

Newsletter, No. 29 Summer 2017

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Victoria County History of Cumbria (VCH) Update

Since the last newsletter I have been appointed to cover Dr Sarah Rose's 12 month maternity leave. I am delighted to report that Sarah and Damien's daughter, Rachel Alys Litchfield, was born on Sunday 25 June.

By way of introduction my expertise lies in the economic, social and environmental history of Britain from the 16th century onwards. I am a graduate of Lancaster University's History Department. I completed the MA in English Local History at the University of Leicester and returned to Lancaster for my PhD, supervised by Professor Angus Winchester, on the history of common land in Shropshire from the 16th to the 19th century. I held an Economic History Society Junior Research Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London for 2012-13 and my previous role was as a Research Associate in the Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Liverpool on an Arts and Humanities Research Council Care for the Future theme project investigating the impact of extreme weather since 1700. I have recently co-written an article in the journal *Archives and Records* on the use of parish registers to explore extreme weather history (available to download for free through open access, see: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23257962.2016.1260531>). I have experience of the VCH in other counties, notably Shropshire where I have been instrumental in helping to relaunch the project. In addition to my Cumbria role, I am the part-time contributing editor for VCH Herefordshire working on Colwall parish in the Malvern Hills.

Carrying on from where Sarah left off, I have been working closely with VCH Cumbria volunteer Richard Brockington on his history of the three fellside townships of Kirkoswald, Staffield and Renwick which form the modern civil parish of Kirkoswald. Richard had already written three separate draft articles on these townships which are available on the Cumbria County History Trust (CCHT) website, but since last autumn he has worked on combining them into a single document and carrying out further research. I have already visited the area having spent the day with Richard undertaking a buildings survey. The resulting document will form the basis of our first official VCH publication known as a VCH 'Short'. The VCH Shorts series of parish and urban histories are produced in paperback and aim to bring local research to publication as swiftly as possible and to inspire readers to get involved with VCH ventures in their own localities. Other VCH volunteers have continued to submit sections of draft articles and have attended training sessions which so far this year have included a behind the scenes tour of Carlisle Archive Centre and a talk on Victorian coach travel in the Lake District.

Since starting I have arranged a field trip for Friday 22 September which I hope as many of you will attend (further details overleaf). In the autumn I will be arranging the regular drafters' meetings that are held in Penrith. My contact details are given below, so please get it touch.

James P. Bowen

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ANTIQUARIAN AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Department of History
Lancaster University
Lancaster,
LA1 4YT

T: +44 (0)1524 593155
www.lancaster.ac.uk/fass/history/
Tweet us: @LancasterHistor

Report on Cumbria County History Trust (CCHT) Annual General Meeting

There was a good attendance at the CCHT AGM on Tuesday 25 April which was held for the first time at the Tebay Services Hotel. Bryan Gray and Tiffany Hunt both agreed to stay on as Chairman and Secretary respectively, but after several years John Garside stepped down from his role as Treasurer of the Trust and Richard Platt was elected in his place. CCHT is very grateful to John for having done such an excellent job and also to Richard for agreeing to take on this vital role. We are delighted to announce that two vacant Trustee positions have been filled: Jane Penman, a VCH volunteer, was co-opted as a new Trustee at the AGM and Timothy Sykes has also since joined. After presenting a positive Director's Report, Fiona Edmonds then went on to give an interesting talk on 'Cumbrian identity in the Viking Age'. Fiona drew on her two recent seminal articles about the expansion of the kingdom of Strathclyde, and its transformation into the kingdom of Cumbria. She sought to explain how the expanded kingdom came to encompass various cultural groups: not only the ruling dynasty of Brittonic-speaking Cymry (who bequeathed their name to Cumbria) but also Gaelic-Scandinavians and English-speaking Northumbrians.

Drafters' Meeting and Guest Lecture

On Friday 12 May VCH drafters and CCHT members were treated to a talk by Dr Chris Donaldson on Victorian coach travel in the Lake District. Using J.B. Pyne's painting *Windermere, Seen from Orrest Head* (1849), Lady Mary Lowther's *Windermere from the top of Orrest* (1766) and a selection of travel writings, the talk and ensuing discussion examined the complex connection between Lakeland landscape, the railway, coach travel and contemporary experiences of it. The Lake District seems to have been one of the few places where the coming of the railway had a positive impact on coaching. The meeting also gave VCH volunteers a chance to meet James Bowen, the new Assistant Editor for VCH Cumbria and for him to hear about their work.

Fieldtrip to Troutbeck

A fieldtrip has been arranged for Friday 22 September to which volunteers and members of CCHT are invited to participate. The morning will consist of a walk (approximately 3 miles) starting and finishing from Troutbeck Jesus Church which was originally a chapel of ease consecrated in 1562. We will follow a footpath which leads to the village of Troutbeck where we will examine vernacular buildings. Continuing past Town Head, we will follow a bridleway along Ings Lane towards the tongue of the valley at Troutbeck Park Farm (famously bought by Beatrix Potter) which previously formed part of a medieval deer park. In the afternoon we will visit Townend in the Troutbeck Valley which has been owned by the National Trust since 1948 when it was donated by its owners. It is a traditional 17th century Lake District stone and slate farmhouse that was previously owned by the Brownes, a wealthy yeoman farming family dynasty, for 400 years. The house has a notable library with books collected by George Browne. If you would like to participate or if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact James Bowen by email or telephone 01524 593141.

VCH Cumbria is on Twitter

A new Twitter feed @VCH_Cumbria has been launched. The profile page features Mercator's colourful 1595 map of Cumbria. It is planned that in the next few months Cumbria facts will be posted drawing peoples' attention to the project. To view the profile and follow the project, see: https://twitter.com/VCH_Cumbria. If you have any Cumbrian facts then please send them in!

VCH at external events

Dr Fiona Edmonds will deliver a talk entitled 'Furness Abbey and the Irish Sea Region in the Medieval Period' at the Cumbria Local History Federation Convention on Saturday 14 October at Askam Band Hall. On Sunday 5 November James Bowen will be representing VCH Cumbria and Lancaster

University's Regional Heritage Centre (RHC) at the Cumbria Family History Society Conference, which is being held at Crooklands near Kendal. His talk, 'Family history and local history: new opportunities and approaches', will discuss the challenges and opportunities which VCH research provides for modern family historians, the sources available and approaches that can be adopted. It will outline how you can explore the history of your ancestors through local, regional and contextual family and community history.

Regional Heritage Centre events

The new RHC programme will be released over the summer. The first event will focus on the White Lund explosion and will take place on Saturday 30 September at the Storey Institute in Lancaster. This event is being organised in collaboration with Lancashire Museums Service. Further details will be available shortly.

New Training Opportunities

Those of you in the south of the county may be particularly interested in the new Heritage Skills Training programme being offered by Morecambe Bay Partnership. The courses are free and include several Heritage Skills Days on running guided tours (Saturday 16 September), recording oral history (Sunday 8 October) and producing effective displays and exhibitions (Saturday 18 November). Pre-booking is essential. For further details, see: <http://www.morecambebay.org.uk/events>.

News from the Archives

Cumbria Archive Service has digitised the Kirkby Stephen Township Tithe Map of 1839 and digitally redrawn it. The result has been to accurately reproduce the map's detail and enhance access to it since the original map is so large. Both the map and the apportionment schedule are now online and can be viewed in their entirety, see: <http://www.westmorland-daales.co.uk/tithe.html>.

New E-book published about Harecroft Hall in west Cumbria by Ruth Mansergh

This is the first book to be published about Harecroft Hall, the former private school at Gosforth. The hall was built in 1881 and was the home of Sir John Ainsworth. The school, whose old boys include Tam Dalyell and singer Tom Morley, was opened by Roy Vallance and Mary Farish Brown in 1926 as a preparatory school for boys destined for elite public schools. All boys were taught to ride by a resident riding mistress on ponies maintained on the premises. The school went bankrupt but was revived by Tom McClelland, the headteacher. Children's author Geoffrey Trease was a teacher at the school and wrote of his time there. Some boys had piano lessons from Eileen Joyce and cricket coaching at the hands of Greg Matthews. Tom Penrice, who bought the business from William Dunlop, was headmaster from 1965 to 1992. Harecroft Hall School, which had strong links with St Bees School, closed in 2008. You can buy the e-book which costs £7 from Amazon, or alternatively from the authors' website, see: <http://ruthmansergh.com>.

Contacts:

VCH Cumbria Project Director: Dr Fiona Edmonds, History Department, Bowland College, Lancaster University, LA1 4YT. Tel: 01524 594297. Email: f.edmonds@lancaster.ac.uk.

VCH Cumbria Assistant Editor: Dr James Bowen, History Department, Bowland College, Lancaster University, LA1 4YT. Tel: 01524 593141. Email: j.p.bowen@lancaster.ac.uk.

CCHT Secretary: Ms Tiffany Hunt, Yew Tree Cottage, Barn Garth, Cartmel, Cumbria LA11 6PP. Tel: 015395 36302. Email: tiffanyhunt59@gmail.com.