

# *The Newsletter*

No 37 - February 2006

## Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society

Brackenthwaite    Buttermere    Embleton    Loweswater    Mockerkin    Pardshaw    Wythop  
www.derwentfells.com

### **Brandlingill Manor in 1954**



Courtesy of KCMG

This is the old Manor at Brandlingill in 1954 as it was shown in a sale catalogue in which everything, including the building materials, was for sale. Has anyone got memories of it? Was it known as a manor house and what was the history of this rather grand building?

*Please let us know*

## Editorial

This is the second Newsletter in our revised format of two Newsletters and two Eavesdroppers a year. I'd just like to make two related points. The first is to invite comments on this new setup; in this way, we can, I hope, make improvements. And it is not only comments - I do need suggestions and material for future issues. The second point is that I've had a few comments on the type of paper used for the first smaller-sized (and outside printed) Newsletter. It was printed on gloss paper and I can understand it's not being to everyone's taste. When the time comes for printing this issue, I'll discuss it with the printer and you should see any result of that in front of you now!

I was given a very interesting notebook a few weeks ago by Jan Tinker whose parents were Norman and Betsy Brown of Whin Garth in High Lorton. The notebook contains the Minutes of the various meetings held to celebrate coronations and jubilees from 1911 to 1977 and Norman was involved in the later ones. Some of the celebrations were extremely well organised with many sub committees and it all makes good reading. I'm sure I speak for all members in thanking Jan for letting us have the notebook which now resides safely in our Archive.

I'm very grateful to a number of members for supplying articles and general information for this Newsletter; most have been used and they have helped to make this a 'varied' issue. Sorry to go on about this, but it is important to receive contributions - and of course this includes suggestions - regularly in order to keep the Newsletters varied and interesting - this is particularly important for our country members of course. MSG

## Title deeds

Michael Baron has heard that Balliol College, Oxford, holds several title deeds of local properties which are referred to on its website and these include Lanthwaite Green Farm, Low Hollins Farm, High Hollins Farm, Oakbank Farm, Netherclose Farm, Rannerdale Farm, Croft House Farm, Wilkinsyke Farm, Pottergill, Bowderbeck Cottage and Bowderbeck Barn.

ca. 160 items, 1581 - 1959 and ten files 1934 - 1963. The website is (no www!):

<http://web.balliol.ox.ac.uk/history/archives> and look under "H. Estates" and "Cumberland".

## Oral history landmark

Some time ago, it was decided to provide copies of our oral history collection of recordings to the long-established Ambleside Oral History Group for public access; a few weeks ago, about half our recordings - now transferred to CD - were handed over in a ceremony in Ambleside. The photo, which appeared in the Westmorland Gazette on 6 January 2006, shows Hetty Baron-Thieme (who has been



the leading light in our oral history group since it was started by Ron George) with "our" CD cabinet in Ambleside library. With her are Dr Rob David, Chairman of the Ambleside group, Jane Renouf, a founder member of the Ambleside group,

Derek Denman, our Chairman and Cecil Otway who is 95 and was one of the first people to be interviewed by the Ambleside group nearly 30 years ago.

As a reminder, our interviews were recorded on audio cassettes and they are all being enhanced in quality and transferred to CD by a BBC engineer. Copies of the interviews will, of course, be kept in our Archive too. MSG

### Your chance to be Treasurer

Chris Bower has been our Treasurer since 2000 and has seen us safely through a period in which our accounts have become a little more complicated but very much more secure. Chris has said that he wishes to hang up his abacus at the next AGM and we are looking for a new volunteer to be the Treasurer of the Society. The accounts are in a good state and no formal qualifications are required. Chris will be happy to advise potential treasurers on what is involved. We are very fortunate to have had Chris's support for these past few years.

### Membership subscriptions are due!

Actually, last November! If you haven't rejoined yet, please would you send your subscription(s) by cheque to:

The Treasurer  
Mr C C Bower  
87 High Brigham  
Brigham  
Cockermouth  
CA13 0TL

Full member £8

Country mem £4

Please include your name, address and telephone number. Many thanks.

### The meaning of 'boon' by Derek Denman

There is an old farmstead in Lorton called Boonbeck, and years ago I asked Ron George what he thought it meant, and he said 'above' in the context of being the only farmhouse in High Lorton that was above Whit Beck, in that you crossed Whit Beck to reach it. This was supported by the



The old waterwheel at Boonbeck Farm  
taken from Whit Beck

use of 'boon' in various field names recorded at various times in both High and Low Lorton. In the parliamentary survey of the manor of High Lorton, taken in 1649 after its owner, the Church of England, was temporarily abolished, the first close behind the farmhouses in High Lorton was usually called 'boonhouse' or some variant spelling, often translated by the time of the tithe in apportionment in 1840 to 'above house'. The close above the church was 'boonkirk' and the 17<sup>th</sup> century deeds of Lorton Hall, in a different manor, list a close 'boondyke', which is above the dyke. But outside of Lorton I could find no other case, and the various experts consulted equated 'boon' to its use in boondays, a service obligation, and could not help.

At last another case has been found and explained in a forthcoming book by Professor Diana Whaley, of Newcastle University, entitled *A dictionary of Lake*

*District place names.* There is in Gosforth a place called Boonwood, also known as Abovewood(e) in 1597, Bounwood in 1692, Bone Wood in 1774 (a confusing mutation) and Bonewood in 1802. The meaning is, of course, 'above the wood' and the derivation is from Old English 'bufan'. So a problem is solved and we are not alone.

I hope that we will be obtaining a copy of the book for the archive, to be borrowed by members, but it will be a fascinating publication for those of us who are curious about names, and it will be published by the English Place Names Society at around £19 when spring arrives.

### **The Lorton yew interpretation board**



This board (which looks much better in colour!) was erected last year in a joint venture between the Lorton Parish Council and us, the local history society. It celebrates the 200th anniversary of William Wordsworth's visit with his sister which inspired his famous poem. It's well worth having a look at it and one nice feature is the map, which was surveyed in 1770 by Thomas Donald, only a few decades before the poet's visit.

### **Early Toilets by Walter Head**

In 1850, a severe storm at Skara Brae on the west coast of the Orkneys removed the turf from some sand dunes, exposing the outline of eight 5000 year old stone houses. Located close together, all eight appeared to be of the same one-room design. In a corner of each house there was a doorway leading into a 70cm square alcove which had a hole in the middle of the floor. The hole was connected to a network of drains which travelled underneath each house and down towards the sea. These cubicles are the oldest lavatories so far discovered.

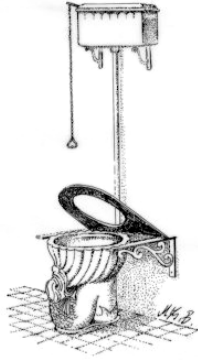
Locally, the earliest form of toilet is thought to have been a hole in the open ground - a cess pit. Later refinements were a shelter from the elements and a seat. The wooden seats were usually made of oak and this remained true for seats into the 20th century.

Prior to the 18th century, the only type of indoor toilet was a chamber pot which was then emptied into the outdoor cess pit. The early chamber pots for the working man were made of copper while crockery ones were used by the wealthier people. Over the years, elaborate pots were made, many with striking designs.

The earth closet, promoted by Henry Moule in the late 18th or early 19th century, was a large advance in this area, the earliest ones were essentially a bucket with soil in it located in an outside building; extra soil was added at intervals and the bucket was periodically emptied.

The first flush toilet was invented by Sir John Harrin in 1596 but was not widely adopted. The 'S' shaped trap was invented by Alexander Cummings in 1775 for use with early toilet bowls. This allowed the toilet bowl to empty directly into the cess pit with standing water in the 'S' trap sealing the toilet from the cess pit's foul air. The traditional 'U' bend trap was invented

in 1782 and this allowed the flush toilet to develop rapidly. A large quantity of water, delivered quickly, was required to flush the pan so early cisterns (either a wooden box with a copper or tin lining or - later - made of cast iron) were located approximately 6ft (2m) above the pan and connected by a large diameter pipe.



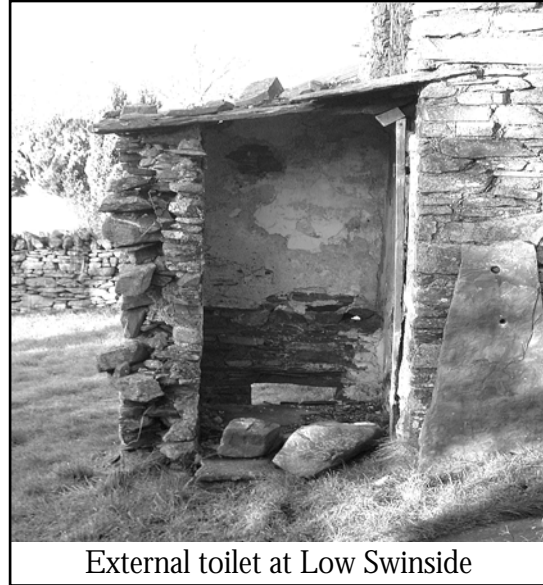
The flush was activated by a pull chain attached to a lever. In the 1880s, Thomas Crapper invented the siphonic system for operating the system without the need for a leak proof valve. In 1886, further refinements combined the water in the bowl with that in the trap and the first British toilet of this design was manufactured at the Beaufort works in Chelsea. These developments enabled the cistern to be lowered and the one-piece toilet combining cistern and pan that we know today was introduced in the 1920s.

Public lavatories were championed by J G Jennings who, in 1851, installed them in Crystal Palace for the Great Exhibition. It is reputed that over 825,000 people paid to use them.

But what of toilets prior to the flush toilets? Different ways of disposing of the waste were used. In some cases, the lavatories, either one or two seater, were designed to stand out over a river or stream thus allowing the waste to fall directly into the water for removal. Hard luck on people living further downstream. Probably the same system was used at High Lorton as the following is an extract from a letter printed in the West Cumberland Times on 25th July 1874: “ ... permit me to call attention of Dr Fox, the Inspector of Nuisances, to the horrible state of Whitbeck, Lorton. The dirt and filth lodged at the bottom of the channel of the

beck and the fearful stench emitted from it in hot weather is enough to cause a pestilence ...”

At High Hollins in Brackenthwaite, the outside stone-built lavatory was built on sloping ground. This allowed the waste to be easily removed from underneath the toilet itself. Another example of this type of design can be seen from the footpath at Low Swinside (see photo).



External toilet at Low Swinside

At Lorton School, built in 1869, there was a block of ash closet toilets, now demolished. Ash from the open fires was placed in the bottom of the toilet and further ash was added from time to time which helped to desiccate the waste and reduce smell. When full, the soiled ash was removed. In the early 1900s, this work was carried out by Alf Mawson with his horse and cart. What he did with the waste is not clear but he owned land at Cass How and it is possible that it was tipped there. The dry closets were replaced by flush toilets following the installation of sewers in Lorton in the mid 1930s.

In the 1800s and early 1900s in Brackenthwaite, most properties were detached and isolated and almost all had a small outdoor toilet in the garden. In Lorton itself however, the close proximity

of the dwellings meant that in some cases the toilets were shared and, at times, this could cause problems.

One such disagreement arose in the Rising Sun area in 1873 which finally resulted in a court case between John Birkett and Thomas Burns. The details are as follows. In 1870, Mr Stephen Mumberson took a house in Lorton which had the exclusive use of a convenience in the garden. At the opposite side of the garden was a convenience used by the Burns family. In 1873, Mr Burns asked Mr Mumberson for permission to use his convenience. Later in 1873, the house previously lived in by Mr Mumberson was sub-let to Mr John Birkett but, on taking up residence, Mr Birkett was prevented from using the convenience by Mr Burns who said he had lived there for 18 years and had bought the right to the convenience from the owner, Mr Robinson, 9 years previously. Mr Burns had put a lock on the door which Mr Birkett had broken off on three occasions to gain access and Mr Burns claimed that five pounds of damage had been caused.

In support of Mr Birkett, the Vickers, who had previously lived in the house currently occupied by Mr Birkett, stated that they had had exclusive use of the convenience and that the Burns family had one on the opposite side. Mrs Cook, an old lady of 71, said that she had lived in the same premises for 43 years (one of four owned by Mr Robinson). She had exclusive use of the convenience and the other three families shared the other convenience.

The judgement of the court was that the convenience should be shared and the court costs divided equally.

#### **Sources**

“Why Does a Ball Bounce?” by Adam Hart-Davis  
West Cumberland Times, 28th March 1874  
and 25th July 1874

## **Ox** **by Derek Denman** **(born in the year of the ox)**

While eating a sandwich of sliced ox tongue, I wondered how long the ox would remain in our culture. Apart from the tongue, the tail also is still consumed in soup. But the traditional dish of braised ox-tail does not seem to have survived the recent law that forbade us to eat beef-on-the-bone; a decree reminiscent of the medieval pope who forbade us to eat horses and thus gave the ox his terminal advantage – being ‘edible on retirement’. So the extremities of the ox, tongue and tail, are still eaten by some. What happens to the rest of the ox? Surely it cannot all go into Oxo cubes. Of course the answer is that, today, there are no oxen in the country and those ox delicacies come from ordinary bullocks, castrated cattle that, by the same law, shall not live for more than thirty months. The word ‘ox’ now seems to be used where it is necessary to name the animal, rather than its meat, ‘beef’, a word which comes through Norman French from the Latin root ‘bos, bovis’. In this country we would not eat bullock tongue or cow tail, and so the ox name just holds on – a heritage food for older folk.

A modern schoolchild probably does not encounter the ox, except in traditional nativity plays where one child gets to wear the horns and to stand next to the child with the ass’s ears. Even the children in the 1950s and 1960s met no oxen; just their eyes in daisies and their blood in shoe polish. Oxen were last used in Shetland in the 1940s, having been replaced in most of mainland Britain during the eighteenth century. In the post-war years the ox’s successor, the working horse, was rapidly giving way to tractor and van. This period would have seen last crops of oats in these valleys, as the need to fuel the working horse was removed. I

recall that the ox lived on in geography lessons. In the syllabus there was the formation of an ox-bow lake, the result of an old river meander which had been cut off and left. It was so-named because it was shaped like an ox-bow, and of course we all had one of those in the shed at home. If not then surely our neighbour did,



because he had an ox and an ass which we were not to covet, presumably with the appropriate tackle? But no; the covetable creatures inhabited an earlier age, the bronze-age second-millennium BC of Moses, but updated in a translation authorised by James I (or James VI if you are Scottish) to instruct the society of 1611. James, no friend of the people of Cumberland, usually skipped the coveting stage and went straight for confiscation of lands and denial of customary tenancies. However, at least back in 1611 the average schoolchild would have understood the shape of the ox-bow lake, and he would have seen his father's servants leading the plough-team, wearing their bows, on the home farm.

The early-modern England of 1611, with oxen abounding and a good survival of records, is perhaps a good time in which to examine the lost culture of the ox, and without any need for gender-inclusive language, because only steer calves could aspire to be oxen; heifers need not apply. A very few steer calves were left intact for careers as breeding bulls, but the majority were castrated to produce large, strong and

docile bullocks destined for consumption, which could be allowed to graze with the heifers without trouble. An ox is, of course, simply a bullock which has been selected and trained as a draught animal, and once in this role the ox could look forward to a working life of around twelve years before being 'retired', whereas a bullock would survive only one or two winters. The Scottish cattle trade, droving through east Cumberland, provided opportunities for locals both to profit from the over-wintering of black cattle, black being the primitive colour, and to select, for oxen-training, suitable one year old stirks who were already partly broken in. Selection was in twos because oxen for ploughing were yoked in matched pairs, who trained together and worked together throughout their useful lives. The wooden yoke bore on the shoulders or withers of the oxen, above the head, and the centre of the yoke was connected to the plough by iron or hemp traces, or tresses. The two ox-bows around the necks held the yoke in place, with the help of the horns.

### **How many oxen?**

How many oxen pulled the plough? It is generally believed that eight oxen were normally used to pull the heavy medieval asymmetrical mouldboard plough (eg O Rackham, *The history of the countryside*), at least in the midlands where the drainage of heavy clay soils required ridges and furrows to be created in the open arable fields. The difficulty of turning this 12 metre long assemblage at the end of the furrow accounted for the 'S' shaped lines of ridge and furrow ploughing. Long, thin strips, or selions, of half an acre were usual and the longer the strip, the fewer the number of difficult turns. The photograph (over) shows just how unwieldy a team of eight oxen was, and there would have been many reasons for using as few as possible, other than the ease of turning at the furrow end



on the headland. One ox provides half a horsepower, though the ox maintains a more steady pull through obstacles, and is a cheap by-product of cattle farming. But oxen had to be over-wintered, and that used precious resources. At plough-time all the arable land had to be ploughed, sown and harrowed over a short period of time, requiring a number of ploughs at work in a township. Oxen had to eat and rest as well as work, and some would become unable to work. The more oxen it took to pull the plough, the more oxen had to be kept and fed. Clearly there would be practical pressures to use as few oxen per plough as possible to draw a single furrow. On flat land with sandy soil, could one not expect a plough-team of eight oxen to pull at least two ploughs, even the mouldboard plough which had to turn the soil over, and to do twice the work? The medieval picture



shows four oxen for a heavy wheel-plough. The illustration in the Luttrell Psalter of 1345 also shows four. Illustrations of eight are not known. Going back to Hesiod, the Greek classical source for farming practice, the team is two oxen for a basic plough:-

'Hew also many bent timbers, and bring home a plough-tree when you have found it, and look out on the mountain

or in the field for one of holm-oak; for this is the strongest for oxen to plough with when one of Athena's handmen has fixed in the share-beam and fastened it to the pole with dowels. Get two ploughs ready work on them at home, one all of a piece, and the other jointed. It is far better to do this, for if you should break one of them, you can put the oxen to the other. Poles of laurel or elm are most free from worms, and a share-beam of oak and a plough-tree of holm-oak. Get two oxen, bulls of nine years; for their strength is unspent and they are in the prime of their age: they are best for work. They will not fight in the furrow and break the plough and then leave the work undone. Let a brisk fellow of forty years follow them, with a loaf of four quarters and eight slices for his dinner, one who will attend to his work and drive a straight furrow and is past the age for gaping after his fellows, but will keep his mind on his work. No younger man will be better than he at scattering the seed and avoiding double-sowing; for a man less staid gets disturbed, hankering after his fellows.' Hesiod, *Work and Days*, approx 700BC.

Ploughing was a communal activity for farmers and their oxen, and no ordinary medieval farmer would keep eight himself. Cuthbert Fisher of Wythop had the most known locally when he died in January 1598, with five oxen in his inventory. By the seventeenth century there are good records of oxen in probate inventories, and some historians have bravely used those records to calculate the total number of oxen in an area, and thence to estimate the area of land under cultivation.

Much larger teams of oxen were used elsewhere and more recently for pulling loads, with teams of up to twenty used for hauling logs in North America. Oxen were as popular as horses for taking the wagon trains westward; cheaper,



requiring less maintenance, and more useful at the destination.

### **The familial ox and its ancestors**

The ox on the early-modern, medieval or ancient farm was very close to the family; a member of the workforce. The oxen were chosen, could be trained to obey five voice commands and were kept for many years. Those used for carting might be shod with ox-shoes, two per hoof. In the ancient longhouse the oxen in the byre helped to provide the central heating. And in High Lorton in the survey of 1649, seven of the nine substantial tenements still had an 'oxehouse' while only two had a stable. The ox had always been important among stock and lived close to the family. Burnt offerings in the Old Testament always involved the less valuable bullock (Leviticus, C1&4), but complex laws and penalties were established to cover accidents caused by or to oxen, which had sufficient status to be stoned for some offences, and not eaten (Exodus C21 v28-36).

Returning to English cultural roots, the main evidence for the ancient linkage between the ox and the family is in its name and its plural, possibly surviving because Latin has no special word for ox, other than just 'bos' which covers all cattle. 'Ox' is one of a few special words, with 'man', 'woman' and 'child', which form the plural with 'en'. This comes through Old English from western Germanic languages, and is a feature still shared in part with modern German, as in 'Herren' and 'Damen'. The ox, therefore, came linguistically with the settlement of Anglo-Saxon people, and it is easy to associate the ox with the name aurochs, old plural aurochsen, which is the Germanic name for the lost native wild cattle of Europe. The ox itself was selected from a domesticated breed of cattle, generally *Bos taurus*, while the aurochs was once classified as *Bos primigenius*, a large and

fierce species which was hunted to extinction. Whilst the eunuch ox may start to approach the size of a bull aurochs, their characters would differ greatly.

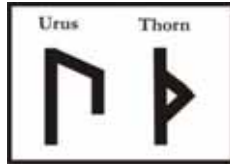
The earliest representation of the aurochs is in the upper paleolithic cave paintings at Lascaux; at least 15,000 years old. Aurochsen were also native to Britain,



in that they arrived before Britain became an island in about 7000 BC, but in Britain the last aurochs is thought to have perished in our early bronze age, about 2000BC. They were, therefore, contemporary with the oxen of the British neolithic farmers from the fourth millennium BC. It was once thought that domestication of the aurochs and the selective breeding of domestic cattle was a local affair, but modern genetic analysis of bone remains has shown that the domestic breeds of cattle result from a single domestication in the Neolithic near-east around the sixth millennium BC. It appears that domestic cattle came to northern Europe and Britain, with sheep, as part of the neolithic revolution. By the 13th century AD, the aurochs' range was restricted to Poland, Lithuania and East Prussia. The right to hunt large animals on any land was restricted to nobles and gradually to the royal household. In 1564, the gamekeepers knew of only 38 live animals, according to the royal survey. The last surviving aurochs, a female, died in 1627 in the Jaktorów Forest, Poland, and has a memorial stone.

### The immortalised ox

It would seem that, the aurochs and the ox having disappeared long ago, the word 'ox' in English will soon lose all connexion with the animal, but long ago both animals made bids for immortality within systems of writing. The local Anglo Saxon and Scandinavian settlers of the seventh to tenth centuries brought with them the runic letters which survive in a good number of sites in Cumbria, for example on the Bewcastle cross. No runic inscriptions are known in Europe before 300AD, but there developed a number of runic futharks, the equivalent of the alphabet. Runes were phonetic, and were also often pictograms representing, say, a tree or animal. While the ox has no rune, the aurochs has the second rune in the anglo-saxon futhark, 'Ur' or 'Urus', representing 'u' or the sound 'oo'. A poem accompanied the runes as both a teaching and remembering aid. In Old-English the second verse was:-



Ur byþ anmod and oferhyrned  
felafræcne deor feohteþ mid hornum  
mære morstapa þæt is modig wuht

Translated as:-

Aurochs is proud and has great horns;  
it is a very savage beast and fights with its  
horns;  
a great ranger of the moors, it is a creature  
of mettle.


The rune represents the horns of the aurochs, without an accompanying yoke. Presumably it is upside down to represent the horns of the charging bull. One can understand why domestication was not easy. In general, runic inscriptions

were discontinued during the conversion of the pagan Anglo Saxon and Norse settlers to Christianity, leaving the Roman alphabet and Latin text dominant. But one anglo-saxon rune survived in common usage into the seventeenth century and is still misused today. This is not 'Urus' but 'Thorn', the rune for the 'th' sound, which was not used in Latin but was required for writing old English with the Roman alphabet. It looks like a capital 'Y', which has resulted in the use of 'Ye' instead of 'the' as in 'Ye olde teashoppe'. For an historian, the mistranslation of the thorn rune as 'Y' instead of 'th' is a criminal offence, though cells of militant historians have not yet been known to deface teashops.

So much for the runes and the aurochs, but all is not lost because there lurks within the Roman alphabet an ox, the civilised aurochs which had to earn a living to survive. Our alphabet derives originally from Egyptian hieroglyphs, and particularly through the way in which phonetic symbols had to be used to write foreign names. But it is the Phoenicians, a trading people, who are generally credited with developing from the Egyptian the phonetic alphabet. From this came the Greek and Roman alphabets, and possibly even the northern European runic futharks. As with the runes, the sound of a letter in the Phoenician alphabet was memorised by choosing a pictogram which suggested the sound in the original language. The letter 'A' was an ox head in the Phoenician alphabet, which came to be represented by two strokes for the horns and one for the

Phoenician    Ancient Hebrew    Ancient Greek



yoke, as shown in these early letter forms. While the pictogram and its phonetic derivation is lost in English, the ox can be restored just by rotating the capital 'A'. The letter 'A' is probably here to 

stay, long after the ox is forgotten.

*Another excerpt from the weekly column  
in the Evening News and Star, 16 February 1979*

### **Riddle of poet's true birthplace**

Until comparatively recent times Cocker-mouth was less than enthusiastic about its most famous son, William Wordsworth.

It is on record that his son, who was vicar of Brigham, once refused a request to give a lecture on his famous father in the town because, he said, "there is not a single copy of any of my father's works to be found in the town."

This was not exactly true, as a local bookseller was quick to point out at the time for he (the bookseller) had William Wordsworth's works for sale in his shop.

It is not recorded whether or not there was a rush to buy Wordsworth, but Cocker-mouth's record in more recent years gives an impression that there was not.

### **DEBATE**

Wordsworth's birthplace was almost demolished to make way for a bus station when a pre-war owner sold it to the Cumberland Motor Services, and it was rescued almost in the nick of time and presented to the National Trust.

Perhaps Cocker-mouth's lukewarm interest in Wordsworth, and in Wordsworth House on the Main Street, is due in part to a long-running debate as to whether or not the poet actually was born in that house.

There have been several investigations, and some strongly held local

beliefs which have raised a question about the house in which the poet was born.

One investigation was carried out in 1882 by a visiting journalist called Griffiths who, at the end of his researches, concluded that William Wordsworth was born in the smaller house on the other side of Low Sand Lane.

### **VANITY**

In virtually the same breath Griffiths said that he had learned that Wordsworth himself, during his lifetime, had been heard to say that he was born "in Mr Wood's house" - Mr Wood being the owner of Wordsworth House at the time.

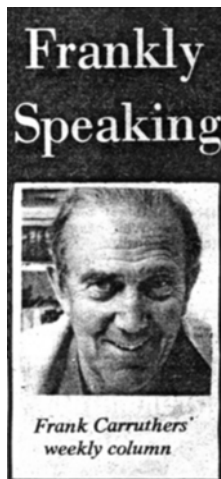
Apparently this Mr Wood also owned the house next door, and Griffiths said that Wordsworth, being vain - "as most poets were known to be" - showed his vanity in claiming as his birthplace a better house than that of his actual nativity.

Griffiths discovered that about the time of Wordsworth's birth, if not for the whole of 1770, Mr Justice Lubbock resided at Wordsworth House, and added: "It is not likely that Wordsworth was born in the house whilst Mr Justice Lubbock was living in it."

This argument can be destroyed in the knowledge that judges lived a wandering existence at that time, and that it is likely that if Judge Lubbock lived in Wordsworth House he did so only for a short time, and probably as a lodger.

The most conclusive evidence that the fine old mansion on Cocker-mouth's Main Street was the poet's birthplace comes in William's autobiography in which he states: "I was born at Cocker-mouth in Cumberland, on April 7th, 1770, the second son of John Wordsworth, attorney-at-law, and law agent to Sir James Lowther."

The memoirs of 1857 say "The house in which he first saw the light of day is a large mansion (now occupied by Mr



Wood) on the left hand side of the road on entering Cockermouth from Workington.”

#### HONOUR

The house was owned by Sir James Lowther, and Wordsworth's father was his agent, a post of considerable importance, and it is natural that he should live in a good house owned by his employer.

Wordsworth spent two years at Cockermouth Grammar School before going, at the age of nine, to Hawkshead Grammar School, and in 1875 when the old grammar school, which was in the churchyard of All Saints, was found to be in danger of falling down, it was suggested that a fitting memorial to the Poet Laureate would be to turn his birthplace into a grammar school, and that a Wordsworth Scholarship to that school would be a fitting monument.

Neither of these proposals gained any favour, and it was pointed out that Cockermouth cared little for the poet for there was not a copy of Wordsworth's poems to be had in any shop in town.



Cockermouth had an unenviable reputation for destroying its heritage of ancient buildings. ....The old Moot Hall which stood in the Market Place, and which Wordsworth would know well, was taken down in 1828.

But if the poet was not honoured in his native town, there was honour for him elsewhere, and in 1881, William Knight, Professor of Literature at the University of St Andrews, wrote: “I believe that the time will come when posterity will care to preserve all that can

be preserved of Wordsworth, just as it has reverently fostered everything that can be connected with the lives of Shakespeare and of Burns.”

Even after that it took more than half a century before the house in which he was born could be said to be safe from demolition.

After Wordsworth House had been rescued from the bus company, and before it was handed over to the National Trust, I was doing an inspection of the house with another member of the committee who had worked to help raise the funds which bought it.

We came to the beautiful first floor drawing room, a light, airy room where the fireplace soars up to the ceiling. My companion looked at the fireplace, sniffed, and said: “That'll have to come out.”

“Why?” I asked.

“It's big and it's ugly, that's why.”

#### OBSESSED

Which only goes to show that even a member of the committee which helped to save Wordsworth House was, true to the old Cockermouth tradition, something of a Philistine, because that “ugly” fireplace is an integral part of the room which, it is said, is the work of the greatest interior decorator of all time, Robert Adam.

Cockermouth's reluctance to do honour to Wordsworth is not out of keeping with the Cumbrian character. They judged the man and not his works, and if he was indeed without a great deal of honour in his own country it was mostly his own fault.

It was probably an impecunious childhood which led Wordsworth to become somewhat obsessed with worldly wealth in his later years. He was not a miser, but he was not much of a spendthrift either.

Neither was a very generous in giving his services to causes, good or otherwise.

In 1840 when a new Church of England school was being opened at Keswick the vicar, the Rev Frederick Myers thought that the presence of the Poet Laureate would lend prestige to the occasion, and duly invited Wordsworth to attend and say a few words.

Wordsworth was a crowd puller that day in Keswick for there wasn't sufficient room for everybody who wanted to attend the opening ceremony.

It wasn't that Wordsworth was a popular man; he wasn't. But he was mostly a very private man, and people just wanted to see and hear him.

The poet sat on the platform at the opening ceremony, displayed no emotions and hardly moved a muscle.

Mr Myers made a speech introducing the great man, keeping it short because he knew, he said, that most of the people there had come to hear what their own great poet had to say.

Mr Myers finished his speech and sat down, turning towards Wordsworth as if to indicate that it was now his turn.

#### SILENCE

But Wordsworth hadn't taken a blind bit of notice of the vicar or of what he had said. There was an uncomfortable silence. Mr Myers leaned over towards the poet and gave him a slight nudge. Wordsworth turned towards him, eyebrows raised. There was a whispered conversation and then Wordsworth stood up and to a rapt audience said:

"My friend Mr Myers has asked me to say whether I agree with the sentiments expressed in the address he has just given you. I have no hesitation in saying that I agree with them entirely."

Which didn't do an awful lot for the Wordsworth image in Keswick because

the Rev Mr Myers had spent all his speech in praise of Wordsworth.

### **Where were the bulls? by Michael Baron**

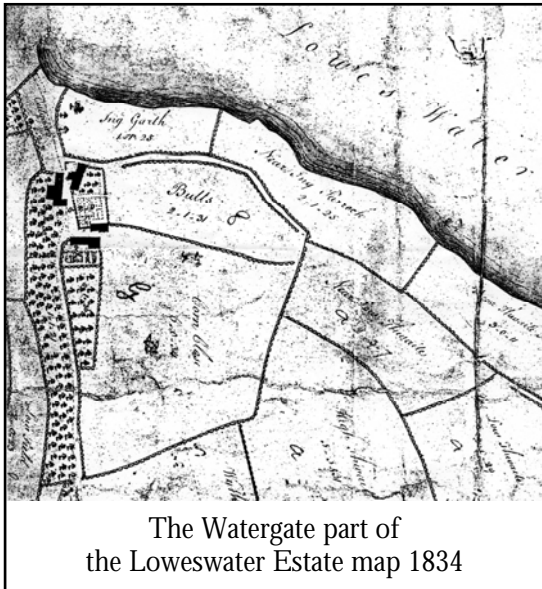
William Dickinson of Workington was the 19th century compiler of "The Glossary of the Words and Phrases of Cumberland". Over many years this zealous advocate for the Cumberland dialect "in its purity" collected and recorded 'local traditions' and details of 'manners and customs of old times'. The collection "Cumbriana or Fragments of Cumbrian Life" was published by Callander and Dixon of Market Place, Whitehaven in 1875, and was sent to the writer by Edgar Iredale, a present-day descendant of many 17th century Iredales. There is a delightful and respectful preface where Dickinson admits 'we are not of the race that is wont to set the lakes on fire' since Cumbrian society consists of 'quiet-spoken people'. Workington on a Saturday night would cause his no doubt bushy Victorian eyebrows to shoot up like rockets. But here amongst the fragments is this bullish piece about Loweswater:

"Some customs bind the tenants to find and keep bulls in annual turns. From this had arisen the term of 'Town Bull', or 'Turn Bull', an animal always famed for his powers of oratory, and not always of a peaceful character. In Loweswater, there is a large pasture held in stints or grasses, and several of the farms have each a right to send so many cattle in summer and sheep in winter. These owners are bound in their annual turns to provide a bull for the use of the rest, according to the number of stints they occupy. It is open to each owner in his turn to put in the worst bull he can find, and the rest have no redress".

So much for love thy neighbour. One can imagine the conversation between

the owner of the worst bull and the owner of the best cow - in dialect of course. So where is this large pasture of which Dickinson was told?

A claim might be made for the field next to Watergate that lies on the south side of the track. It is about 2 acres - large enough? And on the Estate Map of 1834 is



The Watergate part of the Loweswater Estate map 1834

marked “Bulls” and is so referred to in 19th century Conveyances. Whilst some other fields have the telltale lines of stints, ‘Bulls’ had none in 1834. Maybe once upon a time it was ‘stinted’ or part of a larger field until the “several” farmers were told in a “quiet-spoken” way they could take their useless bull away. The name remains. Are there any other candidates for the bull field in Loweswater? Lower your crumpled horns and come forward. Or is there a reader from the group of “many old people ... able, from personal recollection, to confirm the correctness of most of what is introduced”? One early and relatively youthful reader of this unconsidered trifle has come forward and argues forcefully the field name is not “Bulls” but “Butts” in reliance on the Tithe Map description. And the Loweswater pasture is Buttermere Scales under Melbreak (as per the passage at page 25 on stints and grazing practices in

the John Bolton lecture of 1891). “Butts” means an irregularly shaped arable field. Maybe the 1834 draughtsman of the Estate Map just did not push his quill pen hard enough towards crossing his T’s. Take your choice. You may run with the bulls or stay with the butts.

(Grateful acknowledgment to Edgar Iredale who provided the Dickinson extract)



### Roadman on Whinlatter

*From Cumbria Lake District Life, July 1971*

Mr. Norman John Scott was a roadman employed by the county council for over 42 years. He served for most of that time on Whinlatter Pass and remembers when the Forestry Commission planted the first of thousands of conifers. Evergreens now give stretches of the road the flavour of the Canadian backwoods.

Mr. Scott also recalls when Whinlatter was waterbound, puddly in winter and very dusty in summer. The surface was “metalled” about 1926. A car was driven over the pass once or twice a year, the busiest time being when the Keswick Convention was held. “When we were kids, we were very excited when a car came through Lorton village; we would run through the house to watch it go up Whinlatter.”

Trials for early belt-driven, single gear motor cycles took place on an old green lane. “Many of the cycles couldn’t get up the hill.” Attending to the main road involved other people than roadmen. “At slack times, farmers contracted to cart road material to Whinlatter—eight shillings a day for horse, cart and man.”



Mr. Scott was first paid 6s. 8d. a day, "and that was taxed." The 1920s were a time of industrial depression; he was fortunate to have a job. He clambered out of bed at about 6 a.m. to be on duty at 7 a.m. The foreman was often hanging around at 7 a.m. to satisfy himself that the men arrived for work on time. The working day ended at 5 p.m., at noon on Saturdays.



During the 1947 winter, Whinlatter Pass was blocked for six weeks. Each day the men worked hard to cut through snow, there being no mechanical help. Each night a cruel wind blew snow back into the cuttings.

Mr. Scott was a ganger when he retired three years ago. Now he does "a bit of gardening" as a hobby, also contemplating the changes that time has wrought. In his early days as a roadman he cycled to work. Now there is a lorry to transport the men.

He worked at a time when lengthmen were common, and today gang working is the general rule.

### **Bronze javelin find**

Reported in the West Cumberland Times, 28th April 1874:

"The Old Curiosity Shop" in Station Street in Cockermouth had on display a fine bronze javelin head, four inches long with two side loops. This had been unearthed from a depth of four feet while draining a moss on land owned by Mr Fletcher Norman of High Dyke in Blindbothel and it was estimated to be approximately 2000 years old.

Walter Head

### **★ Trip to Furness Abbey and Piel Island ★**

We are proposing to hold a trip on Saturday 13 May 2006 to Furness Abbey (photo) and Piel Island. Dr Rachel Newman, Director of Oxford Archaeology North, has kindly agreed to act as our



guide. Details have yet to be finalised, but the cost will be in the region of £20. A number of members have already made provisional bookings, and please would any

further members who wish to make bookings telephone John Hudson on 01946 861555. Full details will be available nearer the time.

### **Future events in 2006**

A comprehensive diary of local history events in Cumbria can now be found on, and downloaded from, the website of the Cumbria Local History Federation, of which the Society is a member. This is at [www.cumbrialocalhistory.org.uk](http://www.cumbrialocalhistory.org.uk)

### **Our events**

9 March	Talk: Tommy Coulthard - 'A La'al bit aboot Dialect in Cumberland and Westmorland'
6 April	Members' evening: Content to be advertised but likely to include the Society's Manorial Records projects and/or some projects related to Cockermouth
11 May	Talk: Angus Winchester - 'Land Tenure and the Cumbrian Landscape'
13 May	Visit: to Furness Abbey and Piel Island (see page 15)
8 June	AGM followed by presentation on the 'Three Valleys Oral History Project' by Hetty Baron
13 July	Talk: Mike Davies-Shiel - 'Wool is my Bread - the medieval wool trade in Lakeland'
13 August	Sunday at 2pm: historical walk in Loweswater
14 September	Talk: Graham Brooks - 'Lime Kilns, their Structure and Function'
29 September	Kirkgate Centre. Talk TBA by Dr Angus Winchester; in memory of Bernard Bradbury. Jointly with KCMG and Cockermouth Civic Society.
9 November	Talk: Gabriel Blamires - 'The Langdale Axe Factories'

### **Some other events**

23 February: Lamplugh Heritage Society. Roman fort to railway junction. 01946861493

20 March: Keswick Historical Society. Angus Winchester on Manor courts and common rights. 01768772771

23 March: Lamplugh Heritage Society. Local Iron Ore Mining. 01946861493

25 March: Lancaster University at Newton Rigg 9.15am - 4.30pm 'Sources for Researching Cumbrian History' 01524 593770

4 April: Embleton Village Hall Committee (fund raising £3) - History of the Border Regiment. 01768776582

8 April, 2.30 to 4.30pm: Whitehaven Record Office. Workshop on the Cumbria Manorial Records Project (watch for details)



There are many relevant interesting local courses in, for example, Cockermouth, Keswick, Penrith and Carlisle and you can get enrolment and course enquiries from Lancaster University on 01524 592623/4