

# The Journal

No. 56 – August 2015

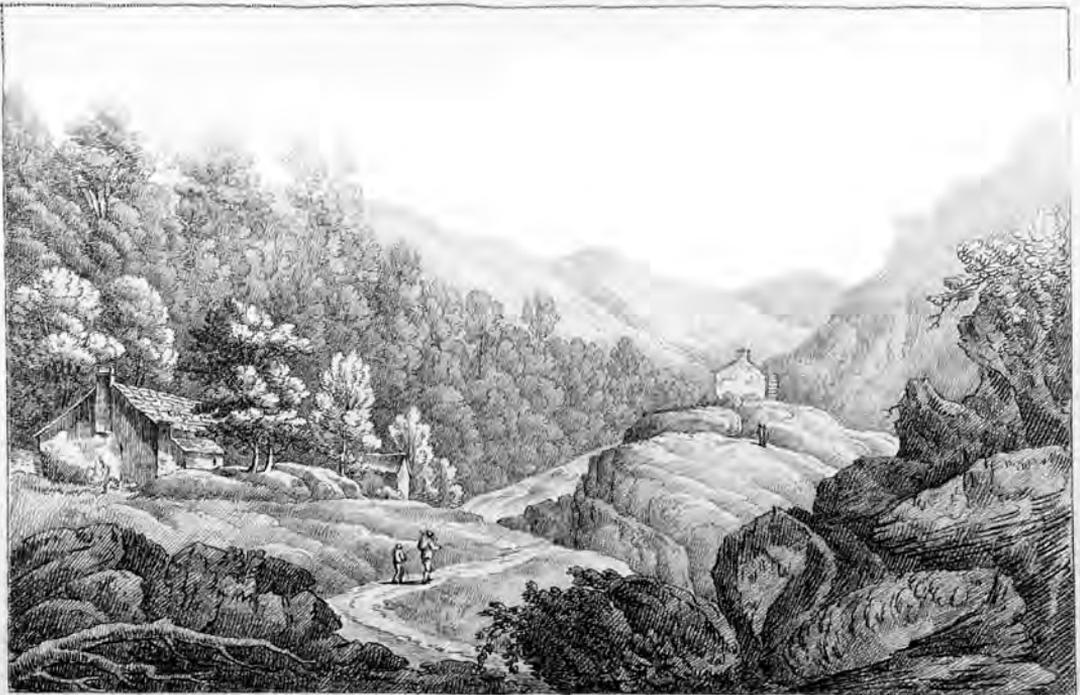
## Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society

Brackenthwaite Buttermere Embleton Loweswater Mockerkin Pardshaw Whinfall Wythop

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*Cottages on the Fells of Lorton*



*Looking Hill near Thornthwaite*

**Scenes in Lorton and Thornthwaite, by Rev. Joseph Wilkinson, 1810**

## **The Journal**

I would like to welcome two new contributors to this issue. Andy Liles, teacher at Lorton school, has written an article on the inspirational headmaster of the school, George Oglethorpe. I remember when we recorded the late Bill Conkey in 2011, possibly then the last living Oglethorpe pupil. Bill said 'The people that I liked the best were Mr & Mrs Oglethorpe, the headmaster and the head teacher'. Welcome also to Tim Stanley-Clamp, and his report on the excellent visit he organised to Acorn Bank. We need more short items of general interest in the Journal, and I hope that others will be inspired to contribute – the Journal belongs to its members.

In this issue Walter Head completes his walking survey of Embleton in the 1950s. At the Society meeting in Embleton in April – the presentation is now on our website for those who missed it – we noted the moat marked on the first series OS map.<sup>1</sup> This was all that remained of the house in the park of the lord of the manor, Thomas of Ireby, who was killed by the army of Robert the Bruce in 1322. A local lady told me afterwards that when the A66 was built the moat was used for landfill. Sure enough, there is a record of thinly-covered dumped black material – track-bed? History is unaffected, but there is little left to see.

The cover contains two studies of local subjects by the Rev. Joseph Wilkinson, from his *Select views in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire*, published in 1810. I had been looking for a source for these images, which are hard to obtain because a first edition will cost around £2000, not because of the exquisite quality of the artwork, but because the letterpress was commissioned, for payment, from an anonymous writer whose later fame has

rather overshadowed the achievements of Wilkinson.<sup>2</sup>

...The reverent Joseph Wilkinson, 1764-1831, resided at Ormathwaite between 1794 and 1804, where his wife, Mary, looked after the elderly Dr William Brownrigg, her uncle. Being close to Keswick they were in the social circle of the Coleridge/Southey families for a few years before the moving to Norfolk. There Joseph Wilkinson was appointed rector of East and West Wretham, and domestic chaplain to the Marquis of Huntley. Pining for the hills, he returned in spirit through this publication.

...Quite properly for a clergyman, his landscapes contain people, with their habitations and work-places, and it would seem that the scenes are quite accurately observed. So the challenge is for someone to identify the location of 'Cottages in the Vale of Lorton'. Perhaps a Society member lives there? The 'Smelting Mill at Thornthwaite' will reflect the lead mining activity undertaken by lessees of the Greenwich Hospital.

*Derek Denman*

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## **Contents of Journal No. 56**

George Oglethorpe, headteacher of Lorton school	3
A report on the visit to Acorn Bank	8
A walk through western Embleton	10
The floods of Crabtree Beck	13
The mole-catcher	19
John Smeaton and Derwentwater	20
The Society's programme	24

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.derwentfells.com/pdfs/EmbletonTalkWeb.pdf>;  
<http://www.derwentfells.com/pdfs/Embleton&WythopTalk-webversion.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/guide\\_lakes](http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/guide_lakes)

**George Oglethorpe:-  
Headteacher of Lorton  
School: 1891-1924**

*by Andy Liles*

When I first visited Lorton School in the Spring of 2008, it was impossible to ignore the genuine and innate family atmosphere that permeated every classroom that day. I have, to date, enjoyed seven years teaching at Lorton School and watching children flourish in this increasingly rare environment which allows students to thrive both academically and socially. Visitors routinely complement everyone connected with the School for the well rounded, courteous and confident children they meet.

As a teacher, I am keen to make the pupils of the School more aware of its history and why we as a school community share an experience so different from others both locally and nationally. This holistic approach to education, on which Lorton School's current good reputation is based, has been around far longer than any of us currently working here, and I have been keen to discover its origins.

As I studied the School's log books and Mick Jane's brilliantly detailed *Lorton General School – The Victorian History*, it became apparent that Lorton School's approach to education was the legacy left by William Alexander and George Oglethorpe. William Alexander, I'm sure, needs little introduction; his contributions to the School, both financially and socially, are part of the reason why Lorton is one of Cumbria's oldest surviving schools.

In addition to funding the expansion of the School in the mid 1890s, Mr Alexander provided the means to create two covered play areas that were built in 1906. The boys' shed survives to this day while the girls' made way for what is now the pavilion shared by the School and Lorton Tennis Club. Alexander's recognition of the need of children to have a change of environment between lessons demonstrates his understanding of the importance of a well-rounded education; an idea decades ahead of his time.



Far less is written about George Oglethorpe. While plaques in the School rightly recognise the important contributions of William Alexander and John Wilson, there is no recognition of the thirty-three years of toil undertaken by George Oglethorpe to transform Lorton from an ailing establishment to one that students, staff and the local community were proud to be associated with. I hope this piece redresses the balance in recognising Mr Oglethorpe's contribution to Lorton School – including the fostering of its child-centred philosophy - and the local community.

George Oglethorpe, born in Dearham in 1866, became headmaster of the School in 1891 at the age of twenty-five. He succeeded Frederic Jones, under whose stewardship the school had sadly floundered. Mr Oglethorpe's early entries in the School's log book lamented the standard of arithmetic and spelling, as well as the girls' sewing!



Winners of County Medals for Perfect Attendance during 1899, attending  
**LORTON SCHOOL.**

The staff roll was threadbare on his arrival; only he and his wife working as schoolmaster and assistant schoolmistress respectively along with Mrs Benson, the school cleaner. The School appeared to be in a chaotic condition according to his entry on September 29<sup>th</sup> 1891: 'The cupboards are in a disorderly state and I have great difficulty in getting classes to work on this account, as the necessary books etc. are not easy to find.'

Mr Oglethorpe spent the next decade improving the School's fortunes remarkably. One of his most notable changes was the introduction of an incentive for excellent attendance, elevating the importance of education in the mind of the children and the local community. Farming work, sickness and adverse weather conditions affected the attendance rate significantly, and academic progress surely suffered as a result. He began by posting a *Perfect*

*Attendance List* on a weekly basis as well as presenting certificates to the children:

*Every week cards will be given for regular attendance and at the end of the year those twenty who can produce the most cards will be photographed in one group and each child presented with a copy and a framed copy hung up in School.*

The impact of this scheme was almost immediate, and by 1900 the School had won the Attendance Challenge Shield, vied for by around two hundred Cumberland schools, boasting an attendance average of 95.6%. It was a moment of significant pride for everyone connected with the School; it inspired a poem entitled *When Lorton Won The Shield*, written by former headmaster John Bolton. Students of Crosthwaite Boys' School, the Shield's previous winners, wrote a magnanimous letter of congratulation to their Lorton counterparts for their achievement:

*Fellow Scholars, We have just heard that you school has won the beautiful County Challenge Shield for the highest percentage of average attendance for 1899 and are going to get it presented to you tomorrow. We, as winners of the shield last year, send our congratulations to you. We of course would sooner that we had won it again but we are glad it has not gone far away.*

Lorton School would retain the trophy for another two years.

The improved attendance brought about the dawning realisation in both Mr Oglethorpe and Mr Alexander of the need to expand the School. Teaching over ninety pupils in such confined conditions was becoming increasingly impractical; both men saw the potential for more effective education that could be realised with expansion and they worked together for three years to raise funds for improving the existing rooms and adding a new room.

Much of the renovation work was done, or contributed to, by members of the local community with whom Mr Oglethorpe had developed a strong bond. Two-hundred people attended tea in the new room to commemorate its opening and acknowledge the community's efforts.

By 1899, one hundred and nine pupils were attending the School. Around this time, George Oglethorpe had enlisted Evelyn Lennox and Clara Burns as pupil-teachers who, by all accounts, handled the responsibility exceptionally well for their age. By April 1901, the progress made by the School under Mr Oglethorpe's



leadership was recognised in a Report of Her Majesty's Inspector:

*The School is worked in three groups, and the principles of the New Code have been adopted with satisfactory success. Good work is done. The Infant class is well taught.*

Because of the increasingly infrequent need for it, and to commemorate the turning of the century, George Oglethorpe abolished corporal punishment in January 1900. Although he would subsequently have to use the cane to admonish two boys in 1903, his resolve to avoid physical punishment was incredibly enlightened,

especially considering that the law to criminalise corporal punishment in schools was only passed in 1987.

As was required at the time, Mr Oglethorpe wrote regularly in the School's log book, a tradition surviving until 1994. Included among the many entries detailing attendance, reports and illnesses, were his sober and dutiful recording of significant historical events. 'January 22<sup>nd</sup> 1901: Her Majesty Queen Victoria died tonight at 6:30 at Osborne House, Isle of Wight'. 'August 4<sup>th</sup> 1914: England today, as the ally of France and one of the guarantors of the neutrality of Belgium, declared war on Germany'. Mr Oglethorpe went on to list five key events leading to Britain's declaration.

On occasions, the log books provide an insight of the warmth and respect he offered to pupils: 'May 10<sup>th</sup> 1921: Owing to good attendance since April 1<sup>st</sup>, and that children were anxious to go to the Circus in Cockermouth, a half holiday was granted today, from noon'.

The log books also contain local newspaper clippings, often about the School's annual prize giving festivals. A touching article was written to commemorate the completion of thirty years of service by Mr Oglethorpe in 1921. Of him, the article says:

*There are few men in West Cumberland who lead a busier or more useful life than Mr. Oglethorpe. He has a hand in every movement of village life, and he finds time, too, to organise the government of football, wrestling, and to interest himself in fur and feather shows. The hard years he spent in the army during the war, when he rose from the rank of private to that of commissioned*

LORTON,

*September 30th, 1924.*

Dear Sir or Madam,

To-day I complete 33 years of service in Lorton School, and sever my connection with it. I came here a young and vigorous man of 25 years—I leave it grey-haired and rather tired.

Many changes of course have taken place, but through them all the school has obtained and maintained a reputation for good, sound work. It has never had a bad report. Our measure of success has been due largely to the hearty co-operation of the parents, for which I am deeply grateful. In Lorton the idea, that the teacher is an enemy, has disappeared—it would be better for education if this feeling was universal.

I ask you to give to my successor the support you have accorded to me. "Play the game" with him.

Yours faithfully,

GEORGE OGLETHORPE.

To all Lorton Parents.

*officer, have not abated his energy. He is as enthusiastic and as entertaining as ever.*

At the back of the log book documenting from 1915 to 1942, a recruitment poster detailing a public meeting at the Yew Tree Hall can be found, dated Monday 1<sup>st</sup> October – the year is not included. Mr Oglethorpe was one of two speakers for the meeting, and one can only imagine the enthusiasm he would have inspired in the young men of Lorton at that time. He departed to serve with the British Army during the Great War between 1915 and 1919, returning to Lorton School on completion of his duties.

His glowing reputation enabled him to represent the village of Lorton. On March 7<sup>th</sup> 1900 George Oglethorpe sent and received the first telegrams in the village. When, in 1913, the linguist Borje Brilioth was writing an academic book on the grammar and dialect of Lorton, he turned to Mr Oglethorpe for his local insight:

*On my arrival at Lorton, I fell in with a person who was in every respect thoroughly well adapted for my purposes, and whose kind and untiring assistance has enabled me to get well acquainted with the dialect and to collect in a comparatively short time what I believe to be a fairly rich and reliable dialect material. This person, who became my chief helper throughout my stay in Cumberland, was Mr. George Oglethorpe, the schoolmaster of Lorton. Mr. Oglethorpe is a true Cumbrian, of an old Cumberland family.*

*Thanks to Mr. Oglethorpe's great popularity, I had almost daily opportunities of meeting and conversing with 'fellsiders', shepherds and farmers living in and around the village.*

The letter of Mr Oglethorpe's speech to Lorton School's rugby team prior to the annual Cumberland rugby competition is, perhaps, the greatest insight into his character and philosophy, an excerpt from which is shown below:

*On the field avoid bad language and quarrelling, foul play and impertinence, and treat every member of the opposing team with courtesy, and lose like a man. When the game is over, go quietly home and do not stand arguing.*

*In your schoolbooks you have often seen the word 'Honour'. I hope you know its true meaning, which is not easy to explain. We honour God, honour the King, and honour our parents. Men fight and die for the honour of their country, county or club, and some boys are proud of the honour and good name of their school. I would like you all to have that feeling. Make an honourable promise – you know what I mean – that in your school work, your school conduct, your school attendance, your school football, everything will be*

*done that can be for the 'Honour' of the School, and I am sure that whether you win or lose, whether you be at the top or the bottom, you will gain the good opinion of all sensible people.*

*Your sincere friend, George Oglethorpe.*

It predates the publication of Rudyard Kipling's 'If' by eight years and demonstrates the respect and companionship he was able to establish with the children, a real rarity in schools in those days. By the time you read this I will have recited the letter in its entirety to the current crop of rugby players before our tournament at Cockermonth School. Later in his career, Mr Oglethorpe represented Cumberland's National Union of Teachers and established the local branch of the British Bird Society. George Oglethorpe would remain at Lorton School until 1924, solidifying the School's reputation and securing his and William Alexander's legacy which sustains to this day. He left Lorton to become Headmaster at Dearham School, departing shortly after his wife decided to conclude her duties at the School. Between them, Mr and Mrs Oglethorpe dedicated sixty years of their life to Lorton School. On his retirement, he moved to Maryport, living there until his death in 1948 at the age of eighty-two. Anybody who works in education knows truly that it takes an awfully long time to fundamentally affect a school's approach and ethos. Lorton School's holistic philosophy is a strong one because it has been embedded into the every-day life of the school for a hundred and twenty years. The lengths he went to be involved in the village community gained him widespread respect and admiration, without which the impact he had at the School may well have been far less significant.

In the letter announcing his retirement to parents in September 1924, Mr Oglethorpe includes possibly his most profound reflection which continues to inform Lorton School's approach to this day: 'In Lorton the idea, that the teacher is the enemy, has disappeared – it would be better for education if this feeling were universal'.

Andy Liles is years 4,5&6 teacher at Lorton School.

## ***A report of the Society Visit to Acorn Bank, 20 May 2015***

*by Tim Stanley-Clamp*

This summer's visit took us to Acorn Bank near Temple Sowerby in the Eden Valley. It was a cool but sunny day, greatly enhanced by the welcome we received from the enthusiastic staff and volunteers working there.

The day began with a demonstration of the water mill. There are records of a mill on this site going back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century though the existing building dates back to the 1700's. At least one of the three wheels was working until the 1940's. However, on the sale of the house to the National Trust, it fell into disuse and decay. Some restoration was done in the years after the war, but by 2005 the main shaft, fitted during the mill restoration in 1991, had rotted and the mill could no longer turn. Acorn Bank volunteers, Richard Harland and Bob Price, joined Tim Martin of Context Engineering in October 2007 to help fit the new main shaft Tim had made and replaced all the 12 spokes of the waterwheel. They were joined by Ray Harland soon after and it is to these heroically committed and very highly skilled volunteers that we owe the chance to see the water mill in action, and doing very much what it has been doing for centuries.

After an excellent lunch we were given a talk and a guided tour of the house itself. The original building was on a noted route for pilgrims and the Knights Templar, whose main purpose was to provide the pilgrims with protection from the elements and from men of bad will, established a hostelry on the site of Acorn Bank. (Temple Sowerby gets its name from their presence here.) After their persecution by Phillip IV of France, who needed them gone because he owed them so much money, and their eventual dissolution in 1308 the building became the property of the Hospitaliers, caring for the sick and frail. This lasted until the reign of Henry VIII who sold it off in his assault on the property of the monastic orders.

So in 1543, the Westmorland branch of the powerful Dalston family was created on the grant of the medieval building and the owners quickly set about developing it to match their new status. The original



**The miller at work – photo Mary Denman**

building consisted of the present entrance hall and the shop. Two wings were added to the medieval building, the eastern one with dummy windows to create the impression of symmetry, ceilings were raised, new floors added and a courtyard created facing south east. On the day of our visit the brightness of the day gave us a beautiful view of the distant eastern fells of the Lake District. Worth noting though that, at the time the Dalston family acquired the house, they would have been hidden from view by an unbroken prospect of oak trees and hence the name now given to this place.

In 1631, John Dalston son of Sir Christopher, married into the wealthy Fallowfield family of Great Strickland. Lucy brought considerable funds for the improvement of the house and a remarkable facility for childbearing. She began at the age of 16 and hardly stopped for the next twenty-five years. Of her twenty-one children, eleven survived, six sons and five daughters. John meanwhile had found the time to get himself into trouble with Parliament during the Civil War, having accepted a commission in the royalist army as second in command to his wife's cousin, Sir John Lowther. Pleading family loyalty and fear of losing his home if he had refused to serve seems to have worked rather well, given the provocation. It is a measure of the comparatively pacific nature of this conflict that Parliament

contented itself with a fine on John, and then after he had relapsed a second time into service under the royalist flag, another fine. (In view of the savagery with which comparable disputes of the time were being settled on the continent this seems remarkable.) In the event, these prosecutions did him no harm once the monarchy was restored and in 1661 he took a seat in Parliament and sat as member for Appleby for twenty years. He seems to have maintained a sensible work-life balance, a good thing perhaps in view of the size of his family. He travelled to London only rarely and then only when there was an issue directly concerning the North of England to deal with.

During the eighteenth century, Acorn Bank was seen very little on the national stage, although John's great-grandson did sit in Parliament for Westmorland from 1747 until 1759. Little is recorded of his doings there but he was very busy at home. Much of the surviving interior of the contemporary house was put in place during his long life, the work revealing an intriguing blend of extravagance and parsimony. Oak panelling was removed and used elsewhere as the ceilings were lifted, gypsum retrieved and reused wherever possible, and a stone staircase was moved piece by piece (so ending up turning in the wrong direction). Elsewhere, though, huge sums were spent on furnishings, on elaborate ceilings worked by celebrated practitioners of the day and on a cantilevered staircase fitted with rather ugly, but very fashionable metal stair rails. No doubt all this improvement achieved its aim of impressing the family's friends and neighbours because they had no idea that the whole programme was done on tick. On his death, it was revealed that John had borrowed the enormous sum of £8000 from a solicitor in Carlisle, no doubt leaving his heirs with a



**The C16th façade – photo Derek Denman**

severe disappointment on the reading of the will.

As Colin, our engaging guide put it: 'The Victorian era in this house was a quiet time for improvements – or vandalism, depending on your point of view - and very little was added or taken away'. The house seems to have been rather neglected during this period. Its last private owner was Dorothy Ratcliffe, opera singer, musician, writer, poet, patron of the arts and editor/publisher of (among others) G K Chesterton and J R R Tolkien. She bought the house in 1930 and moved in with her second husband Noel. It was Dorothy who established the lovely gardens as well as modernising many of the rooms. But on the sudden death of Noel she lost the heart to carry on living at Acorn Bank (or Temple Sowerby Manor as she habitually called it) and in 1950 she

**The C17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> front – photo Derek Denman**



Portrait of Dorothy Una Ratcliffe



donated it to the National Trust.

The house's interior has decayed since she lived in it. We might be tempted to lay all the blame on the Sue Ryder charity who adapted the accommodation for the elderly residents who lived in their care. Walls were put in, sometimes seemingly at random, and windows taken out. Rooms were added and removed and very little was spent on maintaining the fabric of the house. But ruinous levels of taxation brought about by two world wars had made it almost impossible for houses like this one to be maintained privately and the National Trust's limited funds could not fill the void. Still, there is something poignant about how insistently it reminds its visitors of a more prosperous and more dignified past. The initials scratched on windows and the signs placed near the hearth hundreds of years ago to ward off evil spirits have survived, reminders of the many generations who lived there. In a curious way, the evidence of neglect speaks as eloquently of families and their doings as the restored drawing room will once the planned refurbishment has restored it to the elegance it had when Dorothy last made use of its generous spaces and ample light.

## ***A Walk Through the Western Parts of Embleton in the 1950s***

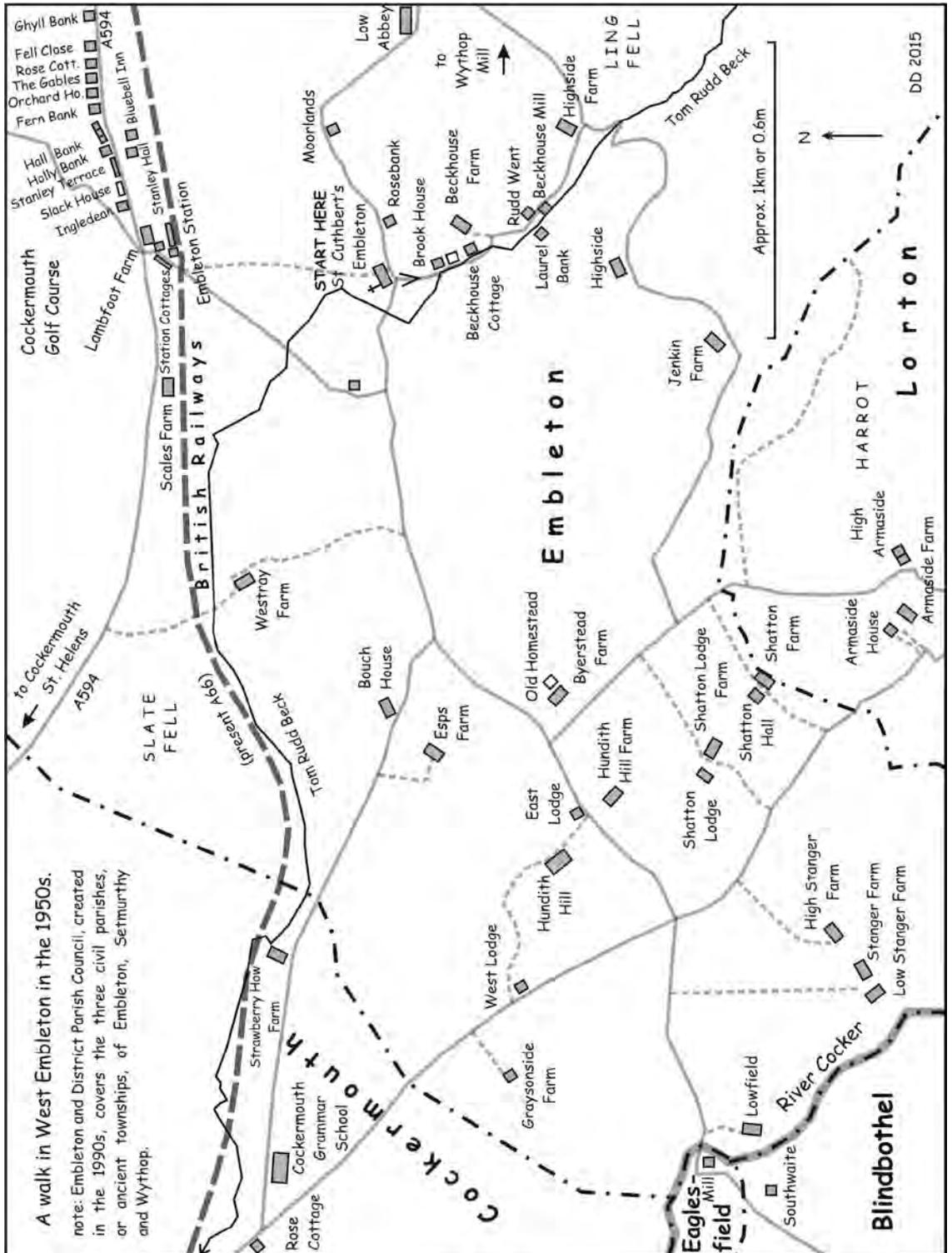
*by Walter Head*

Starting at St Cuthbert's Church and turning up the road opposite the Church, the first property on the left was BROOK HOUSE, known to some as Low Brook House, occupied by Arthur Graham. Next on the right was an un-named house, derelict since the 1920s and used to house animals. After that on the left was the uninhabited BECKHOUSE COTTAGE and then BECKHOUSE FARM, farmed by the Scott family. Beckhouse farm was the scene of the murder of Ann Sewell in 1860. Ann is buried in St Cuthbert's churchyard, Embleton. The next property on the right was LAUREL BANK, the home of Tony Robinson. Then on the left was RUDD WENT, occupied by Edward Bellingham, and on the right was BECKHOUSE MILL home of Miss Nesbitts, who taught at the Sunday school. After this on the left was HIGHSIDE FARM, farmed by Bill Young. Then through a gate and following the road to the right the next property was HIGHSIDE, farmed by John Teasdale. Further along on the right was JENKIN FARM, farmed by Joe Teasdale.

Continuing along the road to the T junction and turning left, entering Lorton Parish, further on again, on the left was a group of farm buildings. Further on, situated on the left, were two properties. No1 HIGH ARMASIDE was home to the Casson family, followed by the Robinson family, and No2 HIGH ARMASIDE was occupied by Mr Balmer, who was followed by the Beattie family. At the end of the road and turning right onto the B5289 the next property on the right was ARMASIDE FARM, farmed by the Sewell family. Then just past this was the entrance to ARMASIDE HOUSE, the home of Mr & Mrs Thom Postlethwaite. Re-entering Embleton, the next property also on the right was SHATTON HALL, occupied by Mr Hunter, also here was SHATTON FARM farmed, by the Burns family, who were followed by the Wallace family. Next on the right was SHATTON LODGE FARM farmed by Bill Hewitson, and also here was SHATTON LODGE HOUSE, home of Mr & Mrs Daniels who later changed their name

to Whettenhall. Past this a road on the left led down to HIGH STANGER FARM, farmed by Gilbert Alexander and after this on the left was STANGER FARM farmed by Joe

Fearon and then behind this was LOW STANGER FARM, farmed by Stanley Heslop. Continuing further along the road to the T junction, the road to the left led



down to LOWFIELD, situated on the left just before the bridge over the river Cocker, and farmed by William Lewthwaite.

Back at this T junction, the road to the right led up to the crossroads at Hundith Hill. Turning left the next property on the right was WEST LODGE occupied by Mrs Hughes and rather further on, on the left was GRAYSONSIDE FARM, farmed by Ted Waugh. We however turn in at West Lodge taking the drive on the right to HUNDITH HILL which at this time was divided into two residences. Mr Whyllie lived in one section and Mr Hertzberg lived in the other part. Further on at the other end of the drive was EAST LODGE, occupied by Mr & Mrs Wren. Turning left the next property was HUNDITH HILL FARM, farmed by the Lawson family then on the right past the junction was BYRESTEAD FARM, farmed by Thomas Taylor. Behind this was THE OLD HOMESTEAD, an uninhabited derelict house.

At the next junction the road to the left led to three farms, the first farm on the right was BOUCH HOUSE FARM farmed by Frank Chester, next on the left was ESPS FARM farmed by Tucker Bell then on the right, in Cockermonth Parish, was STRAWBERRY HOW FARM farmed by Isaac Cook. Finally on the left was Cockermonth Grammar School and in the grounds was GRAMMAR SCHOOL HOUSE where the headmaster, Mr Hammer, and family lived.

Back at the junction, taking the road towards Wythop/Embleton, after approximately 400 metres a bridleway on the left led to WESTRAY FARM, farmed by the Gibson family. In the 1950s this was the access for Westray as it was on the South side of the railway track, but it is now accessed from the A66 road and this is the track we now take across the A road up the track to join the A594 where we turn right.

The first property along the A594 on the right was SCALES FARM, farmed by Tommy and Ellie Benson. Turning right onto the road sign posted Lorton, on the left was LAMBFOOT FARM farmed by Robin and Mary Teasdale, then on the left was LAMBFOOT GUEST HOUSE run by Miss Seagar and Mrs Kemp. Then on the right was a row of six cottages named STATION COTTAGES. At No 6 lived the Albions, at No5 was Mrs Gaskell, at No 4 lived Mr &

Mrs Moffat, then at No3 was Mr & Mrs Scott, at No2 was Mr Christy and Mr & Mrs Cotteril lived at No1. Next on the left was STATION HOUSE occupied by Miss Wren.

Returning to the A594, the next property on the left, at INGLEDEAN was the home of the butcher, Mr Thompson. Next on the left was a derelict property known as SLACK HOUSE. The next house on the left was No1 STANLEY TERRACE, home of the Nelsons. Joined onto this was No2 STANLEY TERRACE, the home of the Bragg family and then, at the end in No 3 STANLEY TERRACE, lived Joyce Turner who was followed by Lizzie Teasdale. Further along on the right was STANLEY HALL, built in approx. 1300 and occupied by the Thornthwaite family. Next to this, also on the right, was THE BLUEBELL INN run by Herbert Jackson.

Next on the left was HOLLY BANK, home of Sally Winder. Then on the left was a row of three terraced cottages. At No1 HALL BANK lived Miss Sherwen, at No2 HALLBANK lived Mr & Mrs Young and No3 HALLBANK was the home of Ernie & Mary Taylor. Then on the left was FERN BANK occupied by Johnnie Nicholson and his two sisters. Next on the left was ORCHARD HOUSE, where Joe Tiffin lived, followed by THE GABLES, occupied by Mrs Nelson. The next property on the left was ROSE COTTAGE, home of Fred & Rose Fisher. Then on the left was FELL CLOSE, occupier unknown. Next on the left was GHYLL BANK, home of George & Molly Brandwood.

Retracing our steps and taking the road on the left after the Bluebell Inn, and across the railway towards Lorton, up the hill the VICARAGE was situated on the left of the junction and was occupied by Rev Robb and family. Turning left at the junction down the hill the next property was THE SUNDAY SCHOOL. The Sunday school was held upstairs in this building, and the downstairs was used to store room. I am told the hearse was stored here, but looking at it the doorway was too small. Perhaps it was used to store a bier used to carry the coffin. Next to this was St Cuthberts Church, back where we started.

**Note:** the walk through the eastern parts of Embleton and through Wythop appeared in Journal 55.

## ***The floods of Crabtree Beck***

*by Sandra Shaw*

This article was inspired by information and enquiry from member Roger Humphreys and enquiry and research by Ray Greenhow. Their different interests in the beck have been drawn together in this article that recounts the best known and the two most recent floods that have occurred at Crabtree Beck and considers the infrastructure concerned with the first.

Probably the best known flood is that touched on by Alfred Wainwright in *The Western Fells* in his series of Pictorial Guides to the Lakeland Fells. Under the section on Low Fell, he says 'Crabtree Farm was the scene of a tragedy in 1828, when a dam burst on the fells above and flooded the beck. Part of the farm buildings was washed away and two occupants were washed into the lake and drowned. The site of the reservoir is not now clear, and no obvious traces remain (except for an old water cut); probably it was a small one, earth banked.'

Earlier this year the society was contacted by Roy Greenhow who wanted to know if we had further information about this tragedy. He later posted an account on his blog at

<http://scafellhike.blogspot.co.uk/2015/03/low-fell-crabtree-beck-and-wainwright.html>

His full article can be read there, but for reasons of space, the relevant sections have been extracted and edited here and are reproduced with his kind permission. Anyone who enjoys some history and folklore with their walks is recommended to explore his blog further.

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'Despite my many years of walking the Cumbrian Fells I have never been an ardent 'Wainwright bagger', these being the 214 fells walked by this iconic individual and which range in height from Scafell Pike, the highest at 978m, to Castle Crag, the lowest at 298m. As I began to assist friends to complete the Wainwright Fells, the journey took me onto smaller fells which turned out to be real gems for their views. Two such fells are Fellbarrow (416m) and Low Fell (423m), the latter giving spectacular views of the full length of the Crummock and Buttermere valley and also looking down onto Loweswater. It is my usual practice to pick up folklore or



**Crabtree Cottage and Beck**

local tales of the areas I walk. I began by checking the internet which showed only two sources of information:

- a) The Old Cumbria Gazetteer (listed as hearsay, being a verbal account): <http://www.geog.port.ac.uk/webmap/thelakes/html/lgaz/lgazfram.htm>

*There was a dam across the beck to supply water to a lead mine in Kirkhill Wood. Edward Bogg, in 1902, told of a dam burst:- 'Many years ago a small reservoir, or tarn, on the hill above the lake [Loweswater], burst, and came rolling in one huge wave towards the lake; a farm stood in its path, and one of the occupants, a girl who was outside the house, saw the dark mass of water sweeping downwards. Daring into the house, she informed the inmates (the master and a female) of the occurrence. These two had just reached the outside of the door in their endeavour to escape, when the wave caught them both,*



**The Turrel memorial at Lorton**

*swept them into the lake, and their bodies were never discovered, while strange to say, the girl, who was first to discover the inundation, was saved by the water forcibly banging the door in her face and holding her prisoner, when she was in the act of following the other persons'. It is not clear that the right beck and house are identified.*

b) An Atlas of The English Lakes (Author) John Parker:

*... A hundred years ago a tragedy occurred when Crabtree Beck, swollen by the waters of a burst dam on Loweswater Fell, swept the bodies of an occupant and his child out of the eponymous house into the lake.*

There is no clear reference to any names, dates, etc. and this appears to be folklore.

I decided to try and find out whether this actually occurred and thought a good point of contact would be the Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society and managed to contact a lady who is the society secretary. She was unable to give me any direct help but through another member she managed to send me an e-copy of John Askew's 'A Guide to the Interesting

*Places in and around Cockermouth'* (Published 1866).

[The relevant section on page 42 reads;

*In the summer of 1828, one bright Sunday morning, Crabtree Beck was the scene of a melancholy catastrophe. High up on Mosser Fell was a large dam or reservoir, which supplied water to some lead mines on the adjoining fells. One side of this dam burst, and the whole of the water it contained rushed into Crabtree Beck. The roar of the flood so much alarmed the servant-girl, who was without, that she fled into the house, and upstairs into her sleeping-room. John Tyrrel, the master, who was in bed with his wife and a young child, was so much terrified by the sound, that he rushed down to the front door with the young child in his arms, into the torrent, and both were swept down into Loweswater Lake and drowned. A quantity of hay and the dairy and stable parts of the homestead were washed into the Lake, but the mistress and the servant-girl were saved.' SS.]*

This was invaluable as it at least gave a period of time, summer 1828 and a name of the dead man, John Tyrrel; which seemed to at least indicate it was more than local legend. The secretary warned me that the name was not John but Joseph (this becomes relevant later). [The warning had been to the fact that Askew names the master as John, whereas it was Joseph. SS.]

From here I visited the Graveyard of St. Bartholomew's Church at Loweswater village, in a hunt for the graves, noting that The Old Cumbria Gazetteer stated the bodies were never discovered. I found none, though in my experience of such tragedies I found it difficult to accept neither body was ever recovered from such a small lake.

Next I visited Carlisle Archives and with the assistance of the staff and after fruitlessly checking microfilm of county papers of the time, I finally checked the records: *Burials in the Parish of Loweswater* [YPR41/5 SS.] for the

year 1828 and there it was: 'No 94 Joseph Turrell of Crabtree Beck buried July 26th age 35 (Curate's name)'.

The next entry is his son John and his age is listed as 2 (years) though the burial is on 29th and not with his father on 26th. Now sense shows this to be an actual event and not folklore. It was a father and son and the bodies had at some time been recovered; these are burial records and clearly not the dates of their deaths. The secretary had been right and wrong for it was both Joseph and John who died.

Although nearly there I decided to carry on to find out the actual date of the incident and checks of the Archives [catalogue] showed Inquest reports available at Whitehaven Archives and a later visit to that establishment revealed the inquest reports. [DLEC/CR/I/137/14 for Joseph and /15 for John. SS.] I must say I was surprised and disappointed with what I viewed. Having some experience of a modern inquest, (I retired as a police inspector in 2012) I at least expected a file on the subject and steeled myself to a thin document. There were two inquests, both fitting on a single sheet of hand written paper with the signatures of the twelve jurors also present on each coroner's report! A modern Coroner's Court table would groan under the weight of a modern inquest file. I will summarise the Inquest of Joseph:

*'The liberty of the Lordship of Egremont in the County of Cumberland.... An Inquisition indented taken at the dwelling of Sarah Turrell situate at Crab Tree Beck in the Parish of Saint Bees ... Friday Twenty Fifth of July ... Before William Bragg Gentleman Coroner ... Upon view of the body of Joseph Turrell then and there lying dead upon the oath of Aaron ... 13th day of July aforesaid at Crabtree Beck aforesaid was by the sudden bursting of a reservoir kept and adapted for the purpose of carrying the pumps and then belonging to a certain lead mine worked and carried on at Loweswater within the liberty aforesaid, swept and carried away by the flood or water accumulating from the bursting of the said Reservoir and was then and there suffocated and drowning and is the Jurors aforesaid upon their oath aforesaid do say that the said Joseph Turrell accidentally casually and by misfortune came by his death in the manner aforesaid and not otherwise.*

John's inquest was a few days later and the same verdict of accidental death, though the Inquest has his age as '18 months or thereabouts'.

There we have it; a father and son swept away into a lake by a burst dam washing through their house. It occurred on 13th July 1828, their corpses were recovered at different dates and they were buried at different dates also. The mother Sarah Turrell was not injured but she lost both her husband and child and the verdict was accidental death. I believe a modern inquest would return a verdict of Unlawful killing, but times change especially in respect of safety as opposed to profit and there was no Health and Safety Legislation to be flouted in 1828.

With reference to the rainfall the only checks I have been able to conduct show 1828 to be classified as a wet year. It may be that just down the valley from the wettest place in England that this was the influence, but it is too broad to conclude anything from, but one can wonder.

This is a sad loss of life and a tragedy for the surviving mother/wife. Rather than be forgotten perhaps in remembering them in this way, it at least pays some tribute to them and the hard and precarious life lived in those days of the early 1800's.'

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Using the free website [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) and information held within the society's archive including John Bolton's 1891 lecture on Lorton as it was 80 years ago, it was possible to uncover a little more about the characters in this tragedy. Joseph Turrel (sic) was baptised at Lorton on 4 October 1792, son of Joseph and Mary Turrel. His parents were living at Gilbrowe at the time and later moved to Piked Howe. Joseph married Sarah Briscoe on 14 November 1825 at Lorton, when they were both resident at Lorton. Their witnesses were John Turrel, John Fisher and another Sarah Briscoe. They appear to have had just the one child John baptised at Loweswater on 21 January 1827. It has not proved possible to identify Sarah before her marriage or to find her after the tragedy. Joseph is remembered on a memorial stone in St Cuthbert's churchyard at Lorton. Just a couple of paces from the church door, on the north-west of the church stands an imposing stone with inscriptions in memory of the parents Joseph and Mary Turrel and five of their children including son Joseph.



### The leat near the take-off point

This society holds more information about the reservoir, the leat and the mines through the Level 1 surveying work that was carried out with Jamie Lund, National Trust archaeologist in 2008. One of the three surveying groups, comprising Michael and the late Hetty Baron, Jean and Jim Williams and Jane Worthington created two records, numbers 1018 and 1019 on 7<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> April 2008. 1018 records 'a leat 600 m N/NW of High Thrushbank, a narrow water channel, dry in parts. Claimed to be the leat feeding Loweswater lead mine by Wainwright and others. Site of mine in Moss Cottage garden.' Number 1019 'a former water course 210 m N of Netherclose – stone edged shallow water course (? Leat) developing into deeply incised former water course edged with large rounded boulders. Small length of revetment visible on east side. Covered in mature trees. Possible association with nearby field drains.'

The images taken at the time, including the one reproduced here, reveal that the weather was cold and wet on the surveying dates. An exhibition of the survey's findings included more

background information about the mines but a summary, concentrating on the water system will have to suffice here.

Six hundred metres to the north-west of High Thrush Bank, in rough tussocky open ground, the group found a man-made water channel or 'leat', that would have originally taken water to Loweswater lead mine. The vein worked in Loweswater was part of a longer vein that stretches from the Newlands Valley, via Force Crag in the Coledale Valley to Scale Hill and Netherclose and Moss Cottage in Loweswater. Along the route there are numerous mines and trial mines 'testing' the vein. According to Postlethwaite's classic and original study of 1877 '*Mines and Minerals of the English Lake District*'; the main shaft of Loweswater Mine was on the western side of the River

Cocker, opposite Scale Hill. Postlethwaite records that '*... a powerful waterwheel was erected to pump the water from it, and also to haul ore to the surface and propel ore dressing machine*'. It is reasonable to infer from his observations that the water from what Wainwright describes as an 'old water cut' in his guide to the Western Fells was constructed to supply water to power the all-important wheel. The water wheel was situated at and adjacent to the present Moss Cottage. The cottage was constructed from the 'mine manager's office' (Adams, J. 1988. '*Mines of the Lake District Fells*' p.111). In the garden is a small construction sited over the shaft entrance.

In the summer of 2014, member Roger Humphreys contacted the society, enquiring about the dam, having found the remains some 600 m or thereabouts above the take off point, beyond the path from Low Fell to Darling Fell. I have retraced his footsteps to take a look and some photos including those included here. This certainly looks like the remains of a dam even though the approximate position is

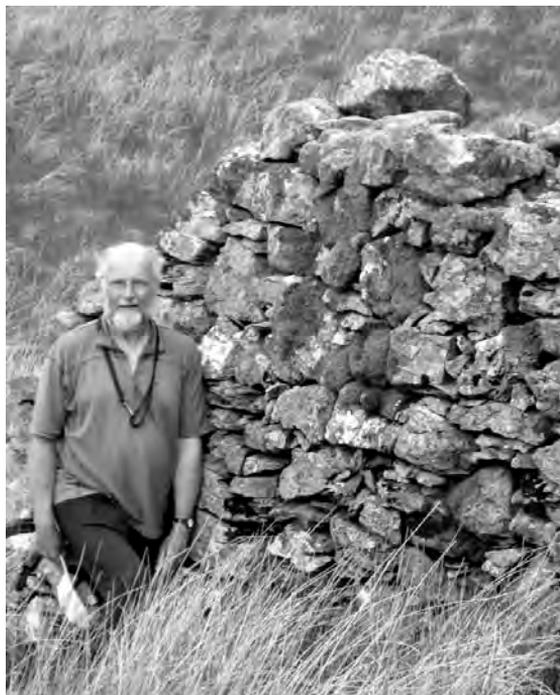


**The dam looking west**

marked on the OS Explorer Map OL4 as a bield (NY134227) and a photo appears on another website describing the eastern portion as a bield. The remains stretch across on both sides of the beck and remain standing to a height of over 2 metres. They are much further up the beck than one would expect and Wainwright's route to the summit of Low Fell would have taken him eastwards long before he reached the relevant point. I believe the site of the dam fell outside the area surveyed with the National Trust in 2008.

Anyone wishing to pay a visit is advised to go from the shore of Loweswater via the Mosser fell road and turn off well before the path marked on the map to Pottergill. A clear path heads eastwards over a stile near a bench with memorial inscriptions to Jon W and Enid G Duff. This avoids some of the dense gorse which makes keeping close to the beck something of a challenge. If a course alongside the beck is taken, the banks can be seen to be littered with stones and rocks which have been washed out of its course during periods of flooding.

We turn now to more recent events and in both these cases, there was no dam left to burst, just intense heavy rain over a



**The highest point of the eastern half of the dam**

prolonged period. It is likely that the force of the water shifted rocks and boulders such that temporary blockages were formed within the bed of the beck. When sufficient water had collected to cause them to give way, they did so in a catastrophic collapse, causing a sudden surge in water flow, taking debris with it, resulting in greater damage.

The 19<sup>th</sup> November 2009 will be long remembered locally as the date of the great flood; affecting Cockermouth, Keswick and the wide surrounding area. The Crabtree Beck Cottage was damaged by water and stones coming down the beck. However, more visually spectacular damage was done to the road outside the cottage. The culvert under the road became blocked so the water tore up the road surface and eroded the river bank on the far side of the road. It remained passable with care and was eventually repaired with new culverts placed under the road to take a greater quantity of water. The cottage too was repaired. There is a dramatic account of the floods in the local valleys; illustrated with numerous photographs to be seen on Roger and Ann Hiley's website – [loweswatercam.co.uk](http://loweswatercam.co.uk). The image of the damage to the road at

### The damaged road in 2009

Crabtreebeck Cottage is reproduced here with their generous permission.

Further and near terminal damage was caused over the night of 4/5 August 2013 when again stones and rocks driven by the water coming down the beck caused major damage to the cottage, trapping the occupant inside. This resulted in a dramatic rescue by the fire service using an engine with extension ladder on the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>. At that point, the fire brigade declared the road impassable due to the depth of water and rocks on the road, although it was later reopened. This latest damage was reported by several on-line news services. For example:

<http://www.itv.com/news/border/update/2013-08-05/man-evacuated-from-flooded-loweswater-house/>

As can be seen here, the cottage remains fenced off to this day, with



warning notices that it is unsafe to enter. However in conducting research for this article, a planning application for 'Remedial work to ground floor walls and floor to repair damage caused by excessive flooding of property, at Crabtree Beck Cottage, Loweswater' was found, reported on the website of the Westmorland Gazette.

[http://www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/news/12897381.Planning\\_applications\\_submitted\\_to\\_the\\_Lake\\_District\\_National\\_Park\\_Authority](http://www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/news/12897381.Planning_applications_submitted_to_the_Lake_District_National_Park_Authority)



No doubt the beck will continue to flood after heavy rain, but it is to be sincerely hoped for the sake of the cottage's occupants that the remedial work will protect against all but the most severe rainfall.

*Photographs, excepting the leat and the damaged road, by the author.*

**The cottage fenced off after the 2103 flood**

## ***The Mole Catcher.***

*By Walter Head*

I opened the curtains one morning and there it was on the lawn – a molehill. “Leave it to me,” I said. “I’m a country lad and will soon get rid of the mole”. Two years later we still have molehills plus an underground system of tunnels to rival the Paris Metro. Therefore my sympathies are with mole catcher William Black.

William Black, who lived at Ireby, took over the mole catching duties for the Lorton area from William Tinniswood, who had been mole catcher at Lorton from 1853 until 1869. On 7<sup>th</sup> March 1869, William Black entered into a seven year agreement with Jonathan Musgrave, surveyor of Lorton, and the township of Lorton to destroy the moles and keep down the molehills in a manner satisfactory to the ratepayers of the township for the sum of £6 pa. This was to be paid annually on the 25th of March each year. The agreement was signed by Jonathan Musgrave with William Black making his mark, and the signatures were witnessed by James Mounsey. Although William Black lived in Ireby, most mole catchers covered a large area to make the work worthwhile. In March 1875, when the population of moles in the area was on the increase, William Black was served with a notice either to destroy the moles within six weeks or the ratepayers comprising John Jackson , John Lennox , James Mounsey , John Mounsey , John Musgrave, Henry Pearson , John Pearson and Moffat Towers, would withhold all of his payment.

In March 1877 the ratepayers received a letter from William Black asking to discontinue his agreement with the township, this was rejected and a written reply sent to Mr Black telling him ‘to come with as little a delay to fulfil his agreement. William Black left his job! However, help was at hand for the township when later in March William Gaskell of Hopebeck signed a seven year agreement with the ratepayers to destroy the moles and keep down the molehills for £5-5-0 (£5.25) pa. How successful was William Gaskell? Well only two years later in March 1879 the ratepayers agreed to send a letter to him telling him that unless



**Tom Johnston – mole-catcher of Pelutho, Abbeytown**

he at once destroyed the moles according to his contract no further payment would be made to him. Should he want to resign then the ratepayers will accept his resignation. William Gaskell resigned.

In 1879 no person wanted to accept the role of mole catcher so in November in desperation a special meeting was called to appoint a person to destroy the moles, which were now very numerous. The meeting resolved to accept the offer from a smug William Gaskell of Hopebeck to destroy the moles at three farthings (one decimal penny = 9.6 farthings) per acre to the satisfaction of the ratepayers. If he fails to deliver to the satisfaction of the ratepayers no payment will be made, effective from 24<sup>th</sup> November 1881 until 1<sup>st</sup> December 1882. The lands of Mr & Mrs Wilson were not included in the agreement as Mr Wilson would destroy the moles in his own grounds. I have found no further references to the mole menace so can only assume that after this time the moles were kept in check.

Princess Alexandra of Denmark became Princess of Wales in 1863, when she married the future Edward VII. When she started to wear mole-fur garments she started a fashion which spawned a lucrative industry for the country,

especially Scotland. Mole fur was used for ladies coats and men's waistcoats and mole-fur garments were produced in the textile industries at Keswick.

Mole catchers are still in existence and my uncle Jack (Moudy ) Robinson of Cragg End Farm Rogerscale was employed as mole catcher after the first world war until his death in October 1957. He covered an area which included the parish of Dean. I understand that Jack dried the moleskins and received 3d per skin, but I have seen no written confirmation of this. Once he caught a rare albino mole. In the 1950's I remember the caught moles being hung on the field barbed wire to show how successful the mole catcher had been. Some farmers skinned the moles and nailed the skins to barn doors or wooden panels to dry. I know of no farmer who caught enough moles to make it worthwhile to send them away to be used in clothing.

I wonder if the troublesome Lorton moles, which can tunnel up to 65 feet per day (20 metres), were descended from the mole which was involved in the death of William III in 1702. While out for a horse ride William's horse stumbled over a molehill throwing William to the ground which resulted in a broken collar bone. The bone had to be reset twice and after the second time William fell asleep beside an open window. It was March and he developed pneumonia, from which he died on 8<sup>th</sup> March 1702.

### ***John Smeaton, FRS, and the level of Derwentwater, 1774***

*by Derek Denman*

Many interesting and well known people visited Derwentwater after 1770, which is the approximate date when gentry tourism started, following the promotion of the English lakes in topographical writing by explorers of the 1750s and 1760s. Among these visitors, and of particular interest to engineers, was John Smeaton, 1724 – 1792, a key figure in the establishment of civil engineering as a distinct profession.<sup>1</sup> In 1764 Smeaton was appointed as one of the two Receivers of the Greenwich

Hospital, and visited with the Hospital's Directors, in part to design a scheme to lower the level of Derwentwater, as requested by local landowners. This article records that project, which did not proceed at the time, and other related projects.

John Smeaton was born in Whitkirk, educated at Leeds Grammar school and commenced to study for the law, intending to join his father's firm. He gave this up to set up as an instrument maker in London in 1748. 'He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1753, and in 1759 won the society's Copley Medal for his research into the mechanics of waterwheels and windmills. His 1759 paper "An Experimental Enquiry Concerning the Natural Powers of Water and Wind to Turn Mills and Other Machines Depending on Circular Motion" addressed the relationship between pressure and velocity for objects moving in air ...'. As an engineer his designs were based on theory, experimentation and modelling, rather than established rules. Describing himself as a civil engineer contrasted his work with that of a military engineer. He established the Society of Civil Engineers in 1771, renamed the Smeatonian Society after his death. The Institution of Civil Engineers, the world's first professional engineering body, was not founded until 1818, with Thomas Telford as president.

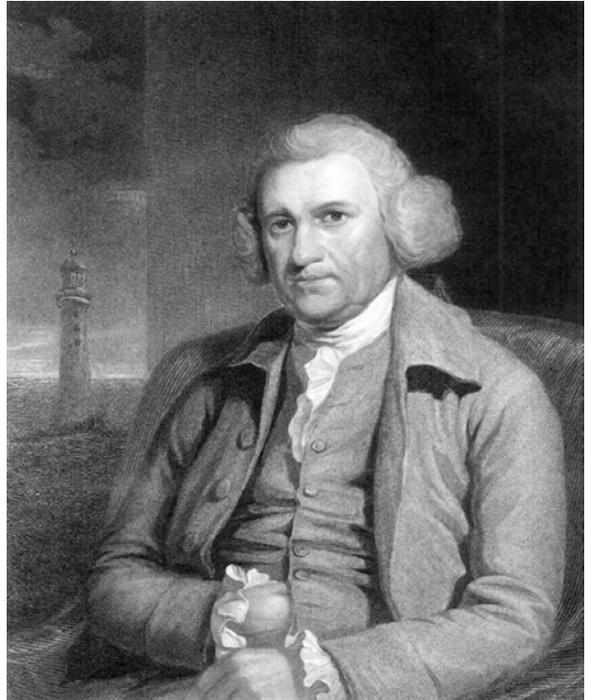
As his Copley Medal project would suggest, Smeaton's principal interest lay in projects involving hydraulics and the management of water. His most famous achievement, then and now, was the design of the Eddystone lighthouse. His was not the first. Henry Winstanley's ornate wooden lighthouse of 1698 did not survive the first winter. The replacement lasted until 1703, when a violent storm blew away the lighthouse, the keepers, and the visiting Winstanley himself. The third, Rudyard's streamlined design of 1708-9, survived the weather for 47 years but then, being made of wood, burnt down. The third designer, John Smeaton, built his lighthouse of stone, using a scheme of interlocking dovetailed blocks of Portland stone. His lighthouse lasted from 1759 for 127 years, when it had to be dismantled, not from its failure but from a deterioration of the rock on which it stood. It was the prototype for modern lighthouses worldwide.

<sup>1</sup> For Smeaton's life and work see A W Skempton, Ed, *John Smeaton, FRS*, Telford, London, 1981

Smeaton was well known and much in demand as a consulting engineer, but not wealthy from his charge of one guinea a day. The Royal Greenwich Hospital had been granted, in 1735, the rents and profits of the confiscated estate of the beheaded third earl of Derwentwater, which it managed through two Receivers. The Receivers were based in Gateshead in Durham, convenient for the vast majority of the 38,000 acres of the Dewentwater estates which lay in Northumberland. In 1764 a vacancy occurred for what might be called the gentleman receiver, because most of the routine work was done by Nicholas Walton at Gateshead, though each post received about £500 per annum. Edward Roddam was the candidate supported by seventy gentlemen of Northumberland. John Smeaton applied to the Admiralty for this post, nominated by Robert Weston, the main partner in the Eddystone lighthouse. On 28<sup>th</sup> November the Directors noted both applications, and that Smeaton had 'built the Eddystone lighthouse'. They put both applications to the General Court, at the Admiralty, chaired by the Earl of Egmont, for a decision on who should succeed the late Mr Hugh Boag.<sup>2</sup>

In writing on 5 January 1765, thanking the Board for his appointment, Smeaton assured them that 'no future Engagements shall in the least interfere with the discharge of his Duty'.<sup>3</sup> It seems that his limited but specialised duties were well performed, and in harmony with Nicholas Walton, who did the majority. Eventually in 1777, Smeaton found it necessary to resign due to 'his inability to perform the duties of that employment in the manner he could wish without being put to the greatest difficulty and Hurry in the execution of the Business of his profession as a Civil Engineer ...'.<sup>4</sup> Lord Sandwich, the First Lord of the Admiralty, took the opportunity to replace Smeaton with John Crichloe Turner, who would take a special interest in forestry.

This article is primarily about a local project which Smeaton investigated but which was not implemented, and so it would be good to note some of the projects that Smeaton designed for the



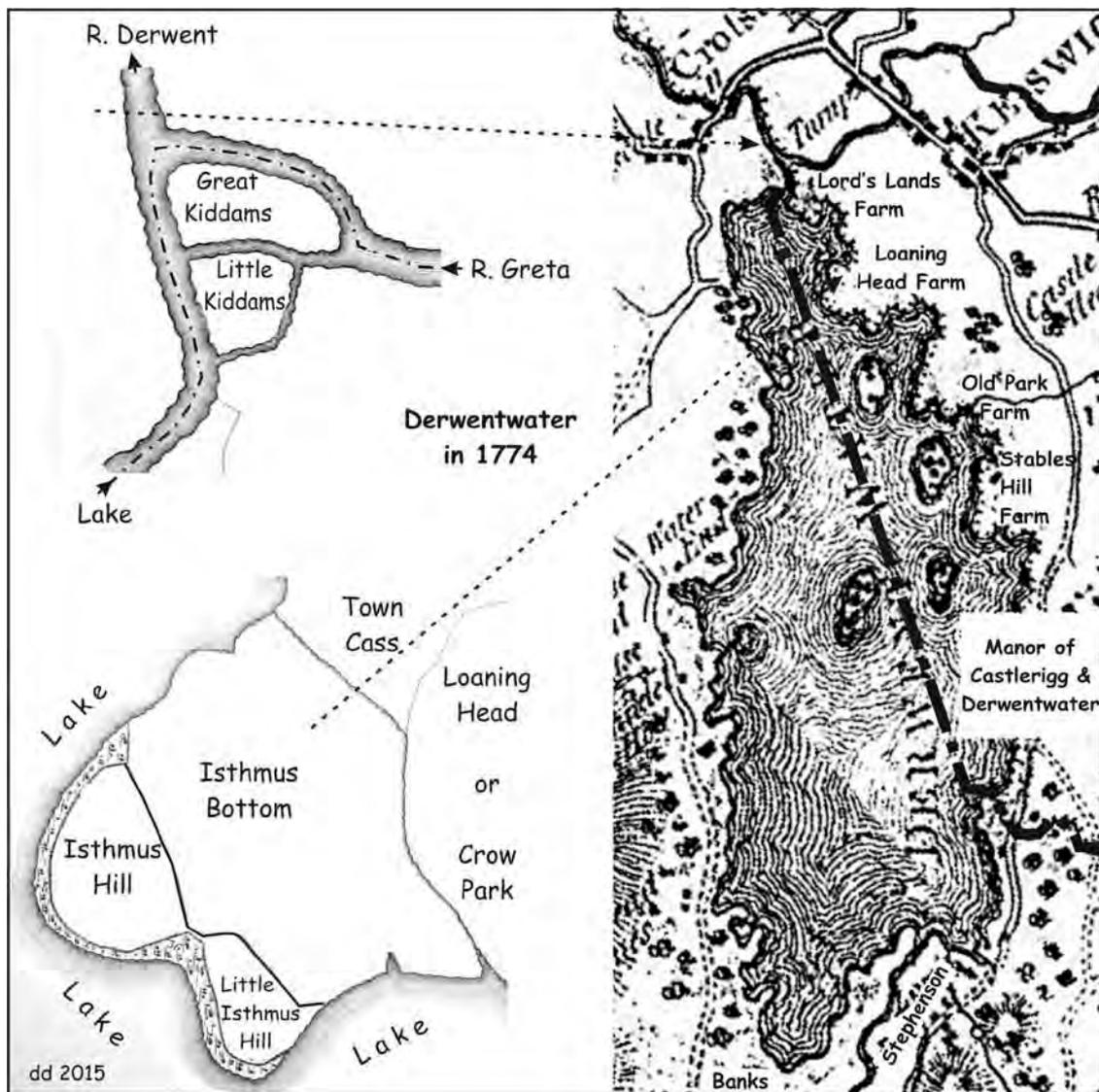
**John Smeaton, FRS, by Mather Brown, 1783**

Greenwich Hospital, which were actually built. One purpose of his appointment, though not stated, must have been to improve the exploitation of the Hospital's mineral rights at Alston, mainly through drainage. Like most owners, the Hospital did not prospect for lead veins, nor mine in its own right, but leased the rights to a number of mining adventurers, taking a fraction of the ore as payment. Such a system did not provide for the general investment necessary to improve the exploitation of the minerals. Smeaton's main undertaking for the Hospital was the design and construction, from 1776, of the Nent Force level. This was an underground canal for drainage, prospecting and exploitation, draining into the River Nent at Alston. Work was continued until 1842, by which time over £80,000 had been spent for its 8km length. It was Cumberland's first canal, and except for the brief life of the Port Carlisle canal from 1823 to 1853, Cumberland's only canal. Smeaton was also responsible for the design of the Hospital's Langley on Tyne Smelt Mills, from 1768, which took advantage of its coal to provide a smelting service for the lead mining companies, and

<sup>2</sup> TNA/ADM67/263, p.21

<sup>3</sup> TNA/ADM67/263, p.25

<sup>4</sup> TND/ADM67/11 p.231



also refined the small amount of silver contained in the Alston ore.

On Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July 1774, John Smeaton arrived in Keswick together with two Directors of the Greenwich Hospital, James Stuart and Thomas Hicks, and a surveyor, Mr. Brounton. At Keswick they met the other Receiver, Nicholas Walton, making a party of five, or six if the count includes the Hospital's bailiff in Keswick, Edward Nicholson, who was in attendance when required, but who was unfortunately unable to supply the names of several closes.<sup>5</sup>

This was the first recorded visit by the Directors, who deliberately chose Keswick

as the place to start, despite it being a small, remote part of the Derwentwater estates, of little value since its timber had been sold in 1747. The Directors had effectively been sent by John Montague, 3rd Earl of Sandwich, who as First Lord of the Admiralty had established a policy of increasing the amount of wood on the Derwentwater Estates. In this context a start in Keswick made sense, although the Hospital had a bad name in Keswick, as despoilers. Their survey of the Keswick and Thornthwaite estates lasted for the next four days, after which, on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> July, the party set off for Alston.

The Directors commenced, that Monday afternoon, by taking a boat on Derwentwater to admire the beauty of their replanted islands, Lords and

<sup>5</sup> TNA/ADM79/57 is the report of the Directors' tour from which the quotations are taken

Rampsholme, 'beautifully covered with wood which appears to be in a thriving state'. They did not own Vicar's island, which had been home to the German miners, was currently used for growing corn, and had yet to be seen and purchased by Joseph Pocklington.

On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> the Directors viewed Smeaton's only completed project in Keswick – Keswick Mill. 'This mill, at which all the tenants in the Manor of Castlerigg & Derwentwater are bound by their grants and leases, was built about 5 years ago under the direction of Mr Smeaton, upon a very able & complete plan, having three sets of stones. ... It cost £378, being £22 less than the 1<sup>st</sup> estimate'.

On the Tuesday evening the Hospital party were attended on by:

*Timothy Wren on behalf of his Brother Thomas*

*Joseph Banks*

*Joshua Scott, agent for Mr Stephenson*

*Abram Banks*

*[who] represented the damage the Lands adjoining the Derwentwater Lake sustain by the height of that water; and at the same time; requested that the Lake may be lowered by widening & deepening the passage thro which it empties itself into the River Greta. Were told they must get the other Proprietors of lands adjoining to the Lake to join with them in a written Application, & to set forth therein the proportion they will respectively bear of the expense attending that undertaking, & that then the same would have a due consideration.*

The property owned by Thomas Wren has not been identified, but Joseph and Abraham Banks owned 'parks' or closes at the head of Derwentwater, in the manor and township of Borrowdale, to the west of the incoming River Derwent. On Joseph Banks' land there was a copper mine at the lake shore in 1784.

Edward Stephenson, who died 1782, was the nephew and, after his father John, the beneficiary of 'Governor' Edward Stephenson, 1691-1768, whose extensive lands included much around High and Low Low Door in Borrowdale. Much land would be flooded by high levels of Derwentwater and by the backing up of the incoming River Derwent. Stephenson also held

Stables Hill and the fishing rights to the Hospital's share of Derwentwater, as a tenant, but the claims to relief from flooding must have related to lands outside of the Hospital's manor of Castlerigg and Derwentwater. On Wednesday evening the party 'went into Borrodale to take a view of the lands which are at the head of the lake and found them greatly overflowed; and we then returned late in the evening to Keswick'.

...The survey showed that the Hospital's own lands were affected by flooding, even in July, and that there would be clear benefit from lowering the lake.

**Loaning Head farm.** 'The Essmess bottom, containing upwards of 16 acres is overflowed by the lake all the winter'.

**Heads and Lords Lands farm,** 'The meadow land in general is subject to be overflowed, & a part of it is now under water'.

**Old Park farm.** 'About 35 acres of this farm adjoining the lake is subject to be overflowed & would be greatly benefitted could the lake be lowered'.

The Hospital had no obligation to assist others who wished the lake lowered, but had the means to do so by deepening the outlet from the head of the lake. That is along a short stretch of the River Derwent, but more specifically at the point where the fast flowing Greta joined and naturally created a delta, forming the Kiddams closes. This would obstruct the Derwent, raising the level of the lake. Here the Hospital owned the Kiddams closes, and half of both rivers were within their manor.

...On Wednesday evening, 'after dinner, tho the weather was very bad, we went and viewed the two Isthmus (or Essmess) hills required for springing wood upon and, thence proceeded & took various soundings of the Derwentwater Lake, at the place where it discharges itself into the Greta, in order that Mr Smeaton might be able to form a judgement how far it may be practicable to lower the said lake, and an estimate of the expense of carrying the same into execution, in case it should be hereafter thought expedient'.

...Unfortunately, nothing has been found in Admiralty records of Smeaton's design, nor estimates of the cost. The project did not proceed, and as a consequence the Hospital's project to plant the Isthmus Hills was halted. The Receivers wrote 'that the owners of lands in Borrowdale, not

## L&DFLHS – Programme for 2015/16

Date	Event
10 <sup>th</sup> September	A Fox in the Fells – the Quakers in Cumbria. Janice Wilson
12 <sup>th</sup> November	Discovering Derwentio - Recent Archaeological finds at Papcastle. Mark Graham
14 <sup>th</sup> January	Waiter, Miner, Butcher, Spy: Germans & Austrians in Cumbria in WWI. Dr Rob David
10 <sup>th</sup> March	Emergency – life in the Lake District before 999. Judith Shingler

Talks are held at the Yew Tree Hall in Lorton at 7.30pm. Visitors £2.50 with refreshments.

agreeing with each other to join the Hospital in the expense of lowering the lake at Keswick, in all probability this project is, for the present, at an end, which circumstances make it more difficult to plant the Isthmus Hills ...'.<sup>6</sup>

One wonders whether Smeaton, the engineer who built the Eddystone Lighthouse in stone and was responsible for a large body of sound and solid water management projects, would have suggested some cheap dredging which would have soon been made ineffective by the Greta's deposits, or a more permanent hard-engineered solution. If the latter, then the Hospital might, in the 1770s, have been worried by the possible aesthetic judgements of others. Perhaps they were lucky to have escaped this project.

In fact the lake was lowered, temporarily at least, in 1819. Robert Southey wrote occasionally to William Peachey, who had bought Pocklington's Island, renamed it Derwent Isle and improved it by planting.<sup>7</sup> He had asked Southey from 1810 to supervise an attempted sale, though not to the wrong sort of person. On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1818 Southey wrote 'Keswick is not entirely without news. They talk of lowering the lake two feet, by clearing the bed of the river from the place where it leaves the lake to the junction with the Greta. Secondly, Monk Hall has been on fire this morning, and just saved from destruction...'. This scheme was being undertaken when Southey wrote his letter of 27 May 1819: -

*The worst news I have to tell you is that the Lake is at this time in the same condition as the funds, - falling, falling, falling; & like the funds, not from the natural course of things, but from the interference of persons who would not*

*be content to leave them as they were. ...All will no doubt be well hereafter both with the funds & the Lake, - but it is very certain that a great deal of immediate inconvenience is occasioned by the experiments which are going on with both, - & in the affair of the Lake you are intimately concerned. At the moment every pier is dry, - and they are not yet contented, but mean to lower the water a foot and half more. The object is to convert what is now unsightly and useless marshland into good meadow, - & so far the object is good & the appearance of the Lake at its head and its foot will be greatly improved, - unless (which Calvert apprehends) they should uncover as much marsh as they gain. The shores which are left dry will be some time in acquiring any covering for their nakedness: - there is a vile belt around your island; however you will do with it whatever can be done, & in the course of a few years, what is now an eyesore, will add something to the value as well as the extent of the place. I am afraid your usual landing place on the island will be useless, & that a new one must be made more to the N.W. where the water deepens.*

I have seen no other record of these experiments. This letter gives some idea of the response that the Hospital might have received if Smeaton had carried out a permanent scheme in the 1770s.

### **The Journal**

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<sup>6</sup> ADM66/155, p.39, 14 May 1775

<sup>7</sup> British Library, Manuscripts, Letters of Robert Southey to William Peachey