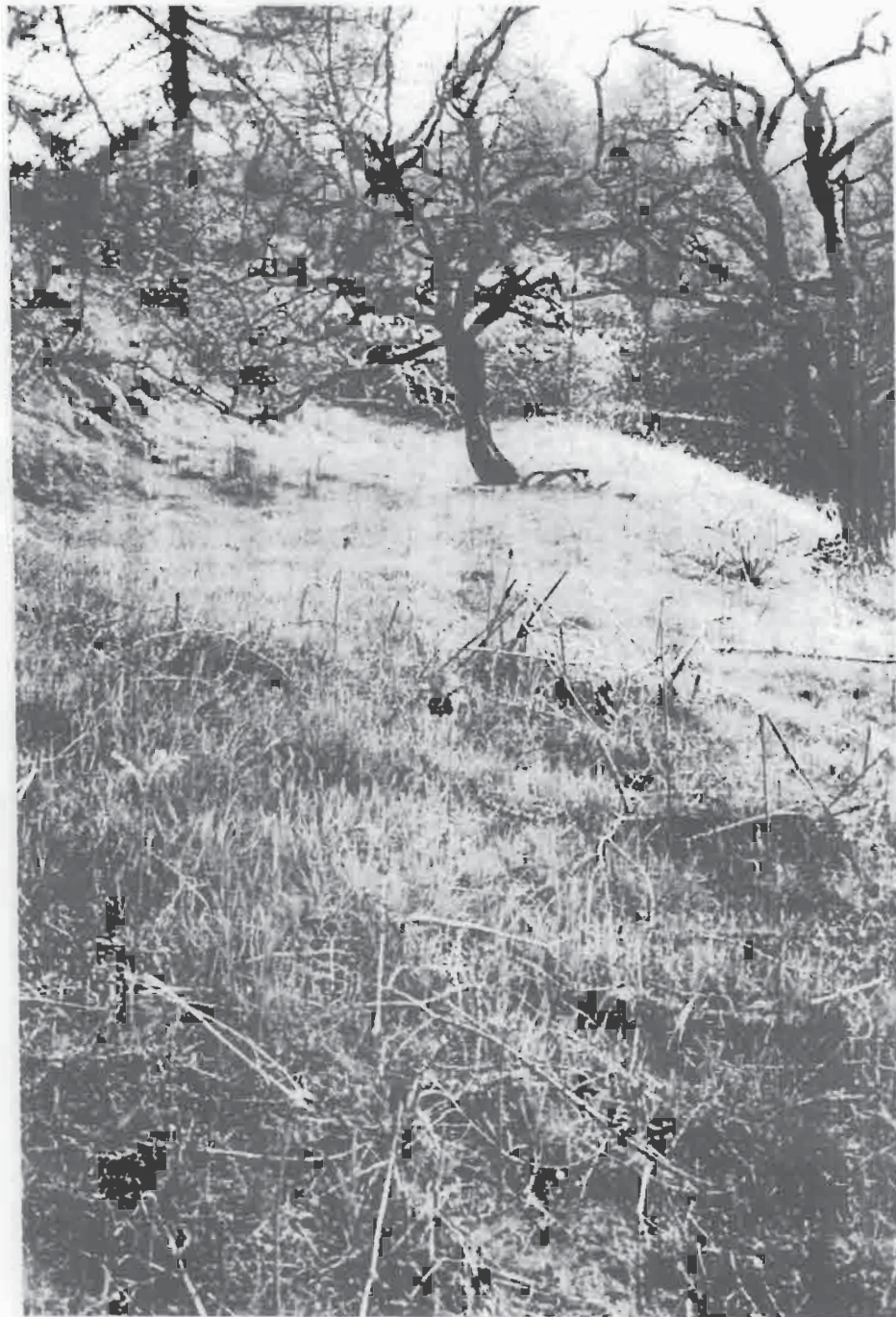


Lorton & Derwent Fells

Local History Society



This, we believe, is part of the Roman road up the Whinlatter Pass from Braithwaite.

If we're right, it will be the first proof that the Roman route from their fort at Brougham to the one at Papcastle went over the Whinlatter.

For the up to date story, please see the centre spread.

Secretary's letter

Although there are a number of things I want to write about, may I first of all wish all readers a happy and successful New Year; and although there have been a couple of changes in the running of the Society, I hope it, too, continues successfully.

To deal with the changes, it is my sincere regret that Daphne and Alan Holbrook are moving south to be nearer their families. Daphne was our Treasurer and a very good one she was - always ready to support new ideas while still keeping the Committee's attention on our bank balance! I'm sure that we all wish them well. Ron George has persuaded (I wonder if that's the most appropriate word?) Ann Laws to stand in as Treasurer, but only until our AGM in June. So we will be looking for a permanent Treasurer at the AGM, so please think about it - it's not a difficult job, nor very demanding, as I can confirm. Ron would like to hear from anyone who might be interested. I have triggered off the other change. For our first five years, I have organised our speakers and I feel that five years is plenty long enough for one person to do that job. So, for that reason and personal reasons as well, I have drawn the line at the end of 1998. Ron is doing the job temporarily but does want someone to take it on urgently. I have said that, with my contacts, I will be happy to produce updated lists of potential speakers, which should make the job easier.

Now on to a much more interesting and, I hope, exciting subject, that of our search for a Roman road in our area. The Society's Lorton Roman Roads Group has already come to the conclusion that it is unlikely that a military Roman road went over Whinfell and has since concentrated on the Whinlatter Pass. We now believe we have demonstrated that a Roman road did in fact go over the Whinlatter; if we are correct, it is a fact of major historical importance for our area. Please see pages 4 to 6 for the story up to now and the plans for 1999. Because of its importance, I have included a reasonable amount of information and I do hope that members find the coverage interesting.

I now have an e-mail address <michael@lorton.freeserve.co.uk> which possibly could be useful, especially by some of our country members.

Currently, I have nothing in hand for the next Newsletter due at the beginning of May and nothing promised yet. If anyone has an article or an idea, please let me know!

We come to Walter Head's fourth and final part of his history of the early years of the Yew Tree Hall as a village hall and this takes us up to the point when the hall was owned and run by the village. I do want to thank Walter for this important bit of our history and invite anyone to do the same for any of our other interesting buildings in the area covered by the Society. Please think about it. Anyway, this final part includes some interesting committee changes, so read on!

The Yew Tree Hall - the early years as a village hall. Final part: 1921

by Walter Head

Following the completion of the purchase of the Yew Tree Hall in December 1920, a meeting was held on 17 January 1921. The balance of the purchase price for the hall had been paid and the bank balance was £346-11-2. Messrs Waugh and Musgrave, Solicitors, had waived their charge of £8-3-0.

The new Board of Management in 1921 consisted of:

J W Towers	appointed by the Brackenthwaite Parish meeting
G Oglethorpe	appointed by the Lorton Parish meeting
J Jackson	appointed by the Lorton Parish meeting
J D Pearson	appointed by the Whinfell Parish meeting
C L Burrows	elected by the meeting
J G Mitchell	elected by the meeting
Mrs C L Burrows	elected by the meeting

At a subsequent meeting held on 7 March 1921, it was stated that J G Mitchell did not wish to join the Board of Management. Mr and Mrs Burrows resigned their membership so that new elections could be held for the three elected members. Five people were nominated and the following three were elected: C L Burrows, Mrs

Burrows and J J Lennox. Then Mr C L Burrows resigned in favour of Mr J H Stoddart but Mr Burrows retained the position of Honorary Secretary and Treasurer.

Now that there was a new Board of Management, the last meeting of the old management committee was held in the Yew Tree Hall on 2 May 1921 at 7.15pm. At this meeting, the cash balance of £10-15-8 and the furniture and effects were passed to the new Board of Management. The final motion of this committee was moved by J W Towers, seconded by J H Stoddart and agreed

“That this committee, having closed up matters in hand relating to the premises, it be and is dissolved.”

The building was insured against fire to the value of £500. The supply of water to the hall by arrangement with Jane Pearson continued in 1921 for a payment of 1/- per annum.

Note from the Chairman.

First, I wish a very happy and peaceful year throughout 1999 to all our members, and a special welcome to those new members who have joined us during the year.

Recently, whilst the family were doing some Christmas shopping in Richmond Hill, Ontario, I was dumped, quite voluntarily, at the Public Library. What a superb custom made building; and there I found an excellent Local History Room. This latter was about as big as the whole of the Cockermonth Library, and was equipped and 'booked' to match. Whilst browsing (unsuccessfully) for any signs of Lorton immigrants, I came across a volume which would gladden the hearts of anyone doing family research and which is called the **Genealogists Research Directory**, known as “GRD”. It is an annual publication which lists the names and addresses of persons who are tracing particular surnames, giving the place and approximate dates that the person is interested in. It is published in Australia and the 1996 directory (the sixteenth year of publication) contains 150,000 entries. Whilst there are entries for surnames from most areas of the world, the great majority are “of importance to persons tracing British, Scottish, Irish, Canadian and Australian families with a fair number of American families included as well”. I naturally extracted a number who hopefully will help me with my own family, and am now awaiting replies to the letters I wrote as a result of that discovery. The UK representative is Mrs. Elizabeth Simpson, 2 Stella Grove, Tollerton, Northampton, NG12 4EY

I am reminded that this Society has now completed the fifth year of its existence. Much has been accomplished during those years, but it is becoming more and more difficult to maintain our talks and meetings on truly local issues. The day must come when we have either to broaden our horizon officially to encompass areas further afield than the strict limitations of Derwent Fells, or begin to go over again the subjects covered by earlier talks. I think both these approaches are reasonable and can be pursued with benefit to all. But there is another and much needed road to be followed. More active research by Society members. That is where the true strength of a Society lies, and that is what keeps it of continuing interest and growth.

So, come on folks, let's all make a genuine long term New Year Resolution - to find something of personal interest and to research it. It does not have to be a large project; and bring the results to share with the other members. And if you can not find anything of your own, then I can find plenty for you to look into - just come and ask. Good luck, and Happy New Year.

Millennium Project - The “Lorton” Yew.

Just a reminder that if anyone is interested in getting a young tree from the “Wordsworth” yew for their own garden!!, applications must be received by the Conservation Trust before the end of January. Ron George has an application form, and will explain what needs to be done. Telephone 85-236.



THE LORTON ROMAN ROADS GROUP

A very encouraging "annual report"



Perhaps a good way to start is to show a photo of a typical moment in one of our excavations on the east side of the Whinlatter Pass. 75% of the group are giving advice (or whatever!) and one person is actually working. And it's wet, of course!

Progress reports have been published in the last two Newsletters giving information about our investigations which included visits to Whinfell, seeing the Roman road over Kirkstone Pass, walking the postulated route on the west side of the Whinlatter and our first excavation on the east side of Whinlatter. So here is Derek Denman's summary of the current position and his future plans.

Summary of the current situation by Derek Denman

In December, the LRRG was one year old and a great deal has happened, although not as we originally expected. You may recall from the last Newsletter that the group had undertaken its first dig on the fell above Hallgarth Farm in Thornthwaite on a Roman-like stretch of road remains, but had found little evidence of an artificial structure; then further excavations were delayed by an impenetrable forest of bracken and the lack of a Prince Valiant.

In October, a brave party of very damp surveyors (mostly male of course) plotted the apparent course of the road (see front cover photo for one part of it) and chose the next site to dig. In early November an even braver party of excavators (mostly female of course) undertook the excavation of a rock terrace section of road remains on the fell side halfway up Knott Head. They found that a terrace had been cut into the bedrock on the shoulder of the ravine above Masmill Beck to form a roadway twelve feet (3.5m) wide, embanked on the lower side and kerbed with largish stones. This seemed to be the structure for about 100m of the road's ascent, the evenly graded and deliberately set out line of the road being consistent with Roman practice in this terrain.

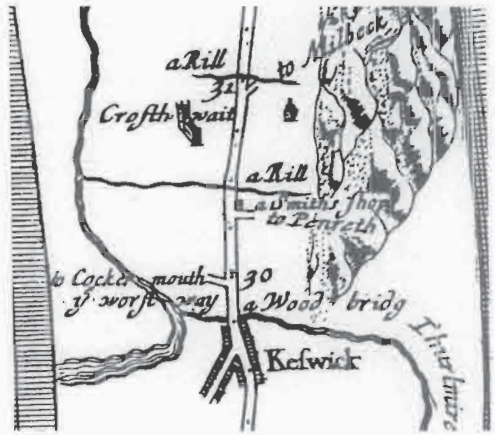
The purpose of the work on this east side of the Whinlatter Pass was to find a Roman road that could be shown to cross the Whinlatter Pass to Lorton and then presumably to Papcastle. As well as finding some roadway of Roman construction, we needed to show that the road could join the only previously known stretch of agger near Braithwaite old railway station, and also cross Masmill Beck near the top of Knott Head to continue up Whinlatter. Then we could be sure that a Roman road did actually cross the Whinlatter Pass. We have managed to do this in a satisfactory way. At the foot of the fell there is clear evidence of a curving terrace, which would take a route to Braithwaite, avoiding the lowest parts of the valley floor. On Masmill Beck we have found a likely crossing point where huge glacial boulders (see photo on right) appear to make a causeway approaching the beck, and large boulders in the beck mark the likely position of a stepping stone crossing, or other structure. This can now be seen by going down the byway from Whinlatter Pass, alongside Masmill Beck for about 100m and turning left to the beck opposite a farm gate on the right of the byway.



We have been fortunate to have had a site visit by Miss Mary Burkett to see the excavations and give an opinion on the road's origins. Her opinion is that the road has a Roman origin and that we probably have

found the beck crossing. Consequently the group is satisfied that sufficient field work has been done here to confidently draw a line on the map showing a newly discovered section of a Roman road. The work has been recorded and will be published in due course.

There remains some work to do on the historical side to track the road history back from the present day. We know that the route over Whinlatter has a long history, certainly before the current road was established as the Turnpike between Cockermouth and Kendal around 1770. Before this, the normal and somewhat longer route between Keswick and Cockermouth was up the east side of Bassenthwaite Lake. In 1675, John Ogilby published his 'Britannia' in which the recommended route from Keswick to Cockermouth is via Bassenthwaite, but his strip map does show a junction left after Keswick labelled 'to Cockermouth ye worst way'. It is likely that this worst way was via the ascent of Knott Head that we have found and was the old Roman route. Our road has certainly been out of use since the Turnpike was made around 1770 and, being a properly engineered road twelve feet wide, is of far better quality than medieval roads. Nevertheless, we still have research to do on road history in this area and a search of land ownership records is needed. Any Society member who can shed light on these matters, please get in touch!



In 1999, the group will need to look at the route from Lorton to Papcastle, where again no trace of a Roman road has been found previously. If it is there, we intend to find it!

The members of the group at December 1998 were: Ruth and Ken Deas, Anne and Robert Flower, Michael Grieve, Joan Head, Daphne Holbrook, Alan Norris and Derek Denman.

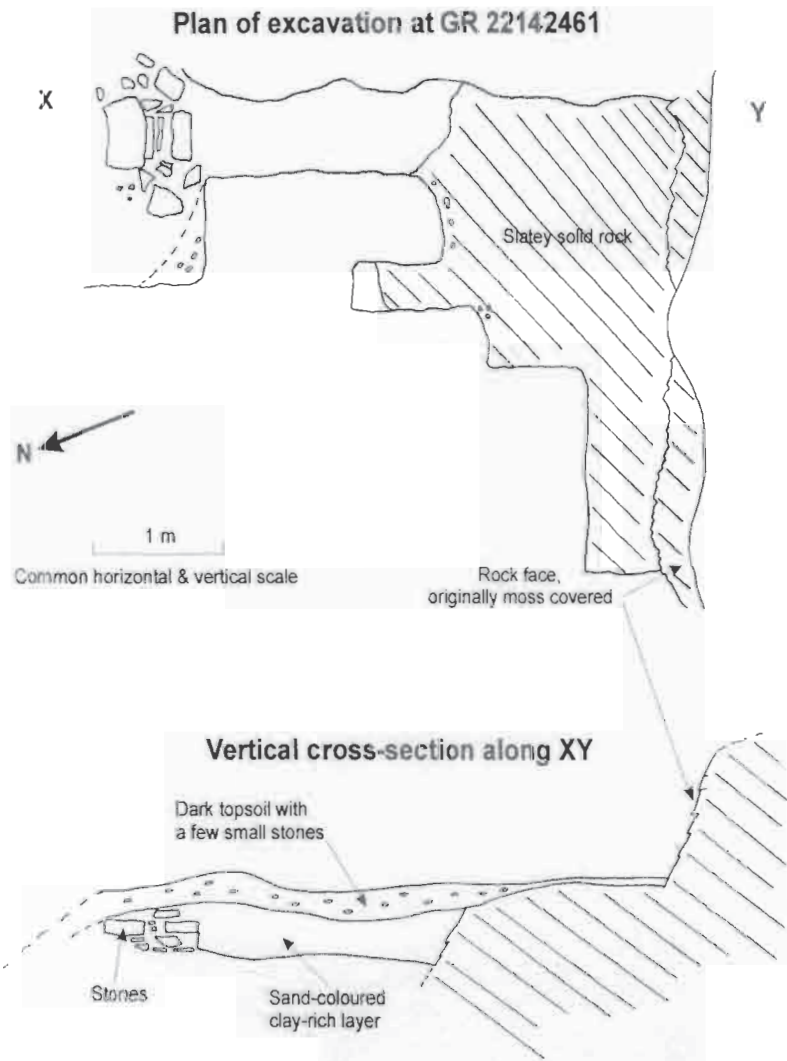
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So that leaves me just to illustrate the important excavation that helped to give such exciting results. This photograph shows the final state of the excavation with the kerb stones at the top, in the excavated channel, and the cut bedrock in the lower half of the picture. The steep drop down to Masmill Beck is off the top of the picture and the nearly vertical cut-rock face runs along the bottom of the picture, below the grass edge.



The strings were accurately positioned so that Daphne could measure everything and she produced a plan and vertical cross-section (measured along the right-hand side string) and I put the two together with, I hope,

suitable annotations. All of this gave the following result, which is an important part of our evidence for demonstrating that there was indeed a Roman road that went over the Whinlatter Pass.



A future article?

I have had two requests from country members for an article on the Lorton yew tree, including its fate in the great storm in the 19th century.

I should really appreciate **either** the offer of a suitable article from someone or a reference to an article that has already been published. It would be nice to have a "home-grown", up to date, article, so how about it? Please would anyone interested in having a go, contact me or Ron. Thanks.

For information.....

Joan Borrowscale, who is one of our country members, came across the following marriage whilst researching in a library and hopes it might be of interest.

ST GEORGE CHURCH, EVERTON - LIVERPOOL

MARRIAGE - 6 JANUARY 1838

PETER PEARSON - OVER 21 MASTER MARINER OF LORTON - CO. CUMBERLAND

ANN HOLT OVER 21 - OF EVERTON, DAU. OF JAMES HOLT, GLASS MANUFACTURER

WTS JAMES HOLT, CHARLOTTE HOLT, CHARLES HY. HOLT

.....and can anyone help?

And Joan is looking for the following two baptisms:

JANE BENSON c1727

said to have been of Bassenthwaite when she married **JOSEPH BORROWSCALE 1751 - EMBLETON**

ISABEL TWENTYMAN c1731

said to have been of Brigham when she married **MATTHEW FEARON AUGUST 1755 - LORTON.**

Any information please to Joan Borrowscale, 21 Churchfield Court, Jones Farm Road, Liverpool L25 3SR

Another stone by Michael Grieve

Just as you had thought that you'd heard the last of local stones, here comes another one! You have Heather Thompson to thank for this one and I have been over to near Derwent Water to have a look at it. It is very near the Borrowdale Road south of Keswick and is by the side of the right of way that goes down to Stable Hills. Ron George will probably point out to me that the title "Derwent Fells" does not include the east bank of Derwent Water but I'm quite willing to incur his displeasure this time.

The stone is on its own on level ground and just has the initials R.D.M. and, below, the number 1834. The back of the stone is plain. So what is the explanation? Heather wonders whether this stone is connected with the two on Whinlatter and are they perhaps boundary stones? Also she asks whether the numbers could be measurements rather than dates (I've wondered this too) and can stones like this can be 'listed'?

Answers please with a £10 note to me, not Heather.



Old maps

Every now and then, I get a request from one of our country members for more old maps to be put into the Newsletter. So first, may I recap on what has been published already.



The earliest large scale map of our area is the Hodkinson & Donald map, which was surveyed in 1770/1771 and published at 1 inch = 1 mile. A copy of this, covering the Wythop Mill - Lorton - Loweswater area appeared on the front of Newsletter No 1 (January 1994). The next map to be produced was the Greenwood map surveyed in about 1822 and again published at 1 inch = 1 mile; a copy of this, covering almost the same area as the last map, was on the front of the next Newsletter (April 1994). The next important map was produced by the Ordnance Survey and these maps were surveyed in 1863 and published at a maximum scale of 25 inches = 1 mile. Newsletter No 9 (September 1996) had High Lorton and Low Lorton on the front cover and I had reduced the scale to 12½ inches = 1 mile to fit them on.

Now this leaves me with a problem because my 1863 OS maps at 6 inches = 1 mile (which go from the old A66 through Embleton in the north to Lanthwaite Green in the south and Maggie's Bridge in the west to Bassenthwaite Lake in the east) are quite large and would easily fill a complete Newsletter! Also, because these 6 inch maps are very detailed, I can't reduce their size to make it all more manageable. So, at least for the moment, I'm going to leave these maps out of the Newsletters unless I get specific requests for particular areas. Then it would be easy for me to include those areas. So over to you!

A secretarial indulgence - the Borrowdale wadd mine

The graphite mine in Borrowdale has always interested me, although I have known little about it. Having read one or two references about it recently, I hope members will be interested in an excerpt from "Magna Britannia" by D & S Lysons, Volume 4 Cumberland. It was published in 1816 and the following comes from pages cxxiv and cxxv. At this time, they didn't seem to know what the material really was.

"At the head of Borrowdale, on the side of a very steep mountain, is the celebrated mine of wadd, or black lead. The demand for this article being limited, the mine is only opened occasionally, so as to answer that demand. As this is a substance which does not require any mechanical process to prepare it for use, great care is taken to secure it from plunder. The mine is only accessible through the agent's house, which is built over it. In consequence of the ease with which depredations on this property might be committed, an act of

parliament was passed in the year 1752 to secure the property, by subjecting the stealer and the receiver to the same punishment as for felony. In the preamble to this act the black lead is described as necessary to the casting of bomb-shells, round shot, and cannon-balls; its chief use is now for making pencils: the coarser sort is employed in the composition of crucibles, and for giving a black polish to iron, &c.* The wadd or black lead is not found in regular veins, but lying in lumps or nodules in the fissures of the slate-rock, the lumps varying in weight from an ounce or less to upwards of 50 lbs. When the mine is opened, a sufficient quantity is procured to answer the demand for several years; the black lead of the best quality is packed in barrels and sent to London by the waggon, the proprietor of which is bound in a considerable sum for its safe delivery. It is then deposited in the cellars under the Unitarian Chapel in Essex Street; and on the first Monday in every month there is a sale of it in an upper room of a public-house in the neighbourhood. The pencil-makers attend, and selecting pieces of the best quality, purchase according to their respective wants. The coarser sort is afterwards sold for other purposes. About three thousand pounds worth of the black lead is sold in a year; the price of that of the finest quality is 35s. per lb.; of the coarser, 120 l. per ton.

Of late there has been some alarm as to the failure of this useful article. It is nearly four years since any quantity has been procured; only three or four barrels were procured in 1814, but we are informed that they have now better prospects. One half of the mine is the property of Henry Bankes, Esq. M.P.; the other moiety is held by several proprietors under a lease for a long term of years, originally made by the person who, in conjunction with Mr. Bankes's ancestor, had a grant from the Crown.

*Fuller says used by the felt-makers for colouring hats."

If my conversion is correct, the 120 l. per ton is almost exactly 1s. per lb. so the poorer quality was 35 times cheaper than the finest. Obviously, at this time (1816), there were worries about the amount of graphite left in the mine and a couple of excerpts from the standard book on local mines (Postlethwaite's "Mines and Mining in the English Lake District", 3rd Edition, 1913) gave the following history and fate of the "Graphite (or Plumbago) Mine"

Page 111:

"The Graphite Mine is situated on the eastern side of Seatoller Fell, near the hamlet of Seathwaite, about nine miles from Keswick. It belonged originally, together with the rest of the manor of Borrowdale, to the Monks of Fumess Abbey: and having at the dissolution of that monastery fallen to the crown, it was granted by James I. to William Whitmore and Jonas Verdon, who by a deed dated 28th November, 1614, sold and conveyed the manor, except the Graphite Mine, to Sir Wilfred Lawson, and thirty-six others. About that time, or soon after, the mine became the property of Sir John Banks, and it is still owned by his descendants."

Page 114:

"Since 1833 the mine has been worked at intervals by various parties; but although a considerable extent of ground has been explored, no deposit of value has been found. It is said that the mineral was first discoveredby the uprooting in a storm of an ash tree, which grew upon the place."

So the mine eventually closed due to lack of 'found' deposits of graphite, coupled with cheap imports, which started coming in to the country around 1833. To show what a financial success the mine was, Postlethwaite gives a number of sales figures, the highest being for a deposit of best graphite found in 1803 which yielded 31¼ tons and would have fetched £105,000 (then!). And in the 1800s, armed men guarded the site at night and the miners were "stripped and carefully searched on leaving their work". The Postlethwaite book, by the way, is really detailed and covers the region's geology and all known mines, with plans for most of them. Michael Moon has republished this 3rd Edition a few times.

The next meeting of the Society is on Thursday, 14 January 1999 at 7.30pm in the Yew Tree Hall

Paul Barker, who works in the Allerdale Council Planning Office, will talk to us about "Vernacular Architecture of the Lake District". We are hoping he will talk about some of the buildings in our area, but there's a story behind that and so we'll have to see!

!! and subscriptions are due !!