

Parish/township: CASTERTON

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Some records from the seventeenth-century courts baron have been preserved.¹ Held apparently twice a year, their tenant lists show about 40 customary tenants, a dozen freeholders and four or five tenants of the 'hospitall ground'. Local regulation seems to have been light: bylawmen and 'sessors' are the only posts recorded in the court records, but there were others. The 1674 hearth tax list was drawn up by a surveyor and a constable.² Tenants were fined for failing to make good their fences, particularly on the open high land to the east of the township, for failing to cut turf properly,³ and for using the heather on the common as a cash crop.⁴ Towards the end of the period recorded, for whatever reason, there were a great many fines for turning cattle and horses into the highways to browse, highways which, even in modern times, are so narrow that they are frequently grass-grown in the middle. Neighbouring owners were sometimes fined for allowing these lanes to become waterlogged.

Spats between neighbours are rarely recorded. In 1673 Christopher Witton and Dorothy his wife were fined 3s.4d. for 'scandalising Edmund Witton with these words following that is to say thou art a theefe thou stole Thomas Servants horse and I will prove it', but this seems to have been an unusual occurrence.

No further records of local government have been traced from this period until 1894 when the parish council was set up with five councillors, a treasurer and a clerk. Apart from the treasurer, who was the manager of the Lancaster Bank in Kirkby Lonsdale, and one councillor, a shopkeeper, the council was drawn from

¹ CRO (Kendal) WD/CW Acc 1914 Casterton Manor Court 1642-85.

² Westmorland Hearth Tax, 204

³ 'For not bedding his turfe pits' (1680)

⁴ 'For pulling of ling upon our Comond and caryeing away' (1682)

the larger farmers in the township. Their business at first was mainly confined to the passing of the accounts for the Poor rate, the Highways and the Poor Land, and the letting of two occupation roads. The state of the roads, sign posts, and the need for fencing round an unprotected quarry, took up much of their time in the early years. Most needs had to be passed on to the District Council, and the District Council was characteristically slow to respond. By 1904, an urgent need was warning signs to slow down the increasing motor traffic. This remained a priority for the next hundred years, particularly from the 1920s onwards, with the spread of Casterton School to both sides of the road. In the 1920s the unsatisfactory water supply was the subject of much discussion, as was the provision of public seats. During the second World War, fire hydrants, long neglected and more or less useless, had to be disinterred and brought back into use. The provision of allotments became important. After the war, with the increase in motor traffic, parking at Devil's Bridge was a particular and ever-increasing problem.⁵

At different times in the twentieth century, the council varied greatly in enthusiasm and commitment. During the 1950s the number of meetings dwindled from the statutory five a year to two or three, with the addition of an annual general meeting usually unattended by any member of the public. Towards the end of the century the council became much more vigorous, attracting greater interest, holding more meetings, and addressing itself to general improvement of amenities in the village. In 1994 it won the small village award in the 'Cumbria in Bloom' contest, and was then awarded £500 to enable it to enter 'Britain in Bloom' in 1995. By the end of the century these were usually ten meetings a year.⁶

In 2011 it happened that all five members were replaced and a new, experienced and salaried clerk appointed, and in the next three years the council entered on a particularly busy time. The seven street lights had to be given their own

⁵ CAS (Kendal) WPC 40/1/1 Parish Council Minutes 1894-1995

⁶ CAS (Kendal) WPC 40./1/3 Parish Council Minutes 1894-1995

standards.⁷ Five grit bins were provided for icy weather. Parish notice boards were set up. The village green opposite the 'Pheasant' inn was tidied, reseeded, given a bench and planted with trees. A village event was held for the Diamond Jubilee. A footpath to provide a safe walkers' route between Low Casterton and the bridge was cleared and made more usable. A parish plan was published, and a quarterly newsletter printed and delivered to every house.⁸

⁷ They had previously been attached to poles belonging to British Telecom or Electricity North West, both of which companies now objected.

⁸ Inf. Mrs. E. Hastings, chairman.