A historical walk in Loweswater

This three mile walk starts and finishes at the Kirkstile Inn and give an outline of the history of Loweswater and its people during the last thousand years. The route is shown on the accompanying map, which is based on the first series Ordnance Survey of 1863, at 6" to one mile. Not much has changed.

The Kirkstall and St Bees Priory

Start from the Kirkstile Inn **1**, adjacent to the Church. For a while in the 19th Century the Kirkstile was called the Hare and Hounds, but the name Kirkstile takes it back to its eighteenth century name, and reflects the ancient name of Kirkstall, recorded for the cottage in 1550. Kirkstall means what it says; the place where visitors and horses would be accommodated for church events, but it became a farm in its own right. Before the dissolution of the monasteries the Kirkstall was in the hands of the Priory of St Bees, together with St Bartholemew's Church and a quantity of land called Milnehowe (Millhow) and Kirkcroft. In 1539 when the priory was dissolved, the church came to the Church of England, and the other confiscated property was sold, coming to Richard Robynson in 1550, together with the manor of Brackenthwaite,

KIRKSTILE INN AND MELLBRAKE, LOWESWATER.

over the Cocker. Who was this Richard Robynson? He was the recent priest of the Chantry of St Michael in the parish of Brigham, a Catholic chantry where prayers were said for its sponsors, which was, of course, also dissolved around that time.

St Bartholomews

Move on to the churchyard **2.** The current church was built in 1827, and rebuilt in 1884. At this time the fourteenth century bell was sold to fund the work, but was repurchased in 1972. It was only in 1895 that Loweswater became an independent parish, after nearly 800 years as a chapel in the enormous parish of St Bees. St Bees Priory was founded around 1125, and noblemen bestowed property on it as a religious duty, supporting the monks. The Priory had the chapel and tithes of Loweswater plus two bovates of land (20 to 40 acres presumably including the Kirkstall, Millhill and Church croft noted above) were given by Ranulf de Lyndesey, and that Loweswater chapel existed before St Bees Priory was created. So Loweswater was already substantial enough to have a chapel in 1125, which suggests that a settled village has existed for at least 1000 years.

After 1125 burials were at St Bees and the dead had to be taken there. There are traditions about certain Loweswater paths being old corpse roads, but it is really impossible to say now which routes were taken. In 1281, because of the distance, Archbishop Wickwane of York licenced the monks to raise the status of Loweswater and create a graveyard, when it pleased them. But they did not for many years. The earliest parish registers of Loweswater and recorded burials are 1625, and those earlier are lost. We can be sure that people were buried here in the 1500s, which is a long time to remember the paths.

In 1500 everyone in Loweswater was a good Catholic, and by 1600 everyone in Loweswater was a Church of England protestant. By 1700 after the civil war, many in the west of Loweswater were Quakers and formed part of the community based on Pardshaw and stretching down the west side of the cocker.

Gillerthwaite and the medieval open arable fields

Leave the churchyard and take the lane the important old junction at **3.** Workington and Whitehaven it is straight on up Bellows Hill. Probably it is this road which has the tarmac because of the growth of Whitehaven in the C17th, when this road being the best route from Whitehaven to Keswick and Penrith. The road we have just come down seems no to go just to the Church and Kirkstile, but the continuing old

fell road takes you to Ennerdale Bridge, to Egremont the seat of Loweswater's first baron and St Bees, perhaps in your coffin.

In this area was the working centre of the village. Here was the smithy, and in Gillerthwaite in the C19th lived the joiner – the smith and joiner/cartwright would work together. Also at Gillerthwaite was the village post office. Just up the hill there at Rose Cottage **21** the small day school of 1780, replaced in 1739 by the fine new school **20** built by John Marshall, the lord of the manor. Closed 1948 – now the village Hall.

Take a sharp right turn into Gillerthwaite. **4**. Take the footpath in line with the buildings, noting lost buildings to the right and turn left onto the quiet lane at **5** to Muncaster House at **6**. This lane goes along an old baulk through Longlands field, in which the medieval villagers would have strips of open arable land, probably worked communally and producing oats and some barley. It is easy to forget nowadays that the people lived mostly on their crops, not animal products, and that Lakeland townships and farmsteads needed to be self sufficient in grain. The remains of open arable fields, as seen also in Lorton, Buttermere and Embleton, suggests an Anglian, pre-Norman village. The lane is in line with the furrows of the open field, but at Muncaster House take the gated road, now a footpath, which was the major

Gillerthwaite by Bogg, 1898

headland through the arable fields, and the turning area for the plough hauled by oxen **6**. Through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, parts of these fields found permanent owners and were enclosed, to produce the patchwork shown on the map. Note the long narrow strip on the map called shirt sleeve **7**.

The deer park

Reach Park Beck at **8**, and note that it was only canalised around 1900, when the level of Crummock was raised about three feet to provide the water supply for Workington. Cross over to what was once the common, or waste, in 1200, but was enclosed as a deer park by the lord of the manor in the thirteenth century. Here it is necessary to consider the post-conquest ownership of Loweswater, other than the Church and Kirkstall, which were donated to the monks. There is a shortage of historical information before the Norman period, and no Domesday book for Cumberland, but the people then might have been British, Anglian, or Norse, or a mix. Loweswater was in the forest and Norman Barony of Coupland, renamed the Barony of Egremont by the twelth century.

The smithy 1920s

When St Bees Priory was formed around 1125, Runulf de Lyndesey held the barony and made the gift of part of Loweswater. Through marriage, the barony of Egremont came to the Lucy family, but when the male line failed, Loweswater came as one twentieth of the barony to co-heir Alice de Lucy and her husband, Alan Multon. The park was created from the common in two stages in the late 13th century by Alan and then son Thomas, who took the surname Lucy. As lord of the manor he held all the land, the farmsteads the mills and and the commons, the farmers being his tenants and rendering rent and fines. But the tenants established strong customary rights, almost equivalent to freehold, and managed to retain those rights through legal challenges.

Peel and the medieval manor house

Move on along the ancient access road to the ruined farmstead called Peel **9**, after the fortified manor house that was once nearby. In its latter days it was occupied by the websters, or weavers, of Loweswater and last recorded as occupied in 1876. Climb to the top of the hill **10**. It is recorded that Thomas de Lucy seated himself in the park, around 1300, and so it is likely that he constructed near here a pele, or fortified refuge, and a moat was constructed below. The land to the south-west had numerous closes called Boness, or Bones or Bonus in the nineteenth century. The name Bowness, common in Cumbria, means a bow shaped headland or promontory, which well suits the way the park meets with the lake, and may be the origin of Balnes, as the park is sometimes named. The manor of Loweswater was acquired through marriage when Maud Lucy married the Earl of Northumberland. The three farmsteads of High Park, Low Park and Peel reflect the tenanting dis-parking of the park for agriculture during the

Northumberland period. Loweswater manor remained in that family until the sixth earl, dying without issue and needing to re-establish loyalty, gave Loweswater, Thackthwaite and much other property to Henry VIII in 1530.

We noted above the purchased of the priory property and the manor of Brackenthwaite by Richard Robinson in 1550. In 1546 Richard Robynson had purchased from Henry VIII the manors of Loweswater and Thackthwaite, previously owned by the Earl of Northumberland. The rest of the Earl's manors, including the honour of Cockermouth were returned to the 7th Earl. The separate property of Mockerkin and Sosgill, part of Loweswater chapelry, were also returned to the Earl as part of Derwentfells manor. And so from 1550, Richard Robynson held Loweswater, Thackthwaite and Brackenthwaite, as had Thomas de Lucy before 1300, plus the monastic lands.

The extent of Loweswater
A look up Crummock towards Buttermere will illustrate the extent of Loweswater manor, parish and township. The boundary between Loweswater and Derwentfells manors ran along the western shores of both lakes and up Warnscale Beck and Dubs Beck to the watershed at Brandreth. Loweswater civil and parochial parishes run only as far as Sour Milk Gill, which drains Bleaberry Tarn. Scale Force is wholly in Loweswater.

Crummock and tourism
This vantage point at Peel is a good place to consider some later history, when the tourists arrived in the 1770s. At that time carriages could proceed from Keswick over the Whinlatter Pass turnpike road, and go on to the foot of Rannerdale Knott, but could not go to Buttermere, because the road went over the promontory at Hause Point, before about 1805. In that early period the Scale Hill hotel developed from a poor roadside alehouse to become one of the most important coaching inns in the English Lakes. From the inn, tourists would travel by boat to Ling Crag to see Scale Force, then visit Buttermere on foot, and then return by boat to meet their carriage at Hause Point. There was a clear class distinction between the Scale Hill Hotel and the Kirkstile, or the Hare and Hounds. Scale Hill was a modern hotel for the carriage trade, while Loweswater provided the picturesque rusticity they had come to see, and pass through.

On the old common
Go down to the lake where you wish and follow the shore south, noting the moat with possible earthwork remains at **11**, and exiting the enclosed park by the gate 12. Turn right steeply up along the wall, or by any easier convenient route, to reach the commons gate at High Park. The wall marks the boundary of the park, established around 1300. On the way, notice the occasional remains of old walls going up the lower slopes of Mellbreak. These were further stinted pastures on what was once the common, but were demolished from the 1860s, when the rest of the commons were enclosed. The entry from the common into the gate at High Park **13** has the typical funnel shaped intake which identifies a commons gate, needed to gather in the stock..

[The walk continues on outside of the intake wall, but can be shortened by going through the gate, through Low Park, over Park Bridge and turning left along the lane. In the 1841 census High and Low Park were home to 42 people, 18 of whom were children. Park Beck was once the limit of the lord's park and the crossing was called Dupwath, being the crossing on Dub Beck, as Park Beck was then called. Partway along the beck are the remains of Beckhouse Bridge, which gave access to a mysterious lost property called Beckhouse.]

The walk now continues outside of the old commons boundary wall through Flass Wood, skirting the northern flank of Mellbreak, up to the commons gate at Bargate. This wall between Park Gate and Bargate existed in 1814, but is not as old as the wall around the Park. Rather it represents the end result of several small enclosures from the common, or waste, perhaps from the sixteenth century on. Continue outside of the woodland to its very end, when you meet the lane or old road through Mosedale, and turn right towards Bargate. This road was the traveller's route by foot or horse both to Buttermere village via Scale Beck and also to Ennerdale Bridge and beyond via Floutern Tarn – though difficult in wet weather.

The mill dam on Mosedale Beck
At **14** is the crossing of Mosedale Beck to Hencomb, outside of the boundary wall and now on right-to-roam land. Hencomb, Whiteoak and the land beyond provided opportunities for extensive lead-mining in the nineteenth century. These mines were on the same vein as the workings at Nether Close and Force Crag. Go down to the beck, a pleasant place for refreshments. At this point a large dam was once built which clearly provided the start of the leat to Bargate, Loweswater's fulling mill before 1800. The start of the leat can be clearly seen east of the beck. Loweswater's corn mill, once the lord's mill, was also fed by a leat from Mosedale Beck and was located in the Millhill/Stockbridge area. Further detail is a subject of current study, but it is certain that the published idea that Loweswater had a windmill cannot be supported, and it seems that the water corn mill became redundant in the later 18th century.

Return to the lane and go north towards Loweswater. Soon you have the only view of Loweswater Lake on this walk. The village of Loweswater is in two parts, that which the walk has covered near

Crummock, and the collection of farmsteads at the head of the Loweswater Lake, often called someone's Place, after the family that owned them.

Bargate

Go through the old commons gate **15** and note on the left the route of the old access road, between trees and wall, to the ruin of Bargate **16**, destroyed by fire in the early twentieth century. Bargate contained a water-powered fulling mill, used to treat woven woollen cloth to cleanse, felt and shrink it before it could be used. The cloth was dried on the tenter riggs, and held with tenter hooks. Bartgate reminds us that the wealth of medieval and early modern Loweswater was in its sheep, their wool and the cloth which was made locally for family use but mostly for sale. As spinning became a factory process in the late C18th, domestic spinning, local weavers and fulling greatly diminished. Going on, as you make a sharp right turn, the field to the left was called

Bargate before the fire.

Tenters, which at once identifies the function of the 'earthworks' **17**, marked on the modern map. When the old map was drawn they knew that the earthworks were associated with the disused tenters. By the late eighteenth century, the websters of Peel were taking their cloth to the fulling mill at Lorton.

Kirkhead

Continue down the fell lane, which was probably on the medieval common and once marked the limit of the enclosed land of Bargate and Kirkhead to the left. The land to the right was called waste, and the old funnel-shaped intake highlighted on the map before Kirkhead, suggests that the medieval commons gate was probably located here at **17**, rather than at Bargate. Go through Kirkhead **18** and note that this was the most important farmstead of Loweswater. In 1841 this farm, and much other farmland, was owned by the ancient local Buttermere and Loweswater family of Hudson. John Hudson was considered a gentleman, and now lived with wife Mary at Hudson Place as a principal statesman farmer.

Loweswater in modernity

Continue over the bridge to the Kirkstile to finish the walk at **19**. Some words need to be said about the path that Loweswater took as a village after the mid nineteenth century, where this history has ended. It has been noted that the map of the 1860s works well today, except that much of the built environment has gone and little new added. On the walk, Peel, Bargate, Steelbank and Millhill are gone, together with post office, shop and school. Lorton took a different path, probably because it had a village centre which the turnpike road over Whinlatter connected Lorton with Cockermouth and Keswick in 1770. Loweswater lost its corn and fulling mills early, while Lorton retained its two corn mills, developed its fulling mill into a flax mill and saw the start of the Jenning brewery. In Loweswater, the shift from mixed farming to pastoral farming involved a reduction in employment and population, resulting in redundant outlying farmsteads. However, Loweswater, with its lake, became popular with tourists as an example of picturesque rustic simplicity, but not a centre of tourism. Loweswater village was visited from Scale Hill or Buttermere rather than providing inns and facilities which would provide employment. That model, with the addition of country residences, has changed very little.

Walk map of Loweswater Village, based on the six inch first series Ordnance survey map of 1863

500 metres

N

Derek Denman August 2010 rev. 2014

To Keswick & Cockermouth

Lanthwa(ite) Wood

Deepa Bridge

lead mines

Longlands Field (open arable)

Mean Ing

Crag

Peel

Boness

Crummock

Near side

School 1780

The Parsonage

Smithy

Gillerthwaite

St Bartholomews Ch.

Bellows Hill

1839

gate

Flass Wood

Flass Green

Flass Wood Top

Commons

To Ennerdale Egremont & St Bees (& Buttermere)

Old commons intake

Waste

Tarn

Tenters

Fulling mill

Barn

Leat

gate

Dam

Park Beck

Kirkhead

Stock Bridge

Mosedale Beck

Corn mill?

Mill Hill

medieval commons boundary?

Commons

To Workington (& Whitehaven)

Loweswater

Dub Beck

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