirty acres were freehold within Derwentfells, and not customary under the Dean and Chapter. The survey of 1649 uses forest measure, where one customary acre is 1.6 statute acres. It contains a bounder of the holdings in High Lorton, and states 'There is lying within the said bounder only two acres of ground belonging to Thomas Williamson and about eight acres of freehold land belonging to Richard Pearson and William Robinson'.⁹

Thomas Williamson was not a tenant of the Dean and Chapter, but lived, from other records, in Low Lorton, as did his fellow yeoman Richard Pearson of Holme Farm (a later name), who also held freehold land within the Dean & Chapter's bounder. Those freeholds probably derive from Low Lorton holdings which predated the creation of the High Lorton manor, around 1136.

³ CASW/DLec/75, Lorton enclosure, Book of ancient closes.

⁴ CASW/DLec/75, Lorton enclosure, List of claims.

⁵ CASC/DCHA/8, manors; 8/8, manor of Lorton

⁶ TNA/C133/119/9

⁷ TNA/E164/37, f.32 1569/70

⁸ CASW, shelves, Percy Great Survey, 1578

⁹ CASC/DCHA/8/8/8, survey manor of Lorton, Bounder of Over Lorton, f.44

That freehold ground in High Lorton owned by Thomas Williamson in 1649 comprised the same two closes, Crook and Windings, which were included in John Fisher's farm of 1827.¹⁰ It therefore seems quite likely that the 'W' stands for the Williamson family, though the 'M' of 1679 is not Thomas of 1649.

Freehold closes could be bought and sold, and so it is possible that the connection between the two High Lorton closes and Low Lorton core of Fisher's holdings was made between 1679 and 1827, and that the Williamsons lived elsewhere in Low Lorton in the seventeenth century. However, there is good evidence of continuity of the High and Low Lorton holdings. In Thomas Williamson's will of 1692 he left to his wife the close called Foullesicks in Low Lorton, which was part of the Fisher holding in 1827, called Foul Dykes in 1840.¹¹

Secondly Ron George noted the following responsibilities for clearing or rasting a watercourse in 1681, when Thomas Williamson owned the closes Cowridden, called Cowrudding in 1840:

*through a Close of Peter Peille called 'Cuble' and then into a close of Thomas Williamson called 'Cowridden' which belongs to the said Peter to cast and there into another close of the said Thomas Williamson called 'Midlemost cowridden' which Widow Iredel is to rast as far as the half ground adjioyning. Then into a close of Richard Fletcher called 'gate of lat' which Thomas Williamson is to rast, then into a Close of Thomas Williamson which the said Richard Fletcher is to rast as fare as his ground adjoyes.*¹²

It does seem probable that in 1679 the Williamson family held the Low Lorton tenement based on Becksides, un-named.

The registers of St Cuthbert's Lorton are lost for large parts of the seventeenth

century, but we know that Thomas Williamson above was born in 1618, the son and heir of John Williamson of Nether Lorton, and Thomas's will was made in 1692. Thomas and his first wife had four children, Mark 1643, John 1644 (buried 1645) Thomas 1645 and Ann 1646. His will shows that he had grandchildren and a second wife, Elizabeth, with further sons Joseph, Jeremiah and John.

Mark Williamson of Low Lorton

The eldest son and heir, Mark, would have been 26 in 1679, which was a typical age for a yeoman's son to marry and have a house, but not necessarily to own the freehold farm. The Lorton registers are lost for the time of his marriage and for the baptism of any children, although Tamar, the daughter of a Mark Williamson, yeoman, was buried in 1720. Mark Williamson died in 1723, as a householder in Low Lorton, perhaps the end of the line.

Mark Williamson appears in the manor court of Derwentfells from 1689, being constable in 1692, and is recorded in 1718.¹³ In 1692 he was presented for 'stopping Mathew Iredale on his way from Long-howe parrack through Mark's gate-flats and so into the Great Close Inge', which confirms his activity in the general area of the holdings of Fisher in 1827.¹⁴

It is most probably that Marke held his father's freehold farm from a few years before his death, and that the lintel dated 1679 records a house on the farmstead becoming, earlier, the dwelling of Mark Williamson and his wife, whose given name would have had the initial 'A'.

Enfranchising the estate in the sixteenth century

It seems clear that in 1649 Thomas Williamson and Richard Pearson held freehold farms in Low Lorton, which both included holdings within the boulder of

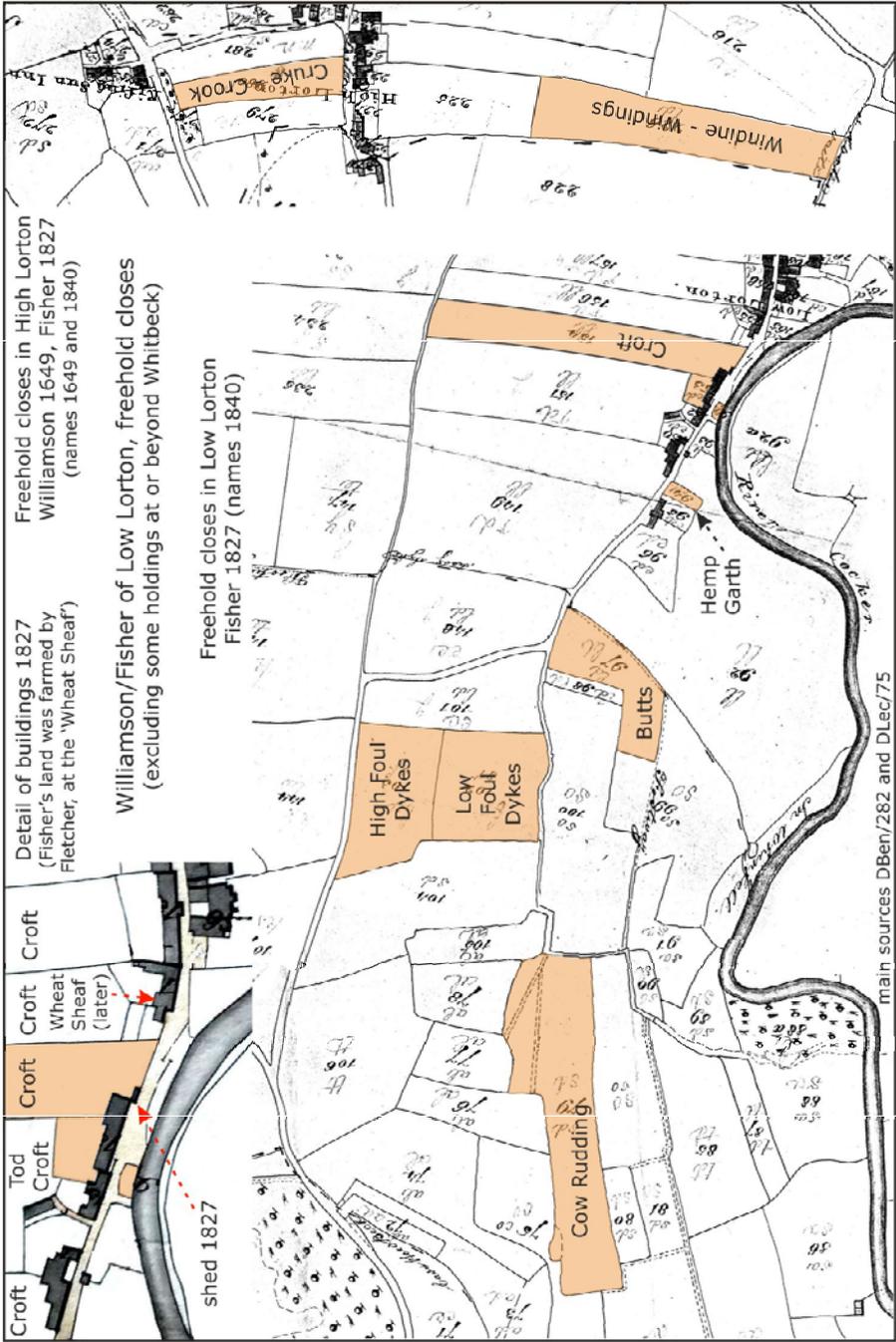
¹⁰ CASC/DCHA/8/8/8, f.45

¹¹ WRW/C/1692 Thomas Williamson, Lorton; TNA/IR29/7/10,7 tithe apportionment, Lorton; IR30/7/107, tithe map Lorton

¹² Ron George, *A Cumberland Valley*, p.60

¹³ Ron George notes 'D/Lec/85 verdicts'

¹⁴ Ron George, *A Cumberland Valley*, p.83



Detail of buildings 1827
(Fisher's land was farmed by
Fletcher, at the 'Wheat Sheaf')

Freehold closes in High Lorton
Williamson 1649, Fisher 1827
(names 1649 and 1840)

Williamson/Fisher of Low Lorton, freehold closes
(excluding some holdings at or beyond Whitbeck)

Freehold closes in Low Lorton
Fisher 1827 (names 1840)

main sources DBen/282 and DLec/75

the Dean and Chapter's High Lorton boulder, but not as part of their manor. These farmsteads and holdings in High Lorton may well date back to the twelfth century and beyond, though the holding in the open town-field of High Lorton would probably not be in defined closes at that early time.

When and how did the tenant farmers, such as the Williamsons and the Pearsons, gain their freeholds and stop being manorial tenants of a minor lord? The second half of the sixteenth century saw the manorial tenants across Cumberland and Westmorland attempting to purchase their freeholds, or at least gain more certainty in their manorial entry-fines. At Bridgend in Lorton, and probably at Lorton Cross, the manorial tenants purchased their freeholds in 1596.¹⁵

The Williamson's manorial tenement was part of a freehold estate of one sixth of the vill of Low Lorton, held in 1547 by one William Hadilston (Hudleston).¹⁶ This sixth included Holme Farm and probably also Croft Farm, though they are not named. The records of Derwentfells manor included only the names of the freeholder and the free rent, which was 20d, and little about the tenants of the freeholder and their lands.

In the 1569 survey the freeholder listed for the one sixth part was John Hale, who held two tenements in Lorton for 20d free rent.¹⁷ In 1578 the Percy Great Survey noted that the Heirs of Thomas Hoales held 'certain lands and tenements' for that 20d.¹⁸ However, three new freeholders in Lorton had been added, each with no rent. These were:

Christopher Hall holdeth certain lands and tenements there late William Hudleston by like service and renteth by the year [blank]

The heirs of Richard Barwis hold there one messuage and twenty acres

of land and meadow by like service and renteth by the year [blank]

The relict [widow] of [blank] Williamson of Nether Lorton holdeth certain lands and tenements there by like service and renteth by the year nil

This would suggest that between 1547 and 1578 the one sixth of the vill freehold estate had been sold as three freehold farmsteads, including one to the Williamsons who were probably the previous manorial tenants in Low Lorton. The heirs of Thomas Hoales would be included in the list of free tenants because the responsibility for the 20d free rent had not been divided among the three sales. It would be for the lord of Derwentfells to apportion and enforce the free rent, if he wished to and could have enforced it.

Conclusion

It is probable that the dated lintel in Low Lorton identifies the dwelling of Mark Williamson and his wife in 1679, around the time of their marriage. Mark was the son and heir of Thomas Williamson, the holder of a freehold estate in Low Lorton, based on Beckside, as it is now called.

The core of the farm tenement held by the Williamsons appears to be one of the medieval tenements of Low Lorton which retained its identity into the nineteenth Century, as part of the property of John Fisher.

That medieval tenement was one of two in Low Lorton which had holdings in High Lorton which are likely to predate the grant of the High Lorton manor in the mid twelfth century.

In 1547 the tenement was a manorial holding within the one sixth of the vill of Low Lorton, held as a freehold estate by William Hudleston, but by 1578 the Williamsons had bought the freehold of their farm.

¹⁵ CASW/DCART/C/5/8, Indenture of sale 1596

¹⁶ CASW/DLec/314/38

¹⁷ TNA/E164/37, f.32 1569/70

¹⁸ CASW, shelves, Percy Great Survey, 1578, freeholders in Lorton