

## 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>

## LANDOWNERSHIP

### Manor of Skelsmergh

Skelsmergh may have been included among the group of vills centred on 'Strickland' held by Gillemicel before the Conquest.<sup>2</sup> It is not named in Domesday but if it was not included in the neighbouring vill of Patton,<sup>3</sup> it may have been part of the unidentified 'Mimet', which took its name from the River Mint. The farm once named Old Earth near Mint Bridge may record the site of an early settlement.<sup>4</sup>

In the mid-thirteenth century William of Skelsmergh made grants of land to Conishead Priory and others<sup>5</sup> and in the same period there are references to Patrick of Skelsmergh.<sup>6</sup> In 1671 Daniel Fleming claimed of Skelsmergh Hall, that it 'did anciently give surname to a good Family,' but nothing more is known of the family.<sup>7</sup> Between 1230 and 1246 William de Lancaster III

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<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of part, at least, of Skelsmergh in the later-medieval *villa integra* of Strickland Ketel may suggest such a connection: *Rec. Kend.* I, 252 & 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, xvii, Introduction. Farrer suggested Skelsmergh was in Patton.

<sup>4</sup> Described c.1584 as 'an auncyente tenement': *Rec. Kend.* I, 257.

<sup>5</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 251 & TNA DL/25/403, 1248 Quitclaim by William de Skelmerherch.

<sup>6</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Fleming-Senhouse Papers*, ed. E. Hughes (Cumberland County Council Record Series II, Carlisle, 1961), 13.

granted all of Skelsmergh to Robert de Leyburne,<sup>8</sup> of a Kent family,<sup>9</sup> for a pair of gilt spurs yearly.<sup>10</sup> Robert was succeeded by John and then Nicholas de Leyburne, who served in Gascony and was knighted before 1296<sup>11</sup> and granted free warren in his demesne lands in 1301.<sup>12</sup> Sir Roger de Leyburne, living in 1332,<sup>13</sup> was succeeded by Sir Thomas de Leyburne, who acquired Cunswick through his wife.<sup>14</sup> Around this time Skelsmergh ceased to be the principal family residence and the Leyburnes came to be more associated with Cunswick and later Witherslack.

The family retained most of Skelsmergh until the late sixteenth century when James Leyburne made a series of sales.<sup>15</sup> In 1580 he sold nine Skelsmergh tenements<sup>16</sup> with others in Longsleddale to Thomas Bellingham.<sup>17</sup> In 1584 Robert Briggs sold on to James Bellingham a group of Skelsmergh, Strickland Roger and Mintsfeet properties that had probably been recently acquired from Leyburne.<sup>18</sup> The Bellinghams added other Skelsmergh lands when they acquired the 'Spital' estate of the dissolved St Leonard's Hospital in 1548 and 1640.<sup>19</sup> Bellingham land in the township constituted less than a third of its area but by 1637<sup>20</sup> the Bellinghams kept a Skelsmergh court for most of their customary tenants in Skelsmergh and Longsleddale, although most of the former Briggs tenants appeared at the Bellingham's Crook court throughout the seventeenth century. This reputed manor of Skelsmergh passed from the Bellinghams to their successors at Levens Hall. Most of the customary tenancies were enfranchised in the eighteenth century and by 1836, the lord of the manor, Fulke Greville Howard, owned only eighteen acres at Beck Mills.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> As spelled on the plaque to the last member of the family in Kendal Parish Church. Also Layburn(e), Laborn, Labourne, etc.

<sup>9</sup> One of the witnesses to the grant was Sir Roger de Leyburne of Leyburne Castle, Kent, probably his brother.

<sup>10</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 391-2.

<sup>11</sup> CAS (K), WDTGF, T.G. Fahy notes on De Leyburns.

<sup>12</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 252.

<sup>13</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 252.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/member/leybourne-sir-robert> (accessed Dec 3, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Others included Wowergrease (probably Low Groves) sold to Thomas Sleddall 1578 and Coppack How sold to Allen Gilpin 1579.

<sup>16</sup> Probably, Tarn Bank, Otter Bank, Pond Side, Holme House, Spout House, Red Bank, Burton House, Beck Mills and [near] Laneside. Blake Tyson, see: 'Twenty Cruck Buildings at Skelsmergh, Kendal, c.1600', *CW2*, c (2000).

<sup>17</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 156-9.

<sup>18</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 256-7.

<sup>19</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 87-9; CAS (C), D Lons/L5/1-21 Spittle.

<sup>20</sup> CAS (K), Levens Hall MSS, Box 16/33. Skelsmergh Manor Court Rolls.

<sup>21</sup> Corn Rent map.

After James Leyburne's execution and attainder in 1583 there were legal disputes between the Crown, James's brother William Leyburne, and James's widow Bridget, concerning the unsold Skelsmergh lands and the complex arrangements that James had made in the years before he died.<sup>22</sup> William succeeded to Cunswick but Skelsmergh Park, with hall, demesne farm and some customary tenancies, seems to have been temporarily confiscated although it was leased to Bridget and her second husband in 1589.<sup>23</sup>

The Leyburne sales and the Crown confiscation gave opportunities for successful Kendal townsmen to acquire land or live close to the town in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Robert Briggs was a clothier and the first Recorder of Kendal and its second Alderman. In 1597 the Skelsmergh Park lease was owned by the chapman and alderman, Robert Jopson.<sup>24</sup> In 1606 it was let to his relative and fellow chapman, Henry Fisher, for forty years, although litigation broke out again in 1612 between Fisher and John Leyburne.<sup>25</sup> At Fisher's death in 1616 this estate had already passed to his son Edward and consisted of 15 messuages and tenements in Skelsmergh and 160 acres.<sup>26</sup> Both Fishers were also Kendal aldermen. Later Skelsmergh landholders probably included the first Kendal mayor, Thomas Sleddall.<sup>27</sup>

Edward Fisher seems to have sold the customary tenancies to Dorothy Braithwaite of Burneside and Richard her son by 1625.<sup>28</sup> They were resold in 1687 by Dame Elizabeth Braithwaite, Sir Thomas Braithwaite's widow, to Robert Stephenson.<sup>29</sup> Stephenson's 'mannor or reputed mannor ...known by the name of Skelsmergh'<sup>30</sup> included twelve customary properties<sup>31</sup>, and two other rents.<sup>32</sup> All these Skelsmergh properties, Dodding Green,<sup>33</sup> the two Bellingham properties for which Stephenson was the customary tenant (Holme House and the Beck Tenement), together with those he owned outside the township, were conveyed via intermediaries to the

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<sup>22</sup> TNA, E133/4/676, E133/5/731, E133/4/660, E133/4/676, E133/5/731, STAC5/L36/40.

<sup>23</sup> TNA, E210/10255.

<sup>24</sup> LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R446C/60A, Robert Jopson will.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, E134/10Jas1/East26.

<sup>26</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 261-2.

<sup>27</sup> Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.*, 654.

<sup>28</sup> TNA, C3/337/32 & C2/ChasI/B158/75 Burton v Brathwaite.

<sup>29</sup> Talbot Library, Dodding Green Letterbook 1, 7-17.

<sup>30</sup> Talbot Library, DG Letterbook 1, 9.

<sup>31</sup> CAS (K), WQ/R/P/Box 1, 1717 Papist returns - Robert Stephenson.

<sup>32</sup> They probably included Laneside, Littlemire, Garnett Folds, Harry Bank, Red Tree, Cold Harbour, Oakbank, Redbankfoot, Stocks, Hollin Root and Goody Nook; the two other rents were for Scar Foot and part of Hipshow: author's assessment using 1717 Papist returns, property deeds and wills. Tinklar was at Garth Row and Wilson's Wife's Acre at Tarn Bank.

<sup>33</sup> Stephenson had been a Braithwaite tenant in Dodding but purchased the Braithwaite manor.

Stephenson Trust after his death. Most were enfranchised in the eighteenth century so that by 1836 the Skelsmergh part of the Trust estate was reduced to c.150 acres and consisted of Dodding Green, Holme House the Beck Tenement, an enclosure allotment and a few other fields.<sup>34</sup> The twentieth century acquisition of Red Bank and part of the former Skelsmergh Hall farm more than doubled the size of the Trust's estate in Skelsmergh by 2010.

Although the customary tenancies seem never to have been regained, the hall and demesne farm became a Leyburne seat again during the seventeenth century. John Leyburne and his wife were listed as recusants here in 1632<sup>35</sup> and the hall seems to have been rebuilt around this time<sup>36</sup> some years before they took over Witherslack Hall. At least two of John's sons joined the Royalist armies in the Civil War<sup>37</sup> and their lands seem to have been sequestrated again. In 1652 the lands of John Leyburne in Skelsmergh and Esthwaite<sup>38</sup> were reported as in the hands of the County Committee unlet.<sup>39</sup> John's widow, Mary Leyburne was back living in Skelsmergh Hall in 1664<sup>40</sup> and her son George and his wife were the occupiers in 1674.<sup>41</sup> It was finally confiscated in 1715, after a later John Leyburne took part in the Jacobite rebellion. It was sold by the Forfeited Estates Commission in 1721 to Thomas Crowle of Whittington, purchased by Daniel Wilson of Dallam Tower in 1724 and retained by that estate until 1912.

Skelsmergh Hall was a tower house that was sketched by Machell as H-shaped (1692) but had lost the south wing by the nineteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The fifteenth-century tower contains no internal second storey and is tunnel-vaulted at the lowest level. The existing southern projection probably dates from the sixteenth and to the east there is a seventeenth century range, with stone mullioned and transomed windows, to which twentieth century extensions have been added.<sup>43</sup>

### **Other estates.**

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<sup>34</sup> Corn Rent map.

<sup>35</sup> Westmorland Recusancy returns 1632 in CRS Vol 53 Miscellanea, 359.

<sup>36</sup> CAS (C), D&C, Machell MSS, ii, 120. Machell recorded an inscription, no longer visible, of J+K and J+M (John Leyburne & wives, Katherine and Mary) and a date for which Machell's third digit is unclear, perhaps 1630.

<sup>37</sup> F. Alison Wright, 'The Layburnes and their World circa 1620-1720, the English Catholic Community and the House of Stuart', unpublished PhD thesis, St Andrews, 2002, Chapter 3.

<sup>38</sup> A tenement in Whinfell.

<sup>39</sup> *Calendar of the Committee for Compounding*, June 5 1662.

<sup>40</sup> LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R465A/27, will of Dorothy Patch.

<sup>41</sup> CAS (K) WQ/I/13, 19 April 1674.

<sup>42</sup> CAS (C), D&C, Machell MSS, ii, 120.

<sup>43</sup> RCHM 1936.

Although Skelsmergh was granted to the Leyburnes in the thirteenth century as a single manor, Ladyford, Giltwhaiterigg and some other lands in the southern part of the township had a somewhat autonomous existence during the medieval and early modern period. There were two monastic possessions. St Mary's Abbey in York owned land next to Sprint Bridge called Kirkfield until 1539.<sup>44</sup> St Leonard's Hospital in Scalthwaiterigg,<sup>45</sup> just outside Kendal, had an estate that included Beck Mills, Priest Leyes, Priest Holme and other land<sup>46</sup> on the Skelsmergh side of the Mint. It was suppressed in 1546 and granted to Alan Bellingham and Alan Wilson the following year.<sup>47</sup>

**Ladyford.** A grant in 1330 by Gilbert de Lancaster to his son, Christopher, of land in Skelsmergh, probably referred to Ladyford.<sup>48</sup> At his death, in 1355, Gilbert held, jointly with his wife Margaret, 2 carucates of land, a messuage and two tofts of Roger de Leyburn by fealty for service of 3 shillings in Skelsmergh.<sup>49</sup> 'Le ladefurd' is first named in the Lancaster deeds in 1487<sup>50</sup> and remained with the Lancasters until the seventeenth century, being usually linked with their Strickland Roger manor. In 1604 the Ladyford demesne was bought by Thomas Benson for £850.<sup>51</sup> It was sold by Charles Benson to Thomas Shepherd in 1690 for £3000.<sup>52</sup> There was other Lancaster land in Skelsmergh that had been linked to Ladyford. In 1623 Lancelot Lancaster of Sockbridge and his nephew Christopher Lancaster sold the Strickland Roger manor with the remaining Skelsmergh property to Hugh Barrow and Matthew Phillipson.<sup>53</sup> This probably consisted of the area immediately north of Ladyford and included Nether House, the Redman Tenement and Must Hill. By 1807, John Gale had acquired all these properties, reuniting most of the Lancaster Ladyford estate<sup>54</sup> although his son, Colonel Braddyll, sold Ladyford in 1841.

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<sup>44</sup> Brit Mus., Harley 607. Held by Christopher Redmayne 1557 - probably the Redman Tenement.

<sup>45</sup> Area later known as Spital.

<sup>46</sup> Possibly also Summerhow.

<sup>47</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 87-9.

<sup>48</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 252.

<sup>49</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 253.

<sup>50</sup> CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/1/56.

<sup>51</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 259.

<sup>52</sup> London Univ., Senate House Library, MS1108. Deeds relating to Lady Fford.

<sup>53</sup> CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/1.

<sup>54</sup> *Westmorland Gazette*, 12 Sept. 1807.

*Gilthwaiterigg*, like Ladyford, was taxed<sup>55</sup> and listed as a hamlet<sup>56</sup> separately from Skelsmergh in tithe rentals and was also assessed apart in rentals for the Marquis fee.<sup>57</sup> Whereas most of the township seems to have had moss and turbary rights on Skelsmergh Fell or Crake How Moss in the north-east of the township, Ladyford had such rights on Potter Fell and Gilthwaiterigg had them at Brigsteer. Gilthwaiterigg was occupied by John Cuke in 1431 when it was described as in the vill of Strickland Ketel.<sup>58</sup> In 1518 Thomas Parr listed Gilthwaiterigg among his possessions and willed it 'to Christofer Godmonde for term of his life.'<sup>59</sup> He held the manor of James Leyburn by service of socage.<sup>60</sup> It was a Duckett residence throughout the sixteenth century but was sold to meet James Duckett's debts in 1646<sup>61</sup> and purchased by the Kendal mercer and alderman Edward Turner who resold it for £1200 to William Rawlinson<sup>62</sup> of Graythwaite in 1661.<sup>63</sup> The estate was retained by the Rawlinsons until the beginning of the twentieth century and the house, mill and farm of c.120 acres was let to a series of tenants. Gilthwaiterigg mill and some adjacent land was part of the estate but linked with Nethergraveship in Scalthwaiterigg manor<sup>64</sup> and was not enfranchised until the 1930s.<sup>65</sup> The Thornburghs had a long term interest in some of the land in the north of the township near Selside Hall. In 1360 William de held two tenements in Skelsmergh of Roger de Leyburne.<sup>66</sup> By 1609 a later William Thornburgh had three messuages and 40 acres in Skelsmergh.<sup>67</sup> One was at Garth Row and the others included land on Skelsmergh Fell called Patterdale(s) and the adjacent farm called High Thorn that was enfranchised in 1733.

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<sup>55</sup> Trinity College, Cambridge., 40 Kendal 3, 1538.

<sup>56</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 90.

<sup>57</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 259 (1593) & TNA E317/Westmor/5, 1650 Parliamentary Survey of Marquis fee.

<sup>58</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 254.

<sup>59</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 58.

<sup>60</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 58.

<sup>61</sup> LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R425D/38, 1640 will of James Duckett.

<sup>62</sup> Later, Sir William Rawlinson, Lord Commissioner of the Great Seal.

<sup>63</sup> CAS (B), BDHJ/91.

<sup>64</sup> CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/2/11/139 1771-1804 Call Book.

<sup>65</sup> CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/2/11/157 1812-1939 Call Book.

<sup>66</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 253.

<sup>67</sup> *Rec. Kend.* I, 246.