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Society News

Message from the Chair

I found it a slightly surreal experience to chair the Society's 2021 Annual General Meeting in June while in a very rural part of Scotland. But using Zoom enabled me to do so notwithstanding a narrow bandwidth, and it was pleasing that there was a good number of Members 'present' in a virtual sense for the meeting and the following Talk.

Following her election at the AGM as a member of the Society's Committee, Clare Round, of High Lorton, has kindly stepped forward to act as committee secretary. I'm very grateful to her for having done so. The Committee nevertheless continues to hope that another member of the Society will volunteer to fulfil the role of Hon Secretary to cover other functions in the running of the Society, particularly in relation to keeping in touch with Members.

The advent of using Zoom for the Society's bi-monthly Talks during the continuing Covid 19 pandemic emergency has, I believe, been a positive development despite its limitations. One of the main disadvantages is that Members do not have the opportunity to socialise with one another prior to and following a Talk. The Committee is very much aware of this issue, and it is hoped to resume holding physical meetings as soon as that is practicable.

As an enhancement of what is offered to Members, however, it is planned to arrange simultaneous 'live streaming' of Talks that are physically taking place. I should, perhaps, explain that live streaming would allow individual Members, as in the case of using Zoom, to log on to a link provided by the Society which would enable them to be 'virtually' present at a meeting at which a Talk is being delivered to Members who are all in each other's physical presence.

The Committee had planned that the first Talk this year when Members could

Our future programme 2021

15 Aug 21	Walk: 'A tour of early Lorton'. 2-5pm.	See this issue
19 Aug 21	Mines of Coniston, pre-walk Zoom talk.	See this issue
9 Sep 21	'The pilgrimage of Grace'.	Dick O'Brien
12 Sep 21	Historical walk: 'The Mines of Coniston'	See this issue
13 Oct 21	Walk: 'The Archaeology of Early Buttermere Settlements'.	See this issue
11 Nov 21	'Cumbrian dialect in the nineteenth century'.	Professor Matthew Townend

Talks are at 7.30 pm and will continue to be delivered using Zoom until further notice.

Officers and Committee 2021/22

President Professor Angus Winchester   Financial examiner Peter Hubbard

Charles Lambrick *Chairman*	01900 85710	Lena Stanley-Clamp *Membership*	01900 336542 *ldflhsmembership@gmail.com*
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Christopher Thomas *Treasurer*	01900 822171	Fiona Lambrick Clare Round *Committee members*	Hugh Thomson James Lusher - walks

Diary dates

7-21 August 21, excluding 15 August, 11am – 4.pm Exhibition on Dorothy Wordsworth, Kirkgate Centre. Cockermouth Heritage Group

12 October 21, Dr Alan Crosby will give a talk on the 800 years of Cockermouth's market charter. Kirkgate Centre, or Zoom if necessary.

The next issue of the *Wanderer* will be published on 1 Nov 2021. Please send any short items to the Editor, Derek Denman, in early October.

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http://www.derwentfells.com

https://www.facebook.com/Lortonlocalhistorysociety

choose either to meet physically at the Yew Tree Hall or participate through live streaming would be that to be delivered on 9 September. However, in view of the renewed uncertainty (at the time of writing) as to the practicalities of arranging public meetings in relatively confined spaces together with uncertainty as to Members' appetite for doing so, the Committee has decided to postpone the introduction of live streaming Talks. The September Talk will therefore be delivered using Zoom again. There will, however, be the opportunity for Members to meet each other in the open air during the next three months when several historical and guided Walks are planned to take place. Details are to be found on page 3.

Charles Lambrick

Our Society will need a new Treasurer

Christopher Thomas is in his fourteenth year of being our treasurer and would like to hand on the baton to someone else at the end of this year. Chris is a professional accountant, having looked after the money at Haverigg Prison and Lakes College in his career, but you need neither his qualifications nor his CV to look after our finances.

If you can spot the difference between money coming in and money going out, understand a bank statement, and can copy its details into an Excel spreadsheet you will have the basic technical skills. You would become a member of the committee and, as well as keeping them informed of our financial position, would be part of the team planning the ways the history of our area can be shared with its inhabitants.

We receive about £1,400 in subscriptions from about 160 members each year, most by transfers into our bank account, and £3 a head in cash from about 100 non-member visitors to our lectures. We pay out about £800 a year to put on seven lectures and about £500 on publishing the Wanderer and other communications to members, plus a few hundred more on special projects. In 2019 Chris wrote out 30 cheques. The annual accounts are drawn from the summaries of the transactions in the spreadsheet.

If you think that you might wish to do this for our Society but would like a chat with Chris to get more details about what is involved please give him a ring on 01900 822171.

An opportunity to be our Refreshments Co-ordinator

Many members will be missing the refreshments at the end of our meetings, which have been a valued part of the Society since 1993. When we restart our meetings for talks, not before the Winter, we would hope that we will be able to include refreshments, and the convivial discussion which goes with them.

Judy and John Hudson have provided the refreshments for several years and had decided, before the current problems, that it was time to make way for others to enjoy the experience and to receive the gratitude of society members, which they have undoubtedly earned.

If one or two people would like to take on the provision of refreshments at meetings, then Charles Lambrick would be very pleased to hear. One key benefit is that the providers get to choose the biscuits.

It may be that the timing of the meetings would not suit a general commitment, and in this case we would hope to find a Refreshments Co-ordinator, who might provide refreshments on some occasions, but would be willing to organise a rota of members who would provide refreshments. If you would like to be Rereshments Co-ordinator, or would be happy to be on the rota, then again Charles would be keen to hear.

DD

Autumn Historical Walks Programme

After a long absence, we are pleased to recommence Live History Society meetings with three planned historical walks. Each has a different flavour and appeal. ***A tour of Early Lorton; The Mines of Coniston; the Archaeology of Early Buttermere Settlements.*** Participation is limited to just twenty individuals for each tour. That aside, it will be a welcome return to getting our history in person, rather than in front of our computer.

A Tour of Early Lorton

Date: Sunday 15 August at 2.00pm. Derek Denman.

Meet: The Pound, High Lorton. The green space behind Yew Tree Hall.

Waiting for us at the Pack Horse, perhaps?

Description: A tour of early Lorton will be a leisurely walk of less than three miles and three hours around the two villages of High and Low Lorton. Derek will explain the early origins of the villages and the relationship between the two. We will hear the way in which the wealth and industry of the villages changed over the years and see the significant buildings in the village, or what is left of them.
Terrain: The walk is on roads and public footpaths so a good pair of comfortable shoes should be adequate. The valley floor is flat but there is a steep climb up to the old turnpike road and the site of the Tenters Fulling Mill. Please bring a bottle of water and a sun hat or wet weather gear or possibly both. About three hours.

The Mines of Coniston
Date: Sunday 12 September at 10.00am. Mark Hatton of CATMHS.
Meet: At the rear of the Ruskin Museum, Coniston (about 1hr drive from Lorton).
Description: A guided walk around the Coppermines Valley. Coniston was worked for its copper ores from 1599. The peak mining period was the 1850s when several hundred men, mainly from Cornwall, Yorkshire and Ireland worked here. Much remains of the mines' water-powered infrastructure and mills allowing us to piece together the progress and history of these mine workings through to the twentieth Century.
Terrain: The walk is on mountain paths and rocky tracks and suitable for fit and confident fell walkers only. There are steep gradients in places. Walking boots and clothing suitable for hostile mountain weather must be worn. Bring a flask and a packed lunch. It is an overground walk only and we will not be going underground. About six hours.
There will be a complementary Zoom talk on this subject to precede the walk on Thursday 12 August at 7.30pm.

The Archaeology of Early Buttermere Settlements.
Date: Wednesday 13 October at 10.30am. Peter Style.
Meet: The green space outside The Bridge in Buttermere. NT car parks are nearby.
Description: This walk follows up on Peter's Zoom talk from February 'From Roundhouse to Sheiling' and looks at the archaeological evidence for early settlements in Buttermere.
Terrain: The walk is on rough moorland paths and suitable for confident walkers only. Sturdy footwear is recommended. Bring a flask and a packed lunch. About four hours.

Booking Information
If you would like to attend a walk, please email me at *LDFLHSzoom@gmail.com*. If you are unable to email, you can call me 01900 85196. Please provide details of the people who will attend the walk, whether they are a member of the Society and your walk preference. If you wish to attend several walks, please provide the order of preference.

Priority will be given to Society members. If demand is very high, we will select using a ballot. for those of you who wish to attend several, we will allocate them based on your preference.
James Lusher

Meeting Reports

The Corpse Roads of Cumbria

a report by Clare Round

The talk on 13 May about the corpse roads of Cumbria was delivered to us in the comfort of our homes by Alan Cleaver, who together with his partner, Lesley Park, have researched these ancient paths and produced a book on them. By now I, for one, am becoming more used to the Zoom format and enjoy having a cup of tea and a notebook by my side on the sofa! Though inevitably (for me), there are moments when I feel anxiety for the speaker….is he or she able to see smiling and engaged faces…or is the experience one of speaking into an unresponsive void. Then there are feelings of relief and congratulation when the perils of screen sharing have been successfully negotiated!

This talk provided us with a great blend of information about the history and myths associated with the corpse roads, some reflections on the process of researching them, and some excellent ideas about some lovely walks that are to be had along the corpse roads.

Alan modestly reiterated that he is 'not a historian', but a journalist. He then went on to carefully explain the method and sources that he and Lesley had used. It was noted that the OS maps identify very few corpse roads (and have even mistakenly created a new type of path: the copse road at Wythop going to Lorton!) and so it has been by walking the known corpse roads and talking to local people that Alan and Lesley have identified other possible corpse roads. The presence, in some cases, of 'coffin rests' seeming to support the idea that these paths had indeed functioned as corpse roads. To underline the importance of capturing and recording knowledge that is held by local communities Alan reported an anecdote in which it had been said that 'it was not necessary to record the route of a corpse road as everyone knew where it was'…of course, years later this knowledge had been lost!

We learned that the corpse roads were necessary as the sparsely populated communities of the fells were remote from their parish churches and, during the period when the roads were in use as corpse roads, major sacraments such as burials and marriages could only take place at the parish, or mother church. As more chapels were built in these communities a dispensation allowing local burials might be requested, and if granted, a fee would be likely to be payable. I found this an interesting reminder of the rather secular and business-like aspects of the mediaeval church. Additionally, it was noted by one audience member that in some places in the fells, the soil being shallow above the bedrock, burials were not possible, and so burial at the mother church might also be necessitated by the physical environment, as at Buttermere.

Alan showed various examples of coffin rests and elucidated their purpose. Fascinatingly, they were not simply a place on which to place a coffin and give weary bearers a rest as one might assume. Indeed, during the mediaeval period, when the corpse roads were in use, bodies were wrapped in a winding sheet and only placed in a coffin on arrival at the church. We were informed that the coffin rests may have fulfilled a variety of functions: a place where the local community may gather to greet and pay respects to the deceased; a place where words would be said or sung; or perhaps a place of significance to the deceased or the community to which they belonged. Alan brought to life the idea of a procession and the traditions surrounding it. Gone were my rather simplistic assumptions about two or three lone men carrying a heavy coffin across a windy fell on a lonely day to be replaced by a much richer and more evocative picture. Indeed, the link between these ancient

traditions and modern practices was made with Alan recalling the progress of his own father's coffin taking a route past significant places in his life.

I was somewhat relieved to learn that I was not the only one to have mistaken assumptions about the corpse roads. A photo of a coffin rest on a corpse road to St Bees showed a substantial structure which could well be imagined as a suitable resting place for a heavy coffin. Apparently rebuilt a number of times, it seems that its Victorian conservators may also have been under the impression that a coffin rest should be substantial enough to support a heavy casket.

Alan made reference to the interesting area of what is a custom and law. Explaining that in the past it was thought that once a coffin has been carried down a path, this then becomes a permanent right of way. Apparently, this was not strictly the case. We were informed that, conforming to this custom, farmers ingeniously found a way of avoiding this perceived difficulty by charging a small or symbolic rent and so ensured that a field could be used as a route to the church without becoming a right of way. Alan recounted details of a case concerning rights of way that went to the High Court who, in their wisdom went along with the erroneous assumption that a right of way had been established and decided that a corpse road at Irton should indeed be treated as a right of way.

We were also treated to a ghostly tale, that in varying forms, has been widely shared and attributed to multiple paths. Indicating the way in which the corpse roads have captured the imagination of local people over the generations.

Alan's talk was both instructive and entertaining, and I will look forward to treading some of these paths with greater knowledge and interest in the future.

Clare Round

Saints and Vikings, the Cumbrian coast and the Irish Sea region in the early medieval period

a report by Derek Denman

Fiona Edmonds, Director of the Regional Heritage Centre at Lancaster University, gave this scholarly presentation using Zoom on Thursday 10 June. The talk covered the misty period between the departure of the Romans occupiers in about 405 until their substantive replacement by the Norman occupiers, by 1092 in our area. In between, our region became partly a void to be settled or controlled by more powerful neighbours to the East and West, the main content of the talk. But also neighbours to the North and South, as England and Scotland evolved, expanded and later met to form a lasting border not much different in location to that of the Roman Empire.

In this early medieval period, once known as the Dark Ages, and before the high medieval of the Normans, we are rather short of the work of historians, and what was striking from Dr Edmonds illuminating presentation was the absolute necessity of a multidisciplinary approach, not only of the known historical sources, which are fixed and often monkish tales, but also the evolving archaeological knowledge and linguistic studies and analysis. Studies clearly could not be limited to Britain and Ireland, for there is the information and evidence which can be found in the neighbouring lands of invaders and settlers, for example through the study of historical cultural characteristics and the evidence of their changing distributions in our island.

The talk took us through the various phases of the development of our regions, some more tentative than others, identifying the evidential sources that we have at present. It is not practical to give

that detail here, but I have a copy of the book *Gaelic influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom, the golden age and the Viking age*, which can be borrowed.

As the title suggests, following the departure of the Romans the major settlement in our area came from the East, as the Anglians gradually established the Kingdom of Northumbria – Brigham, Embleton, Lorton for example. The consequent replacement of Roman Christianity with the Germanic religion was eventually reversed only by the influence and adoption of the Celtic Christianity from Ireland in the West.

The figure, illustrating Bede's *Life of St Cuthbert,* at University College Oxford, exemplifies the Irish connexion with Cuthbert's seat at Lindisfarne. After Northumbria's 'golden period' of the seventh and eighth centuries, Cuthbert's followers fled from Lindisfarne in the 870s seeking to save the relics of their founder from the Vikings. On setting sail at Workington with the coffin, and intending to find refuge in Ireland, three waves miraculously turned to blood. The voyage was abandoned on the basis that St Cuthbert must have disapproved of the plan. The wanderings of the monks with the coffin, which eventually settled at Durham, were said to have caused the creation, at the monks' resting places, of chapels dedicated to St Cuthbert, such as at Lorton and Embleton.

The presentation of the evidence, rather than the stories, showed that we, as society members, are quite privileged to be treated to talks of this high quality of content.

Bastardy in Cumbria before 1834

a report by Hugh Thomson

Alan Crosby, whose Zoom talk on 8 July attracted 34 links and rather more members, investigated, in considerable detail, the functioning of the old Poor Law in Cumbria during the later years of the 18th century. This was a period during which most parishes across Britain recorded an increasing number of births to unmarried mothers. Alan's research has uncovered a wealth of interesting evidence, illustrating the realities of individual lives during a period of significant social and economic change. His presentation brought us face-to-face with these realities.

Under the 1601 Poor Law, church wardens, overseen by magistrates sitting in quarter session courts, were responsible for ensuring that unmarried mothers and their offspring were provided for. The costs involved were, in principle, the responsibility of the fathers of the

Hogarth's *Woman swearing a child*

children; women were put under pressure to identify these fathers, but, in many cases, were unwilling or unable.

Pregnant women working in a Cockermouth ale-house case in 1730 refused to name their children's fathers, but agreed, instead, to fund themselves, presumably with contributions from other 'friends'. Fathers were sometimes elusive – they moved away; in one case, the partner of a Distington woman moved as far as the East Indies.

The process of 'fathering the child' involved cross-examination of the mother before the child's birth. If the woman was unwilling or unable to identify the father, this process became punitive in character – by 1817 it might involve punishing the mother, with a spell in a 'house of correction' and corporal punishment, and even, in some cases, removal of the mother and child.

In the absence of an identified father, the mother's parents were next in line of responsibility, but recovering costs from them involved securing the co-operation of the parish in which the mother had been born. The 1601 law was designed at a time when most people married within the community of their birth but, by the 1760s, unmarried mothers were quite likely to have left the parish in which they had been born.[1] In the circumstances of a pregnancy involving an unknown or absent father, the women and their children needed to be both provided for and supervised.

Records from Ennerdale suggest that in 1828 it cost the parish 18 shillings to provide for the birth of a child, and 1 shilling and sixpence a week to maintain the mother and her child after the birth. Not all of this went directly to the mothers; administrative costs, including payments to the overseer of the unmarried mothers, were considerable, and constables were involved in the pursuit of fathers unwilling to pay.

Dr. Crosby has found that in several Cumbrian parishes the rate of illegitimacy increased three or fourfold between the 1760s and the 1780s, followed by a further doubling by the 1820s, when the rate peaked above 12% of all births - in the poorest area of Whitehaven the rate reached 17% in 1837. This increase probably reflects social and industrial change rather than a decline in moral character.[2]

The official machinery established to administer the 1601 Poor Law was, although cumbersome, in many ways more humane and responsive to the realities of the human condition than that which replaced it, in 1834, when a radical new Poor Law came into effect.

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[1] Shakespeare, for example, married in Stratford before departing to seek his fortune in London.

[2] An example, in our local area, may reflect these changes. The Register of Loweswater church records the baptism of the children of 5 unmarried women 'of Pottergill' between 1817 and 1819 – this was a dramatically higher figure than anything recorded during the 18th century.

From the Bookshelf

An occasional series about old and new books relating to the history of our area.

Thorston Hall

by O. S. Macdonell

Oliver Macdonell was born into a Scottish family living in Beckenham, Kent in 1878[1]. His father died when he was still an infant, leaving his mother to bring up three sons. Relatively little is known for certain about his early years. He was baptised in Crosthwaite, Keswick in 1886[2], rather late for an Anglican, and when he was twelve he was boarded with John Wilson Robinson, the celebrated climbing pioneer at Whinfell Hall, near Lorton. While with them he received the schooling (probably at St Bees) which prepared him first for an engineering degree in London and then for a long career spent in India and Burma as a railway engineer. While in India, in 1913, he married Anne Rachel Harris, the granddaughter of Joseph Harris of the Derwent Mill in Cockermouth. After Macdonell's retirement in the 1930s, they would settle at Greenbank in Papcastle with its imposing views towards Grasmoor and Whiteside presiding over the Vale of Lorton where he had spent his adolescence.

Thorston Hall was his second novel. It was far less successful commercially than his first, *George Ashbury*, published four years earlier in 1932, which went to many impressions and was still in print in the 1970's. This was a tale of early nineteenth century smuggling and derring-do with a vividly realised Lakeland landscape and a cast of characters speaking in dialect, wearing early nineteenth century clothes, struggling with the vagaries of a dilapidated system of justice and having an exciting time while doing it. It had a different readership in mind and a rather different interest in the past.

Our copy of *Thorston Hall* has inscribed on the flyleaf

To Elizabeth
From Auntie Kate
And Uncle Bob
Xmas 1943

The inscription addressed to Elizabeth is written for a child, surely. Elizabeth was being given a present designed to instruct as well as to entertain. Its subtitle, 'A Tale of Cumberland Farms in the Old Days', announces its historical intent clearly enough, though the story turns out to be as much about religious practice and beliefs, as about the introduction of new farming methods.

Whinfell, or 'Thorston', Hall in 2001.

[1] England & Wales BMD Indexes via Ancestry.com

[2] England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975 database via FamilySearch

The focus of the story at Whinfell Hall, including Scales, Gillbrow, and Meergill, the dwelling of the Wiggins family, here incorrectly 'Miregill'. Greenwood map, 1821.

Very simply, a young boy, Thomas Thorston, endures a morally chaotic (and physically very hard) childhood on the farm of his ancestors, owned and mismanaged by his father Robert, who is stupid and cruel, and increasingly out of his depth in the changing world around him. On the death of his parents Thomas is rescued from an equally harsh subservience to his elder brother by an uncle who has in effect appropriated control of the farm. The first part of the novel – 'The Boyhood of Thomas Thorston' – closes with Thomas leaving the farm to be educated at St Bees.

The story moves to Wigton for its second act. In 'The Childhood of Elizabeth Bonfill' we learn about the way of life of a conscientious and devout Quaker family. Elizabeth is subjected to a different kind of neglect from that suffered by Thomas, but it is palpable and eventually owned up to by her parents. She rarely sees them because they are so busy with travelling for the sake of their cause and she is not allowed to mix with other children. For all their carefully portrayed virtues, Elizabeth's parents are in their own way doing as Robert Thorston had done – putting their own priorities ahead of the child's.

The title of the third section – 'Thomas and Elizabeth' – makes avoiding a spoiler in this review all but impossible but the novel is more than a romance with a happy ending. This begs the question we began with: What would our Elizabeth, the one whose Christmas present this was, have gained from reading it? Do we judge its value to her on the basis of its morality, or its historical content or on its power to amuse and entertain?

It would have entertained, I feel sure. The villains are satisfyingly villainous and her uncle and aunt need not have worried that villainy went unpunished. Thomas' father is drowned in a fearsome flood, just as his victim of the first chapter,

a marginalised old man who had healing powers and harmed no-one, had predicted. The thuggish, over indulged elder brother bullies and defenestrates his way through childhood and early adulthood and is rewarded with an ignominious exile and early death. The settings come to life very strongly – the characters' various movements about the Lorton Vale will appeal to members of the society very much, I think, and the fells and becks and the houses are placed just so in the landscape. It would be possible to plan a walk today on the basis of the author's description of them. Several of our members will recognise their own house in the story. This part of the writing was clearly a labour of love. Moreover, the writing is frequently good enough to create atmosphere well matched to the action. The Vale in Thomas' boyhood is often dark and rarely free of menace, while Elizabeth's home in Wigton has sunlight and brightness aplenty, a token of the Quakers' values and of the future Thomas might aspire to.

The historical elements were dear to the author's heart, it is clear. Oliver Macdonell joined the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society in 1934, introduced and proposed by R G Collingwood, and he retained his membership until 1950. It shows in the second of his novels when compared to the first. *George Ashbury* was probably written while he was living overseas and was based presumably on recollections of his early years in Lorton, but not informed by the kind of detailed historical approach he would have come across when a member of the Society. It shows in the careful presentation of dialect (with helpful glossaries at the foot of the pages), in the detailed descriptions of processes and practices – the highly detailed account of a working mill for example might possibly have delighted Elizabeth but is more likely to have kept the attention of her Aunt and Uncle. Similarly, the painstaking description of Thomas' excellent progress in the building of drains when working for Samuel Bonfill, has more history in it than entertainment. Domestic architecture, cooking, medical care, the making of clothes, the care of livestock, the secondary occupations such as weaving and hat-making which were needed to augment incomes from farming – all these are given a highly visible presence in the narrative and can be taken on trust as well founded on research.

Macdonell shows more interest in the culture of the 'dalesfolk' than in the arguments about to what extent and why the 'statesmen' declined in numbers so significantly. In any case, the novel is set some fifty years before commentators noticed it. The effect, and probably the intention, was to avoid the sentimentalised version of events promoted by Wordsworth, Martineau, W G Collingwood and others. A combination of factors contributed to the reduction in the number of yeoman holdings and Macdonell gives a hearing to some of them: agricultural depression during the nineteenth century, changing markets and the pressure to modernise in order to satisfy them, the problems of financing change without incurring crippling debts, the acquisitive greed of the aristocratic landowners encouraged by the enclosure acts and so on.[3] All these appear in one form or another and there is a distinct attitude to change in the novel, that it must be embraced and managed intelligently. There may be a legitimate question to be asked about whether in showing us at the centre of his story what was in effect a degenerate in the character of Robert Thorston he compromises the general account of agricultural upheaval. It was one thing to challenge the way the dalesmen's virtues were overstated

[3] David Uttley, 'The Decline of the Cumbrian Yeomen Revisited', *TCWAAS*, vol. 8, 2008

The simple, but not inexpensive, best dress of a wealthy Quaker woman of the period. Tan silk with linen cap.

but quite another to locate their demise in stupidity, which is the impression we might be left with at the melodramatic end of Robert Thorston's life in a flash flood down Gasgale Gill. However, at the same time, the novel gives us an example of successful statesmen – the Riggs of Buttermere, for example, are educating their sons for a life other than farming and still making a success of their holdings with intelligent husbandry and openness to new ideas. This family had at its head one of several interestingly influential women in the novel, many of them vocal supporters of the Jacobite cause. Macdonell seems to have embraced the Quaker habit of promoting the influence of women and if he exaggerated the support for the Jacobites in Cumberland and Westmorland, still, it was worth bringing it to the attention of a modern reader. (During the Jacobite Rebellion a Macdonell was hung, drawn and quartered in Carlisle Castle by the English when they re-took the castle in 1746. If he had known the fact, the author might well have identified the butcher from Eaglesfield entrusted with the work.)

Sometimes the history and the novel's moral workings sit alongside each other rather uncomfortably. Thomas' great uncle, a clever man with a strong sense of how to prepare for the future, rescues him from his life as little more than a farm hand by cheating Robert Thorston of his property. We have already seen him ensnare another farmer in crippling debt through loans advanced to replace his thatched roof with slates. No doubt a utilitarian case can be made to justify this moral ambiguity – capitalism necessarily creates victims as well as beneficiaries – but Elizabeth might need careful guidance on how the culture of the dalesfolk allowed for, even rewarded with respect, a certain shrewdness in gulling one's neighbours if it were possible. Similarly, the portrayal of the Wiggins, a marginalised family with special powers of healing and prophecy, is evocative enough of a recurrent feature of rural life where pre-Christian beliefs and practices lived on alongside the Church for many centuries, but the narrative cannot resist the temptation to give them an agency – Joseph Wiggins brings about the death through a curse on his persecutor, Robert Thorston – which is completely at odds with the novel's argument on behalf of rational modernity.

Less awkward is the portrait of the 'priests' (the common term in the valley at this time for Anglican ministers). The Loweswater incumbent was a gentle, unassuming man who taught reading and writing to the parish's poor, assisted by a child genius modelled on John Dalton. The

Vicar at Lorton in contrast has forgotten the little Latin he knew, takes less interest in his pastoral work than in farming and until threatened with dispossession refuses to allow a school in Lorton because it was personally inconvenient. Apart from these vocational shortcomings he is also very dull witted and easily manipulated by Thomas' uncle in the defrauding of Robert Thorston. Yet the book keeps a sense of the role's value even if the individual is of little use. At the end of the chapter in which Mr Thompson interrupts his service to negotiate the purchase of a bull calf, Macdonell writes very personally, we feel, about what the Church provided the churchgoers with….*'help during their hard and comfortless lives, consolation in times of trouble, and strength and hope when each in turn went to meet death.'*

What kind of moral instruction might the young reader of *Thorston Hall* have gained from reading it? The second half of the novel is superficially a love story which on closer inspection turns out to be about Quakerism, and in the final analysis about the right people have to choose their own faith and live accordingly. As a child, Macdonell boarded with the Robinsons of Whinfell Hall[4], a Quaker family which attended the Pardshaw Meeting. On the evidence of *Thorston Hall* he acquired a lifelong gratitude to them and an enduring sympathy with their beliefs. Later, he would marry a woman born into a prominent Cockermouth Quaker family but although he seems never to have adopted their faith himself, he knew about their debates and the evolution of their beliefs during the nineteenth century as many moved away from the (partly enforced) isolationism of the Quietist spirit which characterised Quaker practice in the eighteenth century. To take a very relevant case in point, in Cockermouth within the lifetime of the Robinsons, there were several cases where Friends who married outsiders were disowned [5], even as the new rights to a civil marriage removed one of the main objections to marrying out – making use of a Church and its ceremonies.[6] It is inconceivable that the young Macdonell did not hear of these difficult matters at home in Whinfell Hall or at the Meetings he attended in Pardshaw.

The story of Elizabeth Bonfill's childhood and marriage argues for openness and tolerance. The young reader would be asked both to respect and to feel the errors in her father's unbending orthodoxy. Principle made him generous and courageous in his dealings with everyone apart from his children. For much of her childhood, Elizabeth was neglected by her parents who delegated her upbringing in all but matters of religion to a servant, while her brother was lost to 'the world' when he left the family home for good while in his teens. These matters are dealt with sensitively. Samuel's good qualities are shown to derive from the same sources of devotion and commitment which prompt his mistakes. The beliefs which motivate Elizabeth's oppression are given a fair hearing even as the reader wills their defeat. If the writing which celebrates the happy union of Thomas and Elizabeth is, frankly, a bit embarrassing, managing to be both florid and leaden-footed at the same time, we can still encourage the young reader to enjoy the deeper message it is after – not that true love conquers all, but that change for the better is possible as ideas and beliefs evolve.

The two histories – of farming in the Lorton vale and the Quakers in Wigton – are brought together in the characters of Thomas and Elizabeth. Essentially, Oliver Macdonell was an optimist about human potential and his novel was framed to show how human beings can shape

[4] 1891 Census. See also Michael Waller, *A Lakeland Climbing Pioneer. John Wilson Robinson of Whinfell Hall*, 2007.

[5] J. Bernard Bradbury, *Cockermouth Quaker Meeting. The First 300 Years*, 1988.

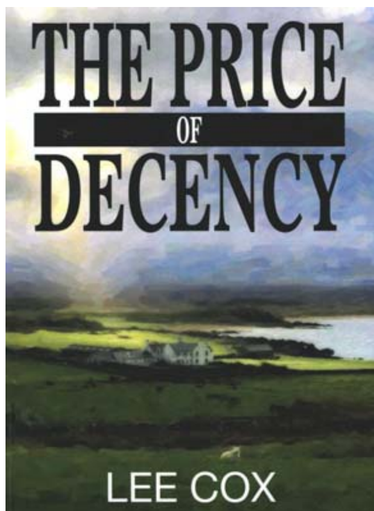
historical processes even as they are subjected to them. He recognised the beauty of the Lakeland settings of his youth, and also how difficult they were to live in, so while change could be painful, if it were managed intelligently with improvement as its goal, it would change for the better the lives of those who embraced it. Meanwhile in the life of the spirit, compromise, even on matters of deeply held beliefs, need not be seen as a defeat but adopted as a principle itself worth fighting for. In Macdonell's own life Anglicanism, Catholicism and Quakerism appear to have been in an earnest, well-mannered dialogue with each other, and the same tolerant inclusiveness is at work in the portrayal of his characters. The novel's happy ending marries Elizabeth Bonfill and Thomas Thorston and also two major currents running through the history of Quaker thinking. The 'dynamic tension' between the Inner Light which can only be understood fully through doctrine and that which is revealed to all by virtue of our common humanity are brought together in the marriage. The little we know of Macdonell's life makes plain just why he took the side of the Universalists and also why he would want to leave a record of the gratitude he felt to the Quaker family living in Lorton Vale which had welcomed and nurtured him.
Tim Stanley-Clamp

Our archive includes *Thorston Hall*. Please contact Derek Denman to borrow it.

The Price of Decency

by Lee cox

This recently self-published novel may well be of interest to members. Set in the late nineteenth century in Ayrshire, and Cumbria, including Workington and Lorton, it records an intriguing family history centred on the life of a remarkable woman with secrets she would keep for the whole of her life. The title is well chosen: what to begin with seems morally beyond the pale gradually, in the course



of its narration, becomes increasingly problematic as the consequences of the choices Mary Jane makes are lived out by herself and also by those affected by them.

The story comes to us in the form of a novel as the author set out to re-create the testimony of her heroine's descendants in the settings, speech and manners of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At one level this was necessary because without re-imagining the concrete details of her immediate family's lives it would be far more difficult to make an informed judgement about Mary Jane's actions and what motivated her. So, the apparently shocking way she behaved makes far more sense than if it were merely recounted factually without its social and psychological context. There are moments, for this reader anyway, when the fictional details are close to overburdening the narrative but there are few of these and much of the writing is thoughtful and evocative.
Tim Stanley-Clamp

Copies may be purchased at £12.99 including postage from Lee Cox at: Eden, Rheda Park, Frizington, Cumbria, CA26 3TA, email *leecox1945@gmail.com*

Articles

Tales of Lorton Hall – Captain Timothy Dalston and the pressed men.

by Derek Denman

On 6 February 1702/3 Captain Timothy Dalston, the owner of Lorton Hall, appeared at Hayton Castle, before Sir Richard Musgrave, Baronet, J.P., to report a violent assault and abduction.[1] In evidence, Daniel Fisher and Joseph Tyson, yeomen of Lorton, stated that:

> *On or about 19 January last Thomas Burnyeats, constable of Lorton, Robert son of Richard Lamplugh, J.P., and about fourteen horsemen came to Lorton to apprehend John Cuppage, Richard Mitchell, Henry Wood, John Hodgson and Thomas Cunningham, soldiers in Captain Dalston's company, &c., then quartered at Lorton, under a warrant from Richard Lamplugh, Esq., J.P. They took these people away and assaulted Dalston and blooded one of the servants. Informants were present at the time. Information by Thomas Burnyeate, Constable of Lorton, ... corroborates foregoing as to the arrest of Cuppage and the others. They were brought before Richard Lamplugh, J.P., who, having examined them, released all of them except Cuppage, whom he kept, and still keeps, in his house.*[2]

Was it an abduction or a rescue? Captain Dalston complained that:

> *on Monday, 1 June last* [1702], *at the house of Mr. John Inman, of Cockermouth, ... he gave one shilling to John Cuppage, a fiddler in the said town, as a retainer to serve in Temple's regiment. Cuppage accepted the coin and was lawfully listed. Nevertheless, on 18 January last* [1702/3], *Richard Lamplugh, Esq., a J.P. for Cumberland, issued his warrant to arrest informant* [Dalston] *and bring him before a Justice to give security for his appearing at the next General Sessions of the Peace to answer the premises and to be of good behaviour; and informant* [Dalston] *was compelled to make immediate application to Sir Richard for relief therein. Sir Richard had made a former examination of the whole matter in the presence of Mr. Lamplugh, and was satisfied that Cuppage had been lawfully retained. He therefore superseded the warrant, and informant hoped to have no further trouble; but Lamplugh, continuing his endeavours to prevent him* [Dalston] *from enlisting men, issued forth another warrant the very next day (January 19th) to arrest and bring before him the said Cuppage and several of informant's other men.*

There followed the encounter at Lorton, with the five soldiers being taken to Lamplugh, where John Cuppage remained until the time of this hearing on 6 February.

How did this occur?

In 1693 Captain Timothy Dalston purchased his commission in Colonel William Northcote's 13th Regiment of foot, Marines, which was disbanded in 1699.[3] In

[1] They thought it was 1702 and that 1703 would start on Lady Day, 25 March. We know that the year starts on 1 Jan, and therefore that it was 1703 by our new style dating. Their confusion persists through the extracts.

[2] *Calendar of State Papers*, Domestic: Anne, 1702-3, Documents relating to the alleged Impressment of Men in Cumberland.

[3] *http://www.spanishsuccession.nl/armies_uk/english_infantry_regiments.html*

The King's Shilling, c.1770

February 1701/2 Sir Richard Temple (1675-1749), 4th Baronet Cobham, was appointed as colonel to raise a new regiment. In September 1702 this regiment was ordered to Ireland and to be brought on that establishment. He fought under John Churchill, 1st Duke of Malborough, at the Battle of Venlo in September 1702 and at the Battle of Roermond in October 1702 during the War of the Spanish Succession.

Captain Dalston was enlisting men from the inns of Cockermouth, and elsewhere, by getting them to take the King's Shilling, or Queen Anne's shilling to be exact, in return for signing up for Sir Richard Temple's regiment. One man, presumably Cuppage, had 'deserted' in Whitehaven, and Dalston had obtained a warrant for his capture. Richard Lamplugh, J. P., must have been convinced that this practice was illegal, for he had issued a warrant requiring Dalston to desist, and he had liberated by force the enlisted men held in Lorton.

However, 'Joseph Relfe, William Ewart and Richard Crosthwaite, all of Cockermouth, gentlemen, and John Peile, of Lorton, yeoman' all confirmed that 'on 1 June last they saw Captain Dalston give John Cuppage one shilling at the house of John Inman in Cockermouth as a retainer to serve in his [Dalston's] company. Cuppage accepted it, and was lawfully listed according to informants' judgment.' Dalston had the law on his side.

An unpleasant man

We do not know whether Captain Christopher Dalston continued to recruit men in the inns of Cockermouth, to hold them in Lorton, and then to ship them out through Whitehaven, but it does confirm previous impressions that this new Squire of Lorton Hall, and the first known to call it by that name, was a rather nasty piece of work.

Captain Christopher Dalston, 1665-1721, was the second son of the Dalstons of Acornbank, Temple Sowerby, and therefore the 'spare' to his brother John, who inherited the family property. Younger sons might enter the Church or the military, and it seems that Christopher made the right choice for his character when he obtained a commission in 1693. His marriage in 1694 to Dorothy Lowther, the daughter of Henry Lowther of Cockermouth, supplied a necessary heiress. Her dowry provided £1,000 of the purchase price of the Winders' Lorton estate in 1699, the rest being borrowed by Dalston from various gentlemen.[1]

The Lorton Hall estate must have provided a healthy income, but Dalston's debts were increased by taking out further loans. After his death in 1721, his widow and son inherited those debts, which amounted to £2210 by 1726. A consortium of lenders, led by Richard Baynes of Cockermouth, bought the debt, foreclosed on the loan, and gave them a year to leave. This injury to Dorothy, the former heiress, was heaped upon the previous insult of Dalston's philandering. This had caused her to confide in Bishop Nicholson, and his diary, in 1711, seeking to gain justice against her husband and his 'paramour'.

Perhaps he was kind to dogs and horses? Such things are not recorded.

Tales of Lorton Hall – the improperly dressed pigs of Christopher Richardson, 1761

by Derek Denman

On 16 April 1761 the jury of the court leet of 'Darwent Fells' imposed two fines on Christopher Richardson of Lorton Hall. The first was a routine 2s 6d for non-appearance at the court. The second was more interesting and more painful 20s, half of the maximum fine the court could impose. Their verdict was given for 'letting his swine go without Rings and Bows in High and Low Lorton Lanes to detriment of neighbours'.[2] Who was Christopher Richardson, and why should his pigs not be allowed out without such fancy attire?

He was one of a string of owners of Lorton Hall in the eighteenth century. The general history of the Hall and its estate is contained in *Journal 59*. The Winders of Lorton sold their mansion and estate in 1699 and departed. The next century saw short ownerships and sales-off before the Lucock-Bragg family restored the estate and developed the Hall. The purchaser from John Winder was Captain Timothy Dalston. His financial failure resulted in the ejectment of his widow and son, and the break-up and piecemeal sale of the estate by the property speculators of Cockermouth. The Hall and a small core of freehold farmland was bought in 1740 by the Quaker Jonathan Wilkinson for £1200. He was successful, purchasing the other half interest in Low Lorton Mill, over the bridge in Whinfell, and restoring it.

Lorton Hall and Johnby Hall

In 1759 Jonathan Wilkinson sold Lorton Hall, its farmland, and the mill in Whinfell, to Christopher Richardson of Johnby Hall, for £1820. He paid half of the money in September and was supposed to pay the remainder in March 1760. Johnby Hall was the ancient seat of the manor of Johnby in the Barony of Greystoke. There had been previous connections between the two halls. John Winder, who sold up in 1699, had married Lettice Williams, the second of the four daughters and co-heirs of William Williams of Johnby Hall. His father, Roger, had been the 'learned steward' of the baronies of Greystoke and Burgh and

[1] For the ownership history of Lorton Hall see *Journal 59*, *http://derwentfells.com/pdfs/journal/Journal59.pdf*

[2] CASC/DLec85/Verdict Bundle/16 Apr 1762, Ron George's notes.

Johnby Hall

widowed mother, and both were buried at Lorton; Catherine Richardson, widow of Low Lorton on 10 July 1773, and Christopher Richardson, bachelor of Low Lorton on 14 August 1781. He did not have the expense or distraction of a family, but nor did he need a mansion as a farmhouse. Whatever he did with Lorton Hall, it did not allow him to pay the balance of the purchase price, and in 1766 the Lorton Hall estate was sold for £2060 to Thomas Peile-Barnes, 1742-82, the owner of the Pack Horse Inn in Low Lorton.

had purchased Johnby Hall circa 1650. William took over in 1664; a professional gentleman.[3]

The purchaser of the Lorton estate from John Winder in 1699, Captain Christopher Dalston, was of the Acornbank branch. His first son Christopher was probably born in Johnby Hall in 1700. Johnby Hall was destined to go to the Hasells of Dalemain, through the marriage of Dorothy, the first daughter of William Williams, to Sir Edward Hasell. However, after the death of William Williams in 1680 Johnby Hall became the dower of his widow Barbara, daughter of Miles Halton of Greenthwaite Hall, Greystoke. It would be the residence of the Halton Ladies for some thirty years.

After 1721, Johnby Hall eventually came to the Hasells of Dalemain, who had no family use for it. It seems to have been let as a farm, with a rather impressive farmhouse, and with no obvious continuing association with Lorton Hall. On 25 April 1756, at Greystoke, Christopher Richardson of Johnbye Halle, farmer, was buried.[4] This must be the father of the purchaser of Lorton Hall in 1759.

The younger Christopher lived in Lorton as a yeoman farmer with his

Street attire for pigs

We know little else about Richardson, other than in 1761 he owned the Lorton Hall estate and his farming included the keeping of pigs, which he allowed to wander the lanes.

Pigs are naturally woodland inhabitants. Names such as Swinside remember areas of woodland, and probably predominantly oakwood, where herds of medieval swine were kept. As tree-cover declined, fewer pigs were kept, and they were controlled while on the common. The main control was the requirement for each pig to have a ring through its nose. This was not primarily for leading or for tethering but was effective in discouraging the natural habit of rooting, which was very destructive of the ground surface. The local manorial records of the sixteenth century contain numerous presentments of tenants and fines for pigs on the common, which will often be for the lack of a ring. At the manor court in Lorton in 1517 William Wynder of 'Armotside' was fined 12d for a

[3] Helen Wright Brown, 'Johnby Hall' *TCWAAS* 1931 pp.85-103.

[4] 'Johnby Hall' p.103.

The pig pens seen from the Cocker bridge with the miller's house behind, 1898

farrowing sow and 6d for a young sow'.[5] The crimes of the sows were not recorded, but it was probably ringlessness.

By 1761 pigs on the common were rarely mentioned, and a presentment for pigs in the village lanes was most unusual. Farmers and other households would fatten a piglet, usually in a pen, as a very efficient convertor of many types of waste into pork, and other useful products. Richardson also owned Low Lorton mill, and pig keeping was often associated with milling, to make use of the waste products. Low Lorton Mill was over the bridge in Whinfell, and in 1898 the pig sties were on the site of Riverside – see the image. They were built before 1863, but were not there in 1803, and so perhaps in 1761 the porcine beneficiaries of Low Lorton mill resided closer to Lorton Hall.

The rings are well known. The bows are much more obscure, but fortunately they have been explained by Angus Winchester: 'Pigs were to be kept ringed ... and, in many places during the summer months, 'yoked' or 'bowed', by having around the neck a triangular wooden collar with projecting ends, to prevent the animal wriggling through gaps in fences'.[6] The bow made the animal wider.

These summer-month restrictions probably applied to earlier examples of pigs on the common, which must not be allowed to break though into the enclosed crops. In the winter months, the open season, animals may graze the open fields and pigs need not be bowed. By 1761 the land in Lorton was held in closes which were fenced, which meant that in the open season Richardson may allow his pigs to roam the village, and his neighbours would wish to keep those wriggling pigs out of their closes. They might insist on bows as well as rings.

One wonders how many others allowed their stock to roam the lanes of Lorton in this period. We think now of highways providing a clear passage and of a peril from fast vehicles, but the village highways were rough, occupied, gated, and obstructed in the eighteenth century. It was much easier and often more direct to travel over the unenclosed commons, especially on a horse. Messy and gated villages were to be avoided for transit. In 1761 the Whinlatter road was yet to be built for the turnpike, and the old route from Cockermouth to Keswick went through High Lorton village, over the bridge and out through Scales. Difficult enough already for the traveller without encountering Christopher Richardson's pigs.

[5] CASW/DLec 299T, Lorton court, 28 Oct, 9Hen.VIII.

[6] Angus Winchester, *The harvest of the Hills,* 2000, pp.103-4.

The Cumberland pig.

What might Richardson's undressed pigs have looked like? The medieval pigs, in the illustration above from the fourteenth century Queen Mary Psalter, look more like their wild ancestors than the later Cumberland pig. They would have been at home rooting in the oakwoods of Swinside or Armaside. The men are knocking down the acorns. The right of pannage at acorn time continues today in the New Forest, as the right of mast for sixty days.

In Richardson's time the county pig breeds were more a product of the local farming environment, rather than controlled selection and breeding. His pigs probably looked more like the short-nosed Cumberland pigs (not Cumbria pigs, please) of the twentieth century. Magnificent specimens such as the the prize boar, Eamont Peter Pan (flying seems unlikely), shown here with an un-named sow (Tinkerbell perhaps), were to be lost by the 1960s. Deemed too fatty for modern tastes.

The pigs of Holemire House

In the twentieth century the most notable Lorton pig-keeper was Ada Cass, of the smart Victorian Holemire House, next to the Rising Sun. She and her father Willam Cass, a Lorton name from at least the sixteenth century, bought Holemire House in 1926, and William kept pigs there. Ada worked in the kitchens at the Scale Hill Hotel and was noted for daily bringing home the waste for their pigs. She died in 1984, probably long after the pigs.