

## Victoria County History of Cumbria Project. Draft parish/township histories

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Parish/township: SKELSMERGH

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# SKELSMERGH<sup>1</sup>

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Manorial Government

The Bellinghams and their successors, kept a Skelsmergh court baron for their holdings in the township and in Longsleddale. Records for this court survive from between 1637 and 1726.<sup>2</sup> It met at St John's Chapel,<sup>3</sup> which was still in use as a place to make payments in 1673.<sup>4</sup> In the same year James Bellingham appointed John Braban to collect rents<sup>5</sup> and, from this date, there are intermittent references to the use of the Braban house (Otter Bank) as a site for juries to meet or payments to be made,<sup>6</sup> until the early nineteenth century when the Stocks inn was used.<sup>7</sup> The court seems to have met only once or twice a year and references to anything except admittances of new tenants are rare. Presentments for agrarian offences were recorded in 1639 and there were three records of fines for non-appearance. In 1697 some of the customary tenants purchased the rights of boon hens and capons from James Grahme.<sup>8</sup> After the early

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<sup>2</sup> CAS (K), Levens Hall MSS, Box 16/33. Skelsmergh Manor Court Rolls.

<sup>3</sup> CAS (C), D&C, Machell MSS, ii, 120.

<sup>4</sup> CAS (K), WD/D/SK/1; sale of Harry-bank 1673.

<sup>5</sup> Levens Hall MSS, 16/34, notice signed by James Bellingham.

<sup>6</sup> Levens Hall MSS, 18M/2, 1680 general fine.

<sup>7</sup> CAS (K), WD/K 1-10, 1846 admittance to Stockdale

<sup>8</sup> Levens Hall MSS, 16/33, Jan 26 1697 Memorandum.

eighteenth century, records are sparse but there were admittances to tenements in Longsleddale and Strickland Roger in the Skelsmergh court down to 1846.<sup>9</sup>

## **Township Government**

Skelsmergh and Patton formed a joint constablewick until the mid-nineteenth century. These neighbouring townships were separately assessed for taxation in 1332<sup>10</sup> but linked for the Hearth Tax and other seventeenth-century subsidies. In the eighteenth century assessments for poor relief were always made separately but arrangements for Window and Land Tax varied.<sup>11</sup>

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century wills there are references to churchwardens and overseers of the poor for Skelsmergh<sup>12</sup> but the only detailed records are from the meetings of the select vestry for the poor in 1820-32.<sup>13</sup> There were two overseers and the vestry met fortnightly at the Stocks inn to consider requests for relief. Pensions, individual payments, rents and items of clothing were paid to the old, widowed, infirm or orphaned but also to a number of working men whose employment was erratic or wages insufficient to support their families. There were nearly twenty cases of illegitimacy that were usually handled by auctioning for the confinement or placing the mother in a house rented by the township. The only exception to this system of out-relief was in 1823 when Elizabeth Goose/Gorse was committed to the House of Correction in Kendal after having a second illegitimate child.

After Skelsmergh became part of the Kendal Poor Law Union in 1836, vestry meetings usually occurred only twice a year. Business included distributing the dole money from Redman Tenement and Oakbank,<sup>14</sup> letting the parish allotment and herbage of the quarries, employing a mole catcher and nominating poor scholars to Burneside and Selside schools.<sup>15</sup> Township government at this time required around a dozen active officers selected from fewer than thirty ratepayers, including a churchwarden, guardian for the poor, assistant overseer, clerk and treasurer. Road maintenance was a township responsibility until 1893 so there was also a surveyor of the highways. Constables were still appointed by the vestry in 1859.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> CAS (K), WD/K Stockdale.

<sup>10</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 252.

<sup>11</sup> CAS (K), WQ/RLT/Kendal/40.

<sup>12</sup> LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R410C/12, Christopher Braban 1670 & W/RW/K/R477B/20, William Stephenson 1723.

<sup>13</sup> CAS (K), WPC2/V1 & V2.

<sup>14</sup> Above, Charities.

<sup>15</sup> Above, Charities, Harling Charity.

<sup>16</sup> CAS (K), WPC 2/V2.

After 1894 Skelsmergh became part of South Westmorland Rural District. The first parish meeting for the election of councillors met on 4 December 1894 in the parish room in the Vicarage. Nineteen landowners or occupiers were present and they selected an unopposed group chaired by the vicar and including four local farmers.<sup>17</sup> The second vicar was also a councillor from 1885-1918 and farmers constituted a majority for most of the twentieth century. The first woman was elected in 2007. Agenda items mainly concerned the parish allotment, road and footpath issues and planning applications. In 2006 the parish council combined with its neighbour to become the Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council and produced a joint Community Plan in 2009.

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<sup>17</sup> CAS (K), WPC 2/V2 & WPC/2 Minute Books.