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## Society News

### Message from the Chair

**Sharing Memories** At their recent meeting Committee members decided to investigate the possibility of arranging a social event when Members who are happy to do so would be invited to share their memories of earlier days in the area. This would be an echo of similar occasions led by Walter Head two decades ago. The format would probably need a person to act as chair for the occasion and to start the ball rolling by asking a few initial questions to prompt discussion among those present.

**Quiz** Another possibility which may be pursued is to hold a quiz evening focussing in a reasonably light-hearted way on local

history – people, events, buildings, sites, and objects. This wouldn't be the first time a quiz was organised for Members. John Macfarlane arranged two a dozen years or so ago.

These are simply ideas for the time being, and I'll be interested to get Members' feedback to learn whether either or both appeal to a sufficient number to make them worthwhile to arrange. So, please get in touch and let me know what you think about these possibilities.

**Outings** We've had a good number of most interesting historical visits and outings in recent years. Judging by comments received these have been very popular and much enjoyed. These are social occasions as well as having a focus on a place of historical interest. An outing in April is being organised, and the Committee hopes to arrange more during the year. As I mentioned in the November edition of *The Wanderer*, Members who have suggestions for outings or historical walks shouldn't hesitate to get in touch with me. I'll be delighted to hear from you.

**Archive** The Cumbria Local History Federation is launching a facility to enable local history organisations such as the Society to use it for archiving their accumulated records. It is designed to allow straightforward public access through the CLHF website. This has been a happy coincidence since for the last year Derek Denman has been hard at work organising the Society's now significant repository of local historical material. See page 3 for full information about this subject. *page2*



## **Announcing our new Digital Archive and Catalogue**

From 1 February the Society's new Digital Archive and Catalogue will be live at <https://derwentfells.org.uk>. On it you will be able to find all the Society's publications which have been built up on <http://derwentfells.com>, plus other material. At present there are around 250 records on the new system, but the plan is for that to grow greatly in 2024, particularly as we include the Society's large collection of digital photographs.

The webspace which hosts this archive has been provided by the Cumbria Local History Federation, CLHF, as a facility which will allow a number of societies to be content providers, using their own domain names. The system was originally developed by Tim Haldon for Alston Moor Historical Society, but it has now been made available to CLHF member societies, such as ours, supported by funding from Westmorland Dales and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Society will contribute a modest annual fee to CLHF.

The system was created as a catalogue for the physical archive of the Alston Society, but has the capability to include digital records. Our use will be almost exclusively as an enduring public digital archive, which will hold all of the publishable material collected and created by the Society during its first thirty years. Matching the system to the varied uses of different societies has required some recent development by Tim Haldon, and we express our appreciation for his support and flexibility in meeting the particular needs of our Society.

### **Content and access**

At its launch on 1 February, the Digital Archive will contain all of our publications, Wanderers, Journals, Newsletters, books, papers, township maps, etc. In addition we have uploaded the 'Beechey' collection of thirty digital images from photographs taken in 1898, see page 14, as an example of our collection of photographs. These are all available to society members and the public without login.

The system also allows the availability of records to be restricted to logged-in users. This allows us to create an online archive of our oral history transcriptions, which are not available to members and the public through this archive, but are available, with proper controls, through the website of the Ambleside Oral History Group.

The system will also allow us to archive the records of the Society itself, and members will find that they have access to a good number of the Society's reports and accounts, through our AGM notices and minutes of past years. We do not propose to distinguish between the access of members and that of the public, which would require individual member logins and the associated admin work.

This is a project separate from the Derwentfells Digital Archive of Historical Sources, DAHS. That is a large collection of copies of primary sources, which we do not publish online.

### **Searching**

All of our publications are currently available on <http://derwentfells.com>, mostly as .pdf documents, but there are no search facilities, other than searches on the current page and the site searches provided by Google. There is no catalogue, nor contents list, nor index, which makes the use of our publications very difficult. Development of our current website to improve this would be impractical, and pointless now that the CLHF system is available.

The CLHF system provides the necessary catalogue and a search facility on the metadata, rather than word-searching the archived documents. That is, it searches the information about the document which has been entered in the catalogue. So far, for our publications, a contents list of titles and authors for each issue has been created. This is to be followed by the inclusion of extra 'key words'.

The process of searching is described on the site itself, with help available. To start it might be best to first list the 'collections', which will show how many

records are in each collection. Or do a search without any search term, which will, at present, give a complete list of the records on the system.

### Referencing

Referencing a society publication is unchanged except for the online reference. In the Digital Archive and Catalogue the format of the record is ABCD/1234. So that the online reference for this *Wanderer, no.51*, is <https://derwentfells.org.uk/showrecord.php?refe=PBWD/0051> . This will take you to the catalogue record where *Wanderer no.51* can be downloaded. This link may be shortened in future.

### Need for catalogue Editors

During 2024 we plan to upload and catalogue all suitable digital material belonging to the Society. The greater part will be the Society's digitised photo-record. We would appreciate a few volunteers as catalogue editors, working from home. This requires ownership of a laptop or PC, and the ability to upload and catalogue collections of images in a straightforward and well-documented process, when you have time.

Secondly there is a need to have a second pass through the existing records for the *Wanderer, Journal, and Newsletters* and to add to the records' key words, which might not be in the contents, such as family names or placenames. One or more editors might volunteer for this.

### The future of <http://derwentfells.com>

We expect that during 2024 all the material currently archived on [derwentfells.com](http://derwentfells.com) will also be on [derwentfells.org.uk](http://derwentfells.org.uk) as an enduring archive. This will leave [derwentfells.com](http://derwentfells.com) as the website of the Society as a membership organisation. The current website could be replaced with a more modern content-management system on [derwentfells.com](http://derwentfells.com), or might be replaced by social media, either of which would provide a more modern and cost-effective online

presence. Whatever the outcome, the domain name [derwentfells.com](http://derwentfells.com) would need to be retained for some years.

*Derek Denman*

## **Our next talk, 14 March 2024**

### **Secrets of Muncaster Castle: Protecting the Tate Collection during World War Two**

For our first talk in 2024 we welcome the return of Dr Rob David, historian, author, and past President of CWAAS.

The Tate Gallery was a vulnerable target during the Second World War because of its central location and proximity to the Houses of Parliament. Before the war broke out, carefully made plans had been drawn up for the evacuation and safe-keeping of the Collection. Suitable storage locations for works of art were identified in nearby underground stations and private country houses. The bulk of the Collection, filling five railway containers, was dispersed in secrecy to three country houses, accompanied by members of staff to look after the works. One of those destinations was Muncaster Castle, in Cumberland.

In his illustrated talk, Dr Rob David will explain the nature of the planning that took place, who was responsible, what happened to the pictures while they were stored at Muncaster Castle, and will reveal the stories behind some of the priceless pictures which were safeguarded there.

### **Muncaster Castle**



## **House History Group Report**

*by Adam Baker*

The House History Group was formed in 2023 as a self-help group to look at the history of their own properties. This could be the actual construction and vernacular style of the building or the social history - the families and people who've lived there over the years.

The group also enjoyed a visit to Midtown in High Lorton in October 2023. This is probably the oldest continually occupied farmhouse in High Lorton dating back to at least 1649. The present owner of Midtown very kindly allowed the group to visit the house with the tour conducted by Derek Denman. Derek had done extensive research on the properties in the vicinity and, assisted by John Hart, took the group on a highly informative talk through the ages. The tour concluded with a slide show of maps and old photos.

Midtown farm itself was held by Michael Wilkinson in 1649. The rebuilt house front of 1678, dated and inscribed over the entrance 'P.W. 1678' (Peter

Wilkinson) also has 18th century and later alterations. There is a delightful round-headed window set in mortar dated MDCCCXLIV (1944), but it has remains of the original 17th century surround. All openings are under a continuous hoodmould. Internally the house has been remodelled over the years but retains the fabulous, original, slate-flagged double staircase which originally would have external steps to the upper floor of the barn. The house faces away from the road and is attached to the old barn, now holiday cottages. By 1800 the farm was owned by Anthony Garnett, but in the 1830s his son, John sold the farm piecemeal and little of the land remained.

In 1935 George Scott bought the farmstead and used the barn as his garage and petrol station. The 1950s bungalow, Green Close, was built for the family of his daughter, Joyce Walling. They also kept bees there, and sold honey.

A further visit/tour to Midtown is planned for early this year.

**Scott's/Walling's garage at Midtown,  
1936-75 (L&DFLHS archive)**



## Meeting Reports

### ***Historical Walk in the Slate Mines of Coniston, 13 October***

A small group of members undertook an engaging walk led by Mark Hatton starting from the car park on the Walna Scar Road above Coniston. The walk along paths and open fell passed through the extensive industrial workings high up on the Old Man of Coniston, and finished just underneath the summit at the High Moss-Head and Spion Kop mine workings. These slate workings had been active for over 500 years and potentially far longer with recorded history at least back to the mid 16th Century. It showed another side of this area of the Lake District which is usually associated with Copper mining and farming.

An excellent pamphlet is available from the Cumbria Amenity Trust Mining History Society ([www.catmhs.org.uk](http://www.catmhs.org.uk)) for this walk as well as a recent podcast from the "Countrystride Audio Dispatches from Cumbria" series ([www.countrystride.co.uk](http://www.countrystride.co.uk)) no. 105 30th



June 2023 - The Old Man and the Slate with author Mark Richards and producer David Felton.

After all the recent wind and rain the weather gods were smiling on us! It was a clear sunny day as we gathered in the carpark, with beautiful views down Coniston Water to the coast and across to the Pennines. After a quick briefing by Mark we collected our safety helmets and head torches before heading off along the track opposite to the first site of interest at Stubthwaite Moss.

Stubthwaite Moss is now an indistinct part of the fellside off the route up the Old Man. The flat raised area above the path was used as a landing area for finished slates that had been prepared high up on the mountain at Spion Kop, and then transferred down on an overhead aerial runway for onward transportation to Coniston. Looking up the mountain a tall wooden post is just visible and marks the line of the gravity powered aerial runway system.

Moving on and turning left we joined the main route up the Old Man and the climbing began in earnest with a short trek up to Low Bank. Walking around the front of the large spoil heap and passing the long-abandoned skeleton of a slate transport lorry, we came to Low Water Power House and Smithy. This small now roofless building houses the remains of the blacksmiths workshop in the first room, as well as a gravity fed water powered engine in the second room which provided power and compressed air for the mines from about 1900. Drill holes can still be seen in the floor and walls around the forge where the smithy had demonstrated to the miners the effectiveness of his work sharpening tools for rock drilling and splitting. Originally water ran diagonally down from Low Water tarn high on the northern flank of the Old Man via a reducing metal pipe to the Pelton Wheel Turbine housed in the second room (Image 1).

**1. Mark Hatton describing the Pelton Wheel Turbine in the Power House (photo by Kevin Andrew)**



**2. View from Smithy Bank above Saddlestone Main Bank showing relationship of the Copper Mines (centre left of image) to the line of slate mines on the Old Man (photo by Kevin Andrew)**

This had a generator attached to provide electricity as well as a belt powered compressor (remains are still in situ) and air receiver vessel for feeding compressed air for the rock drills higher up inside the mines. Air Pipes from here can be seen snaking up the hillside into the mines to feed the air drills and winches.

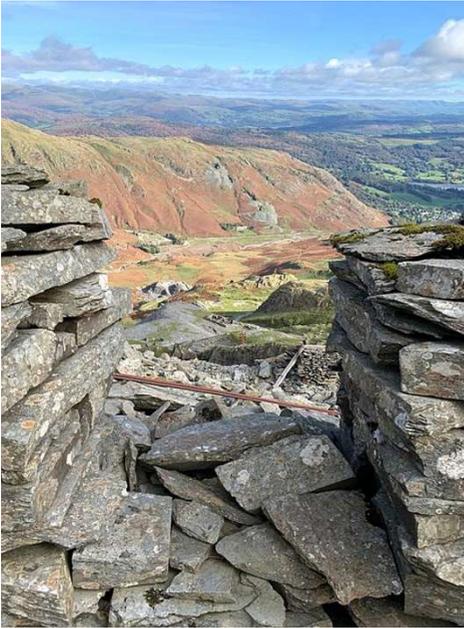
Retracing our steps, we again headed uphill on the main tourist track to Saddlestone Main Bank. This track up the Old Man was originally the miners' route to the slate mines and was used for sledging slate back down the mountain

side to Coniston prior to the aerial runways being installed from around 1900. The oldest mines were higher up the mountain where the silver-grey slate vein outcropped.

Saddlestone Main Bank was the main slate handling area, here large blocks of slate called clogs were landed from a second aerial runway system to be cut to size and then split and split again to make finished roofing slates for onward transportation down the mountain. Remains of the buildings, cutting machine and riving area still exist here today, alongside the old trackways which were used to transfer the clogs of slate.

**3. Group inside Low Moss Head mine lit up by our head torches (photo by Kevin Andrew)**





**4. View from window at Top of the second Aerial Runway system, used by brakeman to control movement of loads down the hillside, with Riving shed visible below at Saddlestone Main Bank (photo by Kevin Andrew)**

The second aerial runway brought the clogs from High Moss Head, Smithy Bank and Fisher Bank mines. Here also we could see the now blocked entrance to the Saddlestone Main mine. Heading further uphill we walked past the thick metal cables from the second runway still lying across the path and at Smithy Bank (Image 2) we turned left off the main path across the fellside to Fisher Bank mine and then higher onto Low Moss Head mine.

Low Moss Head was the first mine the group explored. Safety helmets on and making sure our head torches were working, we entered through a narrow walkway between leaning slate walls, making sure we ducked under the wood and metal bracing. Inside, after moving along a short tunnel, we could see a cavern that had been hewn out and the quality of the slate was clearly visible in the cavern walls (Image 3).

Moving on again uphill but this time on a less distinct path, we reached High Moss Head which is the top of the second aerial runway. The view from the remains of the

**5. Our group inside High Moss Head, making our way between the different mining faces (photo by Mark Hatton)**



runway controller's shed down to Low Bank and beyond to the Copper Mines gave us a clear understanding of the extent of the works. The now roofless shed still has the control handle/mechanism, wheel and brake that controlled the runway in place, alongside the rusty cable lying on the ground heading down the hillside (Image 4). Some of the stanchions and anchoring that held the runway cables were also visible. From here it is not difficult to imagine the aerial runway system in operation.

We then entered our second mine, the cavern bigger than the first one, and this time linking into the upper section of the mine we would come to later. Here more mining equipment could be seen in situ,

including an old ships winch and Blondin Ropes with pulleys still hanging from them high up in the ceiling of the cavern. This had been used for hauling large clogs through the mine. A short diversion in the mine up a loose bank led us to a middle level from which we could view the lower cavern (Image 5), before heading back into the light through a small gap in a partially filled entrance way. It was now time for lunch and more amazing views across the Lakeland fells to the Pennines and down the valley to the coast.



**6. Time for Lunch with Coniston Water below (photo by Mark Hatton)**

Once fed and watered, we moved on uphill again to Spion Kop for the last mine of the day, which is the top of the first aerial runway. Spion Kop is the very upper part of the second cavern we entered earlier and began working in 1901. Walking in through a more defined and clearer tunnel the tramway split and, taking the right tunnel, we came to a



**Image 7 – Looking down from Spion Kop tramway into High Moss Head 180ft below (photo by Mark Hatton)**

walkway that looked straight down on the previous area we entered, probably 180 feet below (Image 7). Turning right we headed higher into the Spion Kop cavern which sits under the summit of the Old Man (Image 8).

Retracing our steps we came back into the sunlight and headed down the mountain, passing alongside the more recent Bursting Stone Quarry which only closed down 20 years ago, demonstrating how the use of more modern heavy equipment has changed the character of slate mining.

The group thanked Mark for the very enjoyable and informative tour of the slate quarrying history of the Old Man of Coniston.

*Kevin Andrew*

**8. Inside Spion Kop underneath the summit of the Old Man (photo by Mark Hatton)**



## **Talk: Mitchells: auctioneers for 150 years, 9 November**

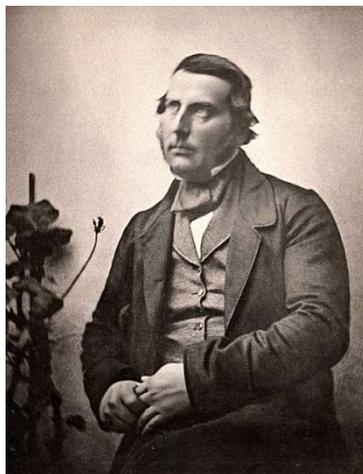
The year 2023 marked the 150th anniversary of the formation of Mitchells Auction Company Limited, so it was appropriate that the final Talk of the year to Society Members was one about the history of this prominent local business. Old photographs relating to Mitchell's accompanied by captions relating to aspects of the history of the business were on display in the hall, and copies of a booklet written by a Society Member, Gloria Edwards, were available for sale.

Ian Powley, current Chairman and Managing Director, came to deliver what was, with a nice degree of wry humour, a lively and informative Talk. It was a pity that, due to lack of sufficient volunteers for the evening, a live transmission wasn't possible. But that had the consequence of there being a rather larger number of Members in the Hall, who were joined by about a dozen visitors. Ian invited audience participation, and a number of those present added their own recollections of Mitchell's business in the more recent past.

After providing information about his own background and explaining what now constitutes Mitchells' business, Ian turned to its historical roots. The eponymous founder was Robinson Mitchell who was born in Ullock in 1821. Having been apprenticed to his father as a boot and clog maker and then acting as a travelling salesman, he became an assistant for a while to his elder brother who ran a grocery business on Cockermonth's Main Street. Robinson Mitchell began his own business in 1849, initially selling furniture in Main Street. The sales became a regular weekly event, and from 1860 onwards they included horses and livestock which were corralled in wooden pens.

With growing success, based on his guiding principles of 'diligence, perseverance, and integrity', Robinson Mitchell was able to repay his brother from whom he had borrowed money, and he obtained a licence to practise as an

auctioneer and appraiser. Developing auctioneering as the means of conducting sales, he moved his business to the open area of Fair Field in 1860 where further success ensued. His acumen in recognising that auctions were a more efficient way of selling not only livestock but also land led to his carrying out significant building work on Station Street. In 1865 he had a market building constructed which he himself had designed specifically for what was required at livestock auctions. It became a model for similar auction marts around the country. Shortly afterwards he also built a substantial residence, Fairfield House, adjacent to the market building.



**The founder, Robinson Mitchell**

Robinson Mitchell was greatly assisted in developing his business by the advent of the railway arriving in Cockermonth, enabling livestock for auction to be brought by rail. In answer to a question raised at the end of the Talk Ian Powley gave as an example cattle being shipped from Ireland to the port of Sillioth on the Solway coast, and then being taken by rail for auction at Cockermonth. And there was trade in cattle sold at auction being taken in the reverse direction. He also referred to cattle being transported by rail from

Scotland and North Yorkshire to be sold at the auction market.

The success of his business led Robinson Mitchell to decide in 1873 to incorporate it as a joint stock company. Mitchell's Auction Company Limited, owned by its shareholders, has traded continuously ever since. He remained actively involved until his death at the beginning of 1888. A stained-glass window in Christchurch, Cockermouth commemorates Robinson Mitchell's life. It specifically refers to his 'marked integrity' and his having been a benefactor of the poor.

For the next period of its existence the company was run by a nephew of its founder, another Robinson Mitchell, and thereafter by another nephew - John Ritson Mitchell. Another Robinson Mitchell succeeded them, and the last family member who ran the company was John Gladstone Mitchell who was chairman between 1936 and 1967. His successor, who had been company secretary, was Norman Robinson under whose leadership the company expanded into estate agency and land agency.

A major development in the company's history occurred in 2002 when the first livestock auction took place at

new premises. They were built, after many vicissitudes, on a greenfield site at Wellington Farm conveniently situated on the A66 for modern modes of road transport used in moving livestock. Meanwhile, Robinson Mitchell's original business of selling furniture and household effects has continued over the years at the old market hall on Station Street in Cockermouth.

Ian Powley concluded his Talk by making the point that, although he may not have been the very first auctioneer in the country, Robinson Mitchell was the most successful among his contemporaries, and set a precedent followed by many for the running of livestock auctions.

Refreshments after the Talk were enlivened by Ian conducting a 'basic, better, best' competition. Audience members had to decide on the respective values of three items of Alfred Wainwright memorabilia which were due to be auctioned at one of Mitchell's Antiques and Fine Art sales later in the month. Those present enjoyed the challenge, which was won by Society member, Jeff Goode.

*Charles Lambrick*

**The auction site and pens, from Station Street, 1958**



## Articles

### ***Skating on Mockerkin Tarn***

*by Walter Head*

As I reflect on my childhood I remember that every year we had long sunny summers and dry frosty winters, or is this a case of selective memory? In Summer, the Mockerkin Tarn produced a fine display of water lilies at the South side. But I do remember spending many winter weekends on the ice at Mockerkin Tarn.

Mockerkin Tarn is situated in a shallow basin about half a mile below Mockerkin village and was formed by a glacier kettle hole, a huge chunk of stranded ice in a glacier moraine. In the early 1900s many of the lakes and tarns froze over. Mockerkin Tarn, with its small circumference of approximate 0.75 km, was one of the first expanses of fresh water to freeze over due to the shallow depth, approximate 12 feet (3.7m), and slow throughput of water from the inlet at the east side and the small outlet at the west side. After several days of hard frost the ice sheet cracked from side to side. It was said by locals that the cracking sound could be heard in Mockerkin village. Once the ice was thick enough people would venture onto the ice to enjoy various activities.

In the weekend afternoons the local young men would gather at the tarn to participate in a game of ice hockey. I say hockey but in truth there were minimal rules except putting the puck, a selected stone, into the opponents' net marked by a discarded jacket or coat. Hockey sticks were obtained from the willow trees at the east side of the tarn and teams of equal numbers were

selected. It was a brute of a game with no quarter given. A chance to settle old scores? Footwear was either steel shod clogs or metal studded boots. Clean ice was the best as any snow affected the sliding conditions.

Very few people had proper skates and boots although I remember one man circling the tarn wearing speed skates with blades about 18 inches long. On another occasion someone took a go-kart out onto the ice. Temporary skates had been available for a number of years. The early ones consisted of a blade attached to a shaped wooden sole which could be screwed into the bottom of the clog. As boots took over as everyday footwear then metal skates could be clamped onto the bottom edges of the boot using adjusted screw fastenings.

I don't remember being on the tarn in 1947 but I do remember the large amount of snow during the winter 1947-8. The temperature during the run to Christmas and New Year was normal, then on 23 January the temperature dropped and snow started to fall. After that, snow fell somewhere in the U.K. for the next 55 days. I was living at Dean at the time and one by one the houses lost their water supply. In the winter 1962-3 the cold started on 23 December 1962 and lasted until 6 March 1963, which was the first morning without frost. The mean temperature for January 1963 was 2.1°C.

### **Skating on Loweswater Lake, 1940**



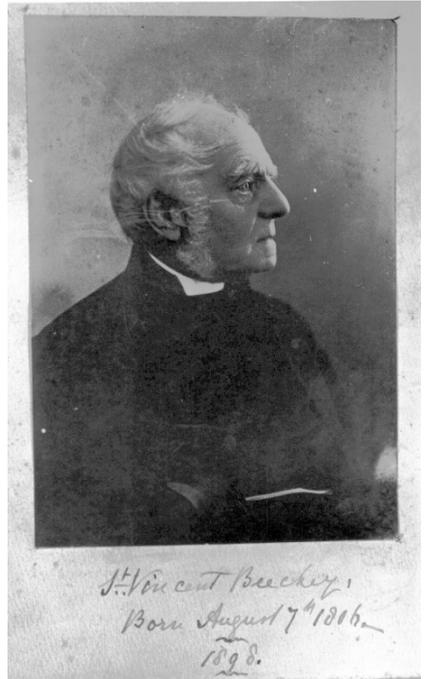
## The 'Beechey' photographs, 1898

by Derek Denman

The 'Beechey' collection of photographs was taken from prints in an album, in the early days of the Society. The photographs record a visit to the area in August and September 1898 by Canon St.Vincent Beechey, 1806-1899, rector of Hilgay, Norfolk, and his daughter, Emily. They stayed for some or all of the time with Miss Grace Musgrave at The Cedars in High Lorton, now called Graceholme.

St.Vincent Beechey was the twenty-first child of William Beechey, by his second wife. One might think that William was beginning to run out of names and took inspiration from a saint, but in fact his son was named after the island, a consequence of being the godson of John Jervis. He had been created the first Earl of St.Vincent in recognition of his naval victory in 1797.

St.Vincent Beechey, a canon of Manchester Cathedral, had many claims to fame, but at the time of his visit to Lorton he was celebrated for being the oldest



**Canon St.Vincent Beechey,**  
<https://derwentfells.org.uk/showrecord.php?refe=PHBC/0030>



clergyman in England, and he remained so until his death a year later, aged 93. More importantly for us, he was a noted early photographer, being President of the Manchester Photographic Society from 1865-70. The photography must have been an important part of his visit, and the fact that he does not appear in the photographs, except perhaps with the party in 'a more distant view',

suggests an active role, though probably with help.

Just before coming to Lorton he attended his granddaughter's wedding in Camberley on 27 July 1898. He is shown in the family photograph seated far left (source Wikipedia). St.Vincent fathered only seven children, including daughter Emily Beechey, 1837-1924. She was living with her father in Hilgay during his later years, and had probably organised the holiday.

The thirty photographs in the collection cover the Cocker Valley from Southwaite Bridge to Buttermere, and provide an invaluable record of places and people in Lorton in 1898. In particular it provides our only image of the flax thread mill at Tenters.

The photograph of the Cedars probably shows Miss Grace Musgrave seated left and Miss Emily Beechey

standing to the right. Miss Musgrave, born in 1850, lived alone by this time, and provided accommodation for gentry visitors. Her grandfather had married Grace, the sister of John Jennings, the first brewer. The Musgraves had become prosperous farmers at Lorton, her grandfather farming Highside in 1827. Grace Musgrave's father was a farmer of 295 acres in 1881. Her uncle was far more successful, being John Musgrave of Wasdale Hall, an important Whitehaven Solicitor and businessman, who eventually held property in Lorton.

The collection can now be seen at <https://derwentfells.org.uk>, entering 'Beechey' as the search term. We hope that many more of our photographs will be archived in 2024.

**The Cedars in 1898,**  
<https://derwentfells.org.uk/showrecord.php?refe=PHBC/0027>



## **Cockermouth Cycling Club: its founding and first committee, 1880**

by Roz Southey<sup>1</sup>

The first British cycling clubs were set up in London at the beginning of the 1870s, barely three or four years after the invention of the bicycle. Over the next few years, the passion for the new machine spread, and clubs were established in southern towns and cities like Peterborough, Oxford, Cambridge and Canterbury. The practice took a little longer to reach Cumberland and Westmorland – the first club in the north-west was not set up until the early months of 1877, when enthusiasts in Workington founded the West Cumberland Bicycle Club.<sup>2</sup> The region quickly made up for its late start – the following year, clubs were founded in Maryport, Aspatria, Carlisle and Kendal, and in 1879 in Penrith and Cockermouth. The members of these clubs were almost all men. Some, like the West Cumberland, did allow women members, but they were rare, and usually used the tricycle which was considered both more manageable than the bicycle, and more modest, as it could be used in normal everyday dress.

The Cockermouth club was not mentioned by local press until the end of its first year of existence when it held its AGM in October 1879.<sup>3</sup> It initially had only twelve members but was very active. The main purpose of the club, as with all clubs, was as a social resource for its members, and many a friendly pleasurable run out into the surrounding countryside occupied a Sunday morning, despite the disapproval of some clergy. Shorter runs

took place on summer evenings. From time to time, the club put on charity events – a regular Christmas dinner for the elderly poor of the town was held for some years. Many of the members also took part in races put on by agricultural shows and Friendly Society galas, although few members had any great success. The highlight of these shows was the 1881 Bicycle Tournament organised to celebrate the installation of electric light in the town.<sup>4</sup> As the electric light failed to work, the tournament was the greater success.

By the end of 1880, the club's membership totalled 23. Local newspapers recorded the names of 14 members who were on the club's organising committee at some point during the year; twelve of these can be definitely identified, using genealogical, census and other sources, giving a idea of the type of men who joined clubs of this sort, their social backgrounds and professions, and even hinting at the way the club first came into existence.<sup>5</sup>

All the men on the Cockermouth club committee were young, ranging in age between 19 and 26, and none were married, although one married at the end of 1880 and most of the others married in mid-decade. The leading light in the club was 20-year-old John Steward, who had been elected captain, a position given to the man considered the best rider. Steward was not a local man, having been born in Wolverhampton. After the early death of his father – a manufacturer – the family had survived on the income brought in by Steward's mother, who worked as a publican. For an unknown reason, Steward had come north in 1879 and taken up a job in an ironmonger's

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier article in the *Journal* dealt with the club and its cycling festivals in the early 1890s: Roz Southey, 'Cycle Sports in Cockermouth, 1868-1902', *The Journal* (Lorton and Derwent Fells Local History Society, February 2017, 3-7).

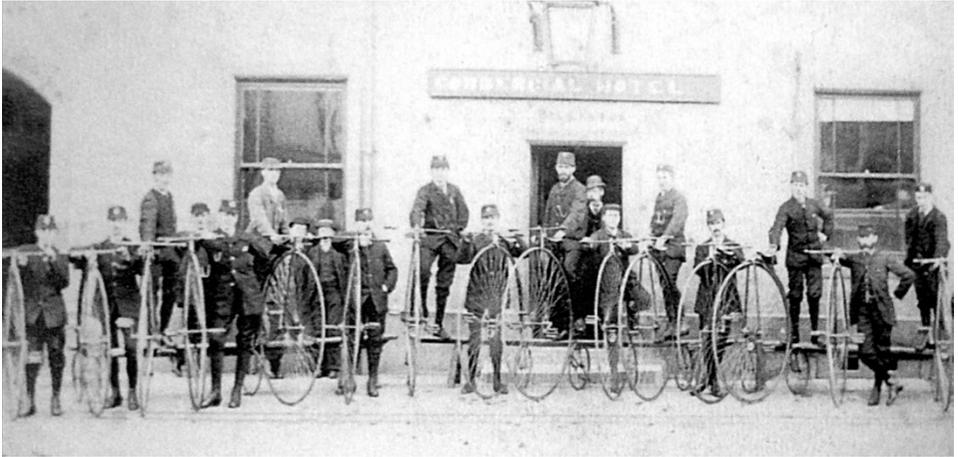
<sup>2</sup> Dates for the foundation of all these clubs derive from local newspapers such as the *West Cumberland Times* and the *Cumberland Paquet*. These papers also regularly record

snippets of information about club runs, AGMs, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *West Cumberland Times* 11 October 1879.

<sup>4</sup> *Carlisle Express* 3 September 1881, *Carlisle Journal* 2 September 1881.

<sup>5</sup> Genealogical data has been from the General Registry for births, marriages and deaths, available on [Ancestry.co.uk](http://Ancestry.co.uk). Information on residence, profession and other family data comes from the 1881 census.



### The Cockermouth Cycling Club

*This photograph of the Cockermouth Cycling Club is dated around 1900 by Herbert and Mary Jackson, but it is very unlikely to be that late. The riding of high-wheelers, the 'Good Old Ordinary', was superseded by the use of the safety bicycle at the beginning of the 1890s and many riders had given it up long before that. The picture was more probably taken in the mid-1880s. [Now in Maryport Library's Collection.]*

shop. This was almost certainly Fletcher and Sons, one of the town's five ironmongers, who described themselves in Bulmer's 1883 *Directory of Cumberland* as 'ironmongers, plumbers, bellhangers, gasfitters, and tinplate workers'.<sup>6</sup> The shop was at 103 Main Street, and was situated right next door to a lodging house at No. 102, where Steward had found rooms.

Steward was the only member of the club who raced with any degree of success, although his racing achievements were less than glorious. 1881 was by far his best year – he won the ten-mile handicap at the Dearham Horticultural Show sports, and had a second and a third in the two main races at the tournament to celebrate the installation of electric light.<sup>7</sup> He then carried off the two-mile handicap in club races on the cricket field in September.<sup>8</sup> Less than subtle tactics may have been partly to blame for his erratic results; a newspaper report of the one-mile handicap at the Maryport Temperance meeting in June 1880 reports that having won his heat, Steward thrilled the crowds by attacking the final from the

gun and simply going full gas until the finish. He paid for the effort, however, by fading towards the end and finishing in fourth, 'thoroughly exhausted'.<sup>9</sup>

Also lodging in No 102 was George Blackburn, a 23-year-old local man, the vice-captain of the club. Blackburn was from a slightly lower strata of society than Steward – his father, John, had been an agricultural labourer for some years before finding employment as a coachman in Papcastle. By 1880, George Blackburn

<sup>6</sup> T Bulmer and Co., *History, Topography and Directory of West Cumberland, comprising its ancient and modern history: A general view of its physical features; geological character, mines and minerals; trade, commerce and manufactures; statistics, &c. &c* (Preston, 1883), 509.

<sup>7</sup> *Maryport Advertiser* 26 August 1881 (Dearham Horticultural Show); *Carlisle Express* 3 September 1881 (electric light installation).

<sup>8</sup> *Carlisle Express* 3 September 1881.

<sup>9</sup> *Maryport Advertiser* 18 June 1880.

too had found employment as an ironmonger, and almost certainly found himself working alongside Steward. He did, however, also describe himself as a draper. Bulmer records John Blackburn's grocery store in the Market Place, a 'grocer and boot and shoe dealer'; if this was George's father, turning his hand from coaching to shopkeeping, then it might explain George's claim to be both ironmonger and grocer – he may have helped out from time to time in the family concern.

Steward and Blackburn obviously had not only work in common but also an interest in bicycles. These were the days of the high-wheeler, later known as the GOO (the Good Old Ordinary), more familiar nowadays as 'penny-farthings' because of the massive difference in size between the front and back wheels. They were not cheap machines, costing £6 or more, a massive outlay for a young man on a shopman's wage which would have been around £1 a week, with obvious expenses such as rent, food and clothes to pay for from it. Accessories such as horns or whistles to warn pedestrians of the cyclist's coming, suitable clothes, and any necessary repairs to machine or tyres would have added to the cost. Hire purchase schemes were, however, widely available. There was an added difficulty in that no shops in Cockermonth advertised bicycles for sale – Bulmer's *Directory* makes no mention of them at all. There was a maker of agricultural implements in the town, however, and at this period such firms often turned their hands to bicycle manufacture, having the sort of production machinery that could be adapted appropriately.

The firm in question was William and Joseph Herbert, 'engineers, ironfounders, and agricultural implement makers,' who owned the Derwent Foundry. The family had originally been from Whitehaven but the 1871 census recorded them as living in Sunscapes House, strictly on Lorton Road but close to the top of Kirkgate. The head of the household was the founder of the company, Joseph and his wife, Mary. Their three children lived with them:

Rachel, Joseph (who was a widower), and the eldest son, William, with his wife (also Mary), and their two children. By 1881, only William's family remained: William and Mary, and their 25-year-old son, Joseph Pearson Herbert, who also worked in the family business. Joseph Herbert was another of the committee members mentioned in the newspapers. His social status, and no doubt his financial situation, would have been rather better than that of Steward and Blackburn. If the company did indeed produce bicycles, Blackburn and Steward may have been riding their machines, and may have known Joseph Herbert through that connection. Herbert served as captain of the club in 1881.

Steward and Blackburn also had a great deal in common with another member of the committee, Heskett Whitlock Fletcher, who was the son of their employer and who also worked in the shop although not as an ironmonger – Heskett was a plumber. At 23 years old in 1880, he was the same age as Blackburn. Within ten years, however, he had taken over the business entirely and described himself as an ironmonger, so he may well have dealt with all aspects of the business from the beginning.

With three bicycle enthusiasts almost certainly in the same shop, this could have been the original nucleus of the club – certainly it was formed within a few months of Steward's arrival in the area, with Steward its first captain. They, and a few other friends, no doubt enjoyed Sunday runs out together, and the idea of forming a club to expand their activities may have emerged quite naturally. Other shopmen were attracted to the group. Clark Tickle was yet another ironmonger's assistant, although it is unlikely he worked for Fletcher, as he lived off St Helen's Street, to the east of the town. It is more probable that he worked for one of the three ironmongers in the Market Place: J B Banks (which survived into the 21<sup>st</sup> century); John Graham's; or John Hird and Son. Tickle was 24 in 1880 and, like Blackburn, the son of a labourer – his father had started in the mines then took

up work as an agricultural labourer. By 1880, however, Tickle was living with his widowed mother, a younger brother, and a cousin. His brother was training as a plumber and glazier – in later life, the two brothers combined to run C and T Tickle’s ironmongers and plumbers’ shop on Main Street.<sup>10</sup>

Other members of the committee worked in shops of different trades. John Newton, aged 24, was an assistant in one of the town’s 44 grocers. He may have been illegitimate – in 1861, his mother, Isabella, was supporting the pair by working as an agricultural labourer. When she married, to another agricultural labourer, John was already apprenticed to a grocer. By 1881, Isabella had been widowed and was living with her son in St Helen’s Street, acting as his housekeeper.

A second grocer’s assistant may have been working close to Newton, as he too lived in St Helen’s Street (although the street was long and well-populated). There were four grocers in St Helen’s Street alone and no fewer than ten in the Market Place, many of them selling other goods as well to distinguish themselves from their competitors – Andrew Johnston in the Market Place described himself as a ‘grocer, corn merchant and tobacconist’. His elder son, Jonathan, was a shopman there; in fact, the whole family’s working life was centred around the shop, with Jonathan’s 15-year-old younger brother, John, also an assistant and his 17-year-old sister Annie helping out in the house. Jonathan was 19 in 1880 and the youngest member of the committee. Another of the younger committee members, 20-year-old William Smethurst, also worked in his

**BICYCLE CLUB CONCERT AND BALL AT COCKERMOUTH.**—The Cockermouth Bicycle Club held their second annual concert and ball in the Freemasons’ Hall on Friday evening last. The room was prettily decorated with suitable mottoes, flags, &c., inclusive of a gas jet device, representing the letters C.C., with a bicycle between. There was a large and fashionable audience, inclusive of the president and vice-president, the Rev. J. T. Pollock and Dr. Hutchinson. The concert comprised songs by Mrs. Pollock, Miss Paterson, Miss Hunter, Miss A. Musgrave, Mr. J. F. Scurr, and Mr. A. J. Lewthwaite; a pianoforte solo by Miss Taylor, and a flute solo by Mr. J. H. Cawley. Miss Todd was the accompanist. At the conclusion of the concert the room was cleared for dancing, the music for which was supplied by Mr. W. H. Lewthwaite’s quadrille band, and included a set of quadrilles entitled “Bicyclica,” composed for the occasion by Mr. W. F. Lamonby. Dancing was kept up with much spirit till three o’clock. The proceeds will be applied to the fund for the laying of a permanent bicycle track.

Newspaper extract, Carlisle Express 3  
December 1881  
[www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)  
(Accessed 19 Oct 2023)

family’s business – his father was a hatter and hosier on Station Street. The family must have visited Ireland or lived there for a short while as William had been born in Belfast, although the family had returned to Cumberland within two years of his birth.

There was one other shopman on the committee – a draper’s assistant who was one of the older men in the group: 25-year-old James William Hall. Hall’s father had been a gardener at the Goat, but had become a dyer by 1881. Hall seems to have been the first man in the group to marry, in the last few months of 1880, but continued his association with the club after his marriage, as he acted as secretary in at least 1881 and 1883.

Thomas Smails was one of two club members who lived in Horsman Street,

<sup>10</sup> T Bulmer and Co., *The History, Topography and Directory of Cumberland 1901* (Preston, 1901).

terraced housing on the western side of the town not far from the road north to Carlisle. His father – a coal agent – had died young and the family had survived on Thomas’s mother’s work as a milk seller and



Thomas’s own income as a fruiterer. He was apprenticed to a plumber and by 1880, at the age of 25, was himself a master plumber. But he changed direction and Bulmer’s 1883 *Directory* records a J and T Smails in Horsman Street, who were listed as tailors and drapers;<sup>11</sup> ‘J’-was Thomas’s elder brother, John, who was a master draper. Thomas was also a member of the Cricket Club and its secretary from time to time.

The other resident of Horsman Street was John Henry Cawley. Cawley’s father was another who died young and his mother had remarried, to a bleacher. Cawley’s first job was as a railway clerk at the station on the edge of town, but he trained as a draughtsman and engineer, and by 1880 and the age of 23, was working in the iron foundry belonging to the Herbert family. He may have become acquainted with Joseph Herbert there or have obtained the post partly through knowing him previously. He was well-known for his excellent flute playing which was much in demand for fund-raising concerts.

The remaining identifiable member of the committee, 23-year-old William Young, was yet another who had lost his father early. William Young senior died

**The Apple Tree Inn (now the Wordsworth Hotel)– the meeting place for the Cocker-mouth Bicycle Club.**

around 1860 when the younger William, the middle of three sons, was only four years old. His mother, Johanna, was a dealer in glass and china on Main Street. But in early 1868, when William was twelve, Johanna married again, to Simpson Hewetson who ran the Apple Tree Inn on Main Street, It was Hewetson’s second marriage and he had children of his own at home, so may not have been too interested in raising the three boys from Johanna’s first marriage. The eldest, Michael, was probably old enough to be apprenticed; the younger two were sent off to Wigton College, a boarding school.

By 1880, William had teamed up with his elder brother Michael as horse dealers, running the Apple Tree Livery Stables – it was a profession William followed for the rest of his life. His mother was widowed for a second time in December 1880 and took to capably running the Apple Tree Inn on her own. The Inn was the cycling club’s headquarters,<sup>12</sup> and it is possible that the

<sup>11</sup> Bulmer 1883, 509.

<sup>12</sup> Bulmer 1883, 493.

club benefitted from William Young's family connections there.

Two committee members remain unidentified. 'W. Scott' was one – but there are two William Scotts of roughly the right age and social class in the town, and it is impossible to be sure which one, if either, was a keen cyclist. The other – J Yeomans – is equally problematic. The only J Yeomans in Cockermonth on the 1881 census was a 13-year-old boy and it is unlikely that a 12-year-old (in 1880) would have been a member of a cycling club – though it did occasionally happen – but even more unlikely that he would have been elected to the committee. Bulmer's 1883 *Directory* records a watchmaker and jeweller on Station Street in the ownership of Joseph Yeomans, but this shop does not appear on the 1881 census. Without knowing more about this man, it is impossible to say whether he was the unidentified committee member.

Some conclusions can be drawn. Most of the men were young and unmarried, at a time in life when most had few commitments. A high proportion of them – 9 out of 12 – were shopmen and some knew each other from their work. It is possible that the nub of the club started with the trio of Steward, Blackburn and Fletcher in Nos 102 and 103 Main Street, and that they accumulated friends, or friends of friends, over a period of a few weeks or months. The club probably started as a loose association of friends, who at some point decided to establish themselves more formally. Social activities were the main focus of attention, although at one time or another all the members seem to have tried their hand, usually not very successfully, at a race or two.

In the way of such bodies, the club gradually faded and became moribund, no doubt as its members aged and took on more responsibilities; the annual supper for the elderly was one of the first things to go. Little is known of the club in the latter half of the decade, although it limped on and was – just – still in existence when a number of enthusiasts decided to re-found it in the early 1890s.

## ***House History: gathering the low-hanging fruit; 2. Tithes and land tax.***

*by Derek Denman*

The first article in this series, in the November 2023 *Wanderer*, covered maps which have been published, with surveys back to 1770. All are freely available online. This second article focusses on the two major property surveys of around 1840 and around 1912. These both identify properties on maps and give details of owners and occupiers. So that as well as providing two good and easy fixed points in a property or house history, they also provide a comprehensive picture of the changes in land use and ownership over the Victorian and Edwardian periods.

Though these two surveys count as low-hanging fruit, by being easy to obtain, the original documents are not available online, and you probably need to borrow a copy of the Society's Digital Archive of Historical Sources, DAHS. This is available as a memory stick full of images of the original public documents, which are mostly in The National Archives, TNA, at Kew, which is a long way to go for a single property record.

Both of these surveys correspond fairly closely with a national census, of 1841 and 1911, and so it is often possible to find the people actually living in a dwelling at that time, making these surveys key milestones in a property history. However, the census is a family history source rather than a property history source, and is available online through commercial family history sites, Ancestry and Find My Past. You can also go to a Local Studies Library. The census is not on the DAHS.

The two surveys were not actually made as a service for future local historians, but had other purposes. Those around 1840 were made to apportion tithe payments to land and properties, while those around 1912 were made in preparation for a land tax which was never charged, because WWI changed

everything. However, there is no need to have any expertise in Tithes or in Land Taxation to be able to use the survey information in a property history.

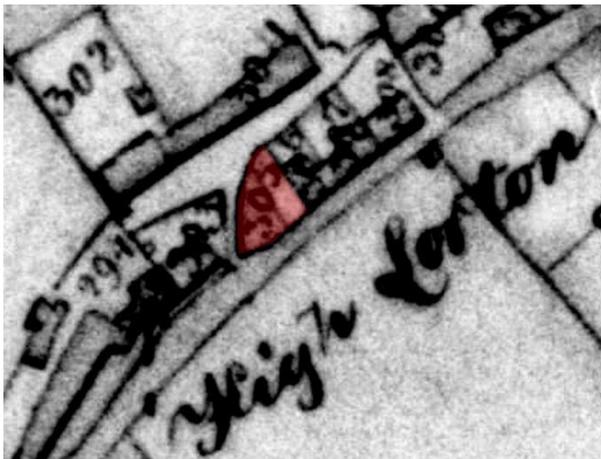
### **Tithe Commutation Records**

Tithes were once given to maintain the parish clergy either in kind or as a money payment. One tenth of the increase of living things in a parish, e.g. corn, lambs, fleeces, eggs, bees, etc, were due to the parish priest or rector. Often these rights were granted to a monastery, and after the dissolution those rights to tithes were sold to lay tithe owners, and could be bought and sold as property.

Tithes paid in kind would go to a tithe barn and would probably be sold for cash by the tithe owner. Over time, many tithe payments were converted to more convenient cash, under local agreements.

Under the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836 all the various tithe payments were to be commuted to a tithe rent charge on land, payable annually by its owner to the tithe holder. To make this work there had to be a survey of each tithe area, often a township, down to the level of every field or close and every dwelling. For house history purposes the reason for the survey and the involved process is unimportant, but it resulted in detailed records being compiled and large-scale plans deposited, all of which remain today. As well as having digital copies on DAHS, the Society has folders of printed copies of the public records in The National Archive, for the townships of Buttermere, Brackenthwaite, Embleton, Lorton, Loweswater (Including Mockerkin), Mosser, Whinfell, and Wythop. These folders can be borrowed.

The Tithe Apportionment files are a listing of every property element, grouped by owner and farm, if a farm, and with the occupier given. Every farmstead and dwelling was listed. Every field or close has a name, acreage, and usage, together with a reference number on a tithe map.



**Property 305 on the Lorton Tithe map,  
DAHS No.205**

Ordnance Survey maps did not exist here in the 1840s, but a Tithe Map had to be produced for every tithe area, showing all the relevant properties. The large-scale plan provides a footprint of every building. The Tithe Map was to be supplied by the landowners at their expense, and so if there was a convenient existing survey which could be used, maybe with adjustments, they would use it. In Lorton they used the survey and mapping done for the enclosure of the commons, in 1826-7. They did not update the buildings. Probably the same was done in Whinfell. In Loweswater they started with John Marshall's manor map of 1819. The landowners rarely commissioned a new survey, but in Mockerkin and Mosser they had no choice, and we have two fine large-scale maps, the first in those places.

As noted above, the tithe commutations were close in date to the 1841 census, and fortunately this was the first census which named all the inhabitants and gave their dwellings, though the dwellings were often imprecise. Subsequent ten-yearly censuses gave more detail. In 2003, for its tenth anniversary, the Society gave an exhibition of township maps for five townships, based on the tithe maps, tithe apportionments, and the 1841 census. These were for Brackenthwaite,

Buttermere, Embleton, Lorton and Loweswater, with Whinfell added in 2004. These can all be found at <https://derwentfells.org.uk> using search term 'maps'. These township maps provide a good picture of properties, ownership, and inhabitants at that time, though it is a good idea to check the original documents on DAHS.

There were three sets made of the tithe apportionments and tithe maps; the original for the tithe commissioners, one copy for the landowners, and one copy for the tithe-owner. We have photographs of the originals from TNA. We also have copies of the Tithe Files, held by the tithe commissioners.

#### **The wooden bungalow/garden in tithe records**

Following the example property in the *Wanderer* of November 2023, the extract from the Lorton tithe map shows property 305 highlighted in red, but remember that this was a reused plan from 1826-7.

From this plan one can go to the Tithe Apportionment of 1840 to find the following, for this simplest of properties:

Landowner:	John Pyale
Occupier:	Isabella Thompson
Name/description:	Houses etc
State of Cultivation:	[no entry]
Measurement:	6 perches
Tithe rent:	1½d

#### **'New Domesday' land valuation records, 1909-15**

The Liberal Government's 1909 Finance Act introduced a new Land Tax, which was intended to create a tax liability for all landowners. A land tax was based on the value of the land only, and so a vast survey was undertaken, covering every property, to provide a baseline value for the land owned, after the value of buildings and timber, etc had been deducted. Work continued until 1915, though the tax was never introduced. The survey records were retained, providing a valuable resource for historians. A discussion of the process with examples of the records, by Dr Michael Winstanley, can be found in L&DFLHS Journal 40.

The survey was based on Civil Parishes, which were fairly new at the time. Some civil parishes, such as Brackenthwaite and Whinfell, have since been combined with others. For each civil parish the survey produced three main records.

Firstly there are the Valuation Registers or registers, or the 'New Domesday Books', which contain a listing of all properties arranged by 1910 Civil Parish, giving owners and primary tenants, together with acreages and valuations. Each register has a set of property reference numbers.

Secondly there are the Field Books which contain a survey and valuation of every property, with a four-page sequence for each in these specially printed books. Buildings were described in some detail for the valuation, often with plans.

Thirdly, there are the valuation plans, which are simply the 25 inch sheets of the second series of ordnance survey maps, with the land area divided up into the properties which are surveyed in the books and listed in the registers. These plans are based on one set of maps, not separate maps for each civil parish. Each property is marked with the property reference number, which, with the civil parish, provides the key to the other records.

#### **'New Domesday' records held by the Society**

The Society has collected extensive records and makes them available through DAHS No.151. We have the full surviving records for: Blindboethel, Brackenthwaite, Buttermere, Eaglesfield, Embleton, Lorton, Loweswater, Mosser, Setmurthy, Dean, Greysouthen, Whinfell, and Wythop.

We do not have the Field Books for Cockermouth (except a few kindly donated by Michael Winstanley), but would be pleased if someone could spend a day at The National Archives in Kew to copy these.

A more complete description of this resource is given on our website at <http://derwentfells.com/NewDomesday.h>

tml and details of the coverage of our records, with supporting information can be found at:

<http://derwentfells.com/pdfs/sources/L&DFLHSNewDomesdayDigitalResourceContents.pdf>.

### The wooden bungalow/garden in 'New Domesday' records

To find the records of a property, the usual starting point is the valuation map, which gives a reference number and outline(s) for each property, whether a farm or a cottage. The maps used were the second edition Ordnance Survey of around 1898.

For the wooden bungalow/garden the reference number on the map below is 142 in Lorton Civil Parish (not highlighted). By this time, part of the plot had been acquired for a joiner's shop.

The register entry for 142 is very basic, giving the owner as W A Wilson and the description as 'land'. Going to the Field Book for Lorton Parish, property No.142, the four pages are mostly wasted for this property, but we learn that 142 was circa 1912 a plot of building land of 143 square

yards, formerly three cottages now demolished. It was valued at £14 per annum, or £5 as agricultural land. Consider that the whole country was surveyed in this detail for a tax which was never raised. Historians are grateful.

### Help

These two sources, together with the maps described in the November Wanderer and the Census, provide a firm foundation for property history through the Victorian/Edwardian period. They are 'low hanging fruit' in that they can all be accessed from home as digital records.

However, while the maps are easy to find and use, the fruit from these two records is attached by rather tougher stalks. I am always happy to assist with personal projects, and would encourage members who are interested to join the House History Group.

Next issue – parish registers

**Property reference 142 on the land valuation map for Lorton, circa 1912, DAHS No.151**

