

AN ACCOUNT
of
St. James's Church
Buttermere

TITUS WILSON
KENDAL
—
1969

By
J. T. PEDDER and ALEC MACDONALD

PRICE 1/6

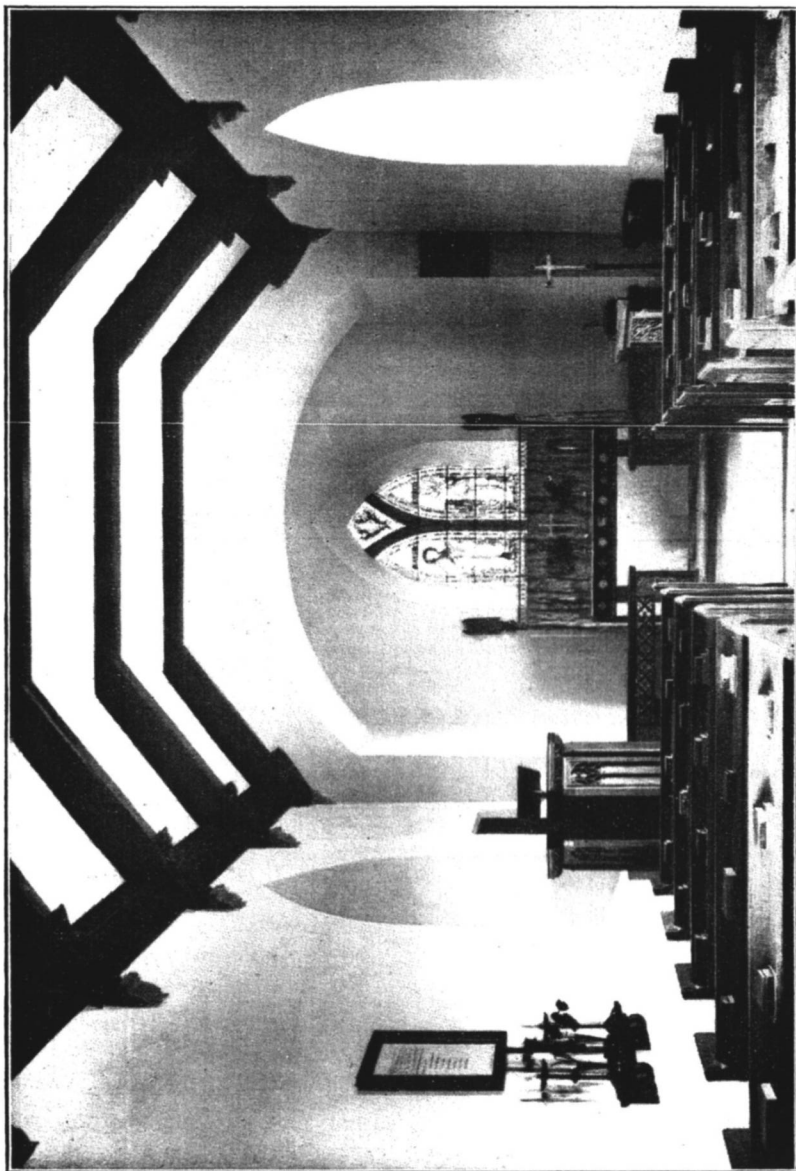
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THE INTERIOR OF BUTTERMERE CHURCH

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Since this booklet was first published in 1936, more general information regarding the bygone history of the church and village has come to light, including an interesting sketch of the old church; it seemed therefore that a new edition of it was now justified.

There are many visitors in Buttermere in the course of each year, and many also—as our Church Visitors' Books indicate—come to see the church.

The village folk too are devoted to their church and are generous helpers in many causes. It is our hope that both they and the visitors will welcome this new edition as giving them a renewed love for, and a little additional interest in, the church and village of Buttermere.

ST. JAMES'S CHURCH, BUTTERMERE

BUTTERMERE CHAPEL

"A man must be very insensible, who would not be touched with pleasure at the sight of the Chapel of Buttermere so strikingly expressing, by its diminutive size, how small must be the congregation there assembled, as it were like one family; and proclaiming at the same time to the passengers, in connexion with the surrounding mountains, the depth of the seclusion in which the people live, that has rendered necessary the building of a separate place of worship for so few. A patriot calling to mind the images of the stately fabrics of Canterbury, York or Westminster will find a heartfelt satisfaction in presence of this lowly pile, as a monument of the wise institutions of our country, and as evidence of the all-pervading and paternal care of that venerable Establishment, of which it is perhaps, the humblest daughter.

The edifice is scarcely larger than many of the single stones or fragments of rock which are scattered near it."

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH—*Guide to the Lakes.*

THE early ecclesiastical history of Buttermere is a matter of conjecture. An enclosure on the north side of the Honister road, opposite Gatesgarth, has long borne the name of "Chapel Garth". Legend points to the ruins of a rectangular building, measuring 30 by 18 feet, which the sceptic would dismiss as a sheep pen, backing upon the eastern boundary wall of Rannerdale Farm, and claims them as the remains of a chantry chapel built about the twelfth century in memory of a victory by the Saxon earl, Boethar (from whom Buttermere perhaps derives its name), over the Norman invaders.¹

It is not until the eighteenth century that we pass from conjecture to certainty, when we find Brackenthwaite, Buttermere and Wythop established as subdivisions of Lorton, which was one of the chapelries of ease dependent on the extensive parish of Brigham. Cockermouth and Embleton were also chapelries of the same parish.² Brackenthwaite had no chapel of its own, as the others had, but, like them, appointed its own chapel Warden. "The sole emoluments of these chapelries", says Ferguson,³ speaking of Cumberland chapelries in general, "was a few shillings, which the inhabitants had, at some remote period, agreed to charge upon their estates. In consequence of their poverty, these chapels were served by unordained persons called 'readers', but, in the time of George II, the bishops (Carlisle and Chester) came to a resolution

¹ Nicholas Size: *The Secret Valley*, p. 76.

² Nicolson and Burn: *History of Cumberland and Westmorland*, 1777.

³ *Diocesan Histories: Carlisle*, p. 173.

that no one should officiate who was not in deacon's orders. The existing readers . . . were ordained without examination."

One of the earliest, if not the first, Reader at Buttermere was the Rev. Robert Walker (1709-1802), known as "Wonderful Walker" and made famous by Wordsworth's Sonnet on Seathwaite Chapel and note thereon, and by a passage in *The Excursion*. Walker was born and died at Seathwaite, where his grave may still be seen. He seems to have served for a few years at Buttermere before returning to Seathwaite in 1736.¹ His stipend was infinitesimal—Buttermere Chapel was "certified at £1"—and he supplemented it by every sort of work, as teacher, labourer, spinner, scrivener, etc., among his neighbours, and taking advantage of the custom of "Whittlegate", which entitled him to reside with each family in turn for a week or two at a time.

The patronage, say Nicolson and Burn, was "for a long time" in the hands of the Fletchers of Hutton, who sold their right, about 1762, to Sir James Lowther, Bart., the ancestor of the Earl of Lonsdale, with whom it still rests.

In his *Fortnight's Rambles in the Lakes* (1792) Joseph Budworth says that the inhabitants of Buttermere, time out of mind, had been used to appoint their own clergyman, and that, though even with the addition of Queen Anne's Bounty it was perhaps the very poorest living in the kingdom, it was "a vehicle for a minor priest to get superior orders", and there had been no lack of candidates; this right they had, however lost, and were now "left to go to Heaven as quietly

¹ This is not stated in Wordsworth's note, but is well attested; see Dr. A. Craig Gibson's *The Old Man, or Ramblings and Ravings round Coniston* (1849), p. 52, and Canon Parkinson's *The Old Church Clock*, 2nd Ed., 1844, Introduction. He is sometimes described as "Curate", but his name is not officially recorded in the Diocesan Registry (see list on p. 7).

as they can". "The Schoolmaster", he says, "without being a clergyman officiates as such; and one from Lorton, the parish church, comes in about once in six weeks to administer the sacrament, which may be the means of preserving the bounty. In this forlorn manner is the service performed in the village of Buttermere. Luckily, it could not have happened in a village where it appears less wanted; but, as good harmless people always regret the loss of a good custom, they regret it." He adds that the chapel was also used as the school, and that it was so small that he could almost touch the roof with his head.¹

Most of these facts are confirmed, and a few others are added, in an article which appeared in the *Saturday Magazine* for November 9th, 1833, from which we take the following extract:

"Amidst the mountains and lakes of that beautiful portion of Cumberland celebrated as the Lake District . . . are found a number of small chapels, all bearing a strong resemblance to each other in size and architecture . . . They are chapels of ease belonging to the different townships into which the parishes in which they are situated are divided . . . They have but small endowments, for they originally belonged to the religious houses, dissolved in the reign of Henry VIII, the revenues of which were then diverted to other purposes . . . Amongst these chapels is that of Buttermere, of which with its adjoining School Room we reproduce a sketch [see Plate opposite p. 2]. It is beautifully situated in a retired vale in the parish of Brigham, nine miles from Keswick. At the time when

¹ It was this book that drew indiscreet attention to the charms of Mary Robinson, the "Beauty of Buttermere", the daughter of the landlord of the Fish Inn, and led her to her marriage, in 1802, to "the Hon. Col. Hope", which left her a year later the widow of a criminal executed for forgery, but at least gave the village and the inn the full benefits of notoriety.

its emoluments were increased by Queen Anne's Bounty, it was certified of the annual value of one pound . . . The few inhabitants of these vales enjoy, even to the present time, as happy a state as we can well conceive to be possible. My information was derived from a person, who, until a few years past, was a parish schoolmaster, and he had full means of observation, for the remuneration of his labours consisted chiefly in taking up his abode for a week by turns, at the different farm-houses. Many of the farms belong to the farmers themselves, and have been very many years in their families. The farmers are called statesmen, or estatesmen, and some have considerable property, but they do not alter their habits when they become rich. I met a man driving his cattle who was worth 20,000*l.* They all bring their families up to hard work, and in frugal habits; they use scarcely anything beyond the actual necessaries of life, and as they breathe a fine mountain air, they are almost invariably healthy. Their personal appearance is good, their countenances have a fine cast, and some of the women are beautiful, but their chief excellence is in their moral habits; public crimes are scarcely ever heard of, and they have few private quarrels. The families are mostly large, and, my informant said, it was a pleasing thing to see members of each one assembled of an evening, at their different indoors employments; they would often beg of him to read to them, and sometimes the whole family would go with him to a neighbouring family, that he might read to both. The old fashion is still continued here, of the farming servants all living in the house with the farmer's family.

"These inhabitants of the valleys have of late years become regular attendants at their Chapels, and the Bible is well circulated among them. They are, as it were, shut out, by their locality, from the rest of the world, and as they have but few wants, which are all

easily supplied, they are more free from the excitements of gain and ambition than the inhabitants of populous places, and but little subject to envy and discontent, or the contagion of bad example."

In 1839, the Rev. James Bush, Rector of South Luffenham, Rutland, and Curate of Plumbland, was licensed as "curate in the Chapelry of Buttermere." He had lived for some years at Hassness, on the shore of the lake. In 1841, Mr. Bush published *The Choice, or Lines on the Beatitudes*, to which he prefixed a woodcut (signed "Orlan Smith, '36") of "the old Chapel of Buttermere, which has been lately taken down." This picture, here reproduced, shows that the chapel stood a few yards above the present church, on the triangle of grass at the foot of the Newlands road. This is even more clearly shown by another engraving, copies of which may be seen at the Fish Inn and at the Victoria Hotel. It is said to have been a white-washed structure holding about thirty people, and was probably the smallest church in England. The only surviving relics of it are the two stone responds, with simple moulded capitals, that now serve as gateposts to the enclosure round the church, and the simple font, which has been mounted upon a modern base.

The present church was built, as the date cut over its door shows, in 1840, and, according to a note in *The Choice*, at the expense of the Rev. Vaughan Thomas, of Oxford.¹

The new chapel was only slightly larger than its predecessor. In 1884, when by an Order in Council a Consolidated Chapelry was assigned to the parish, it

¹ The Rev. Vaughan Thomas (1775-1858), Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, held in plurality the vicarages of Yarn-ton, Gloucs., and Stoneleigh, Warwicks., and the rectory of Duntisborne Rouse, Gloucs., and was the author of numerous historical works, of which the most important was the "Italian Biography of Sir Robert Dudley, Knight" (Oxford, 1861). (D.N.B.)

was inspected on behalf of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners by the eminent architect, Ewan Christian, who reported that it was simply a nave 16 feet by 34 feet 3 inches, with a bell turret at the west end; owing to the inferior quality of the local stone (which, it is said, came from near Sour Milk Ghyll), the walls were damp, and the floor needed restoration. This was made good, and, at the same time, the east end was extended a few feet to form a sanctuary, and a vestry was added on the north side.

The east window was inserted in 1893 in memory of the wife of the Rev. Simmonds Attlee, and the window by the pulpit in 1904 in memory of the wife of the Rev. A. J. Knight.

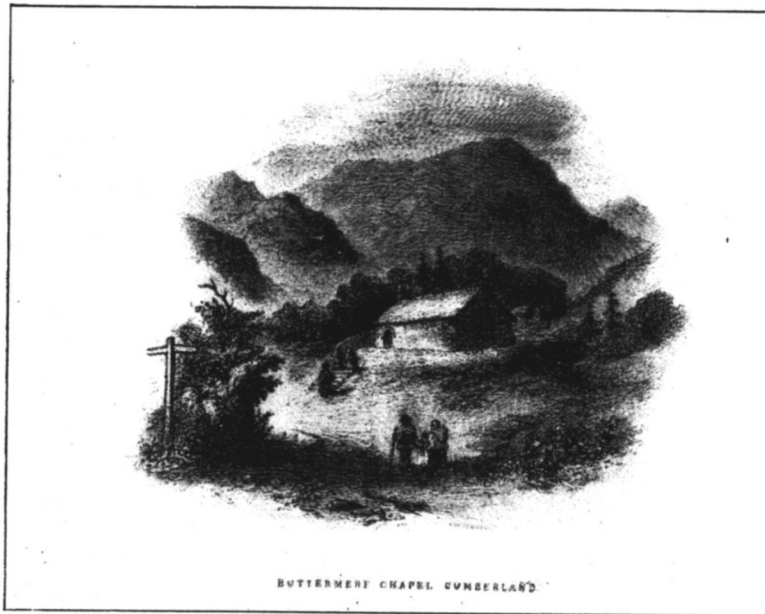
In 1929-30, under the care of the Rev. G. A. K. Hervey, the sanctuary was paved with Honister slate, and the church was completely refurnished in oak. To enumerate all the generous gifts, both from the inhabitants of Buttermere and from visitors, which made it possible to bring the church to its present beautiful condition, would be beyond the limits of this paper. The names or initials of some of them are carved on the details for which they made themselves responsible, and a complete list is in the keeping of the vicar; here it must suffice to note that the pulpit and the hand-made rugs were the gift of the village, and the priest's seat and credence table those of Archbishop and Mrs. William Temple, who were frequent visitors to Buttermere. The pulpit replaced one which had been given, in 1910, by the Rev. Canon Rawnsley, Vicar of Crosthwaite.

The west porch was added in 1933, with local labour, of stone from the lower slopes of Red Pike.

In 1936, an oak umbrella stand and coat hanger were put in the south side of the church porch. These represent the expenditure of a donation of £5. 11s. towards church improvement.



CHAPEL AND SCHOOL-HOUSE IN THE VALE OF BUTTERMERE.
From the *Saturday Magazine*, 9th November, 1833



THE OLD CHURCH AT BUTTERMERE
From *The Choice* (1841)



THE PRESENT CHURCH AT BUTTERMERE

The Baptismal Register dates from 1813 (when the keeping of Church Registers was enforced by Act of Parliament), and the book—so small is the parish that it has not yet half filled its first volume—contains entries dating back to 1801, transferred from an earlier record. The curate was granted a licence to celebrate marriages in 1866, and the Marriage Register dates from that time. Burials are still conducted at Lorton.

There was no vicarage house until 1869. The school was built in 1871.

A plated set of Communion vessels was presented in 1874 by Henry, late Earl of Lonsdale. An old two-handled cup and paten were given to his lordship in exchange.¹

In 1940 the centenary of the present church was commemorated. The Bishop of Carlisle came to preach on the occasion, and to mark the date the interior of the church was re-distempred, a new window replaced an old one behind the reading desk and a new stove was also fixed where a previous one had stood.

In 1941 a Paschal Candlestick was given by a friend who wished to remain anonymous.

The following is a list of the Incumbents. In 1856, Lorton and Buttermere were transferred from the Diocese of Chester to that of Carlisle, and the names prior to that date have been supplied by the Registrar of the former diocese:

circa 1749.	John Steble.
„ 1753.	J. Simpson.
1753.	W. Wilson.
1756.	W. Lancaster.
1759.	C. Gaskarth.
1761.	W. Blennerhasseth.
1762.	R. Brockbank.

¹ Extract from Ferguson's *Old Church Plate in the Diocese of Carlisle*.

1764. A. Birket.
1767. J. Messenger.
1768. J. Atkinson.
1769. J. Henderson.
1772. P. Wilson.
1774. T. Atkinson.
1776. J. Bacon.
1777. J. Wood.
1778. J. Wood.
1780. J. Clarke.
1784. J. Jackson.
1787. J. Wilkinson.
1788. J. Wilkinson.
1789. W. Hutchinson.
1799. J. Wood.
1802. T. Westmorland.
1839. James Bush.
1843. J. M. Woodmason.
1873. Arthur Monier Williams, St. Aidan's
Coll.
1882. Simmonds Atlee, M.A., Cantab.
1892. Henry Robert Dunlop, St. Bee's Coll.
1897. George A. B. Chamberlain, M.A.,
Cantab.
1898. William Copeland, St. John's Coll.,
Highbury.
1902. Alfred John Knight.
1909. Jeremiah Irwin.
1926. George Aidan Kingsford Hervey, M.A.,
Oxon.
1931. Geoffrey Norman Orme, M.A., Oxon.
1935. John Tudway Pedder, M.A., Oxon.