

## Victoria County History of Cumbria Project: Work in Progress

### Interim Draft

[Note: This is an interim draft and should not be cited without first consulting the VCH Cumbria project: for contact details, see <http://www.cumbriacountyhistory.org.uk/>]

Parish/township: **CASTERTON**

Author: **Emmeline Garnett**

Date of draft: January 2014

### ECONOMIC HISTORY

In 1770 only one patch of woodland, on the north side of the old hall in Low Casterton, was significant enough to appear on Jeffrey's map.<sup>1</sup> At that time, Casterton's open aspect made it a landscape very suitable for hare coursing.<sup>2</sup> Quite extensive stretches of amenity woodland, mostly near the river, came with the building of larger country houses, particularly Casterton Hall in the eighteenth century and the Grange in the nineteenth.

The earliest evidence of a mill in Casterton is in 1271, when the rent of a mill and a mill dam were worth 79s. yearly.<sup>3</sup> In 1334 the water corn mill was worth £3 6s. 8d.<sup>4</sup> In 1454 a fulling mill which had been formerly let for 6s. 8d. per annum was in the lord's hand, unoccupied.<sup>5</sup> In 1637 George Stockdall died possessed of 'one water grain mill in Casterton'.<sup>6</sup> These, presumably successive uses of the same site, must have been powered by the Casterton Beck, which runs through Low Casterton and is the only watercourse of any size within the township.<sup>7</sup>

The seam of coal high on the Brownthwaite Moor was noted as having been worked in the reign of Charles I.<sup>8</sup> William Garnett's inventory of 1673<sup>9</sup> included 'a collier grindstone and tools' and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Thomas Jefferys' Historic Map of Westmorland 1770* (reprinted CWAAS Record Series XIV, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> *The Diary of Thomas Fenwick Esq. of Burrow Hall, Lancashire and Nunriding, Northumberland. 1774-1794* ed. Jennifer S. Holt (List and Index Society Special Series, 47) I, 213-5. In November 1782, for instance, Fenwick's hounds hunted hares in Casterton on at least three occasions.

<sup>3</sup> *Lancashire Inquests, Extents and Feudal Aids A.D. 1205-1307*, ed. William Farrer (Record Society of Lancs. & Ches. 48, 1903), 237.

<sup>4</sup> *Rec. Kend.* II, 330.

<sup>5</sup> *Rec. Kend.* II, 332.

<sup>6</sup> *Rec. Kend.* II, 338.

<sup>7</sup> Although no direct reference to a mill has been found after 1637, the beck is named 'Mill Gill' on 1st ed. OS map (1858) and a neighbouring field is called 'Mill Field'.

<sup>8</sup> N & B, I, 250.

the workings were noted again in 1692.<sup>10</sup> In 1732 the colliery, in possession of Rowland Tatham, was rented to James Stainbank together with Casterton Fell Farm;<sup>11</sup> the rent of £5 for the colliery, compared to £65 for the farm, implies a very minor industrial operation, a suggestion supported by an indictment of 1735 against Robert Laws who ‘did break out and demolish several pieces of timber supporting the workings of several going coalpits called Casterton coalpits then in the management of William Willan causing earth to fall in and render them useless,’ for which he was fined one shilling.<sup>12</sup> Later the workings were extended and made much more profitable. Recommendations for six different applicants in 1769 have been preserved, the annual rent then being £30.<sup>13</sup> Traces of these numerous small surface pits, with their spoilheaps, can still be found.<sup>14</sup> In 1830 they were owned by the earl of Lonsdale, as lord of the manor, and rented to James Harrison,<sup>15</sup> but by mid-century, the operation would appear to have died altogether: a reference in 1851 to working in the time of Charles I is phrased to indicate something in the past.<sup>16</sup> The coal was of poor quality, and seems to have been used mainly if not entirely for burning lime. Three limekilns which remain nearby were established at the time of enclosure, and those who were awarded land under the enclosure act were given the right to burn lime.<sup>17</sup> This was only the renewal of a much older activity: in 1666 William Garnett was admitted tenant of a kiln for a rent of twopence, and a year later Edward Mansergh was admitted tenant of the north end of a kiln for a rent of one penny.<sup>18</sup> Sites of nine other limekilns have been identified within Casterton, seven of them along the old road which follows the line of the Roman road.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from these small industries, the economy of Casterton was based on farming, the land towards the river in particular producing good grazing for cattle. A study of inventories shows considerable fluctuation in size of holding and prosperity of individuals, but almost without exception the value of a farm, small or large, depended on the number of cattle it would feed.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Lancs. Archives (Preston), WCW/L.

<sup>10</sup> Ewbank, *Antiquary*, 27. Machell reported the workings, but did not visit them.

<sup>11</sup> CAS (Carlisle), DLONS/L/5/4/15/3

<sup>12</sup> CAS (Kendal), WQ/SR Quarter Sessions Rolls 1729-1804

<sup>13</sup> CAS (Carlisle), DLONS/L/5/4/15/3. One pair of applicants was recommended on the grounds that ‘They are persons who were friends and well wishers to our party in the last Election.’

<sup>14</sup> Inf. M. Kingsbury, Kirkby Lonsdale and District Civic Society.

<sup>15</sup> CAS (Kendal), WQ/R/LT 1830 (Lonsdale Ward)

<sup>16</sup> Mannex, *Dir. Westmd* 1851, 353.

<sup>17</sup> Inf. from David Johnson.

<sup>18</sup> Transcript of Casterton manor book 1662-1705: CAS (Kendal), WDX 1352.

<sup>19</sup> Inf. from David Johnson.

<sup>20</sup> Lancs. Archives (Preston), WRW/L. An analysis of 35 inventories from 1578 to 1694.

Horses seem to have been little valued except as a means of locomotion: there are very few examples of local breeding. Sheep were invariably kept, but in small numbers except in one or two cases of fellside farms (Thomas Fawcett of Gailgarth in 1576 had a flock of almost 200, Roger Wilson in 1690 had 250 at Fellhouses). Few individuals held oxen, probably reflecting a predominantly pastoral economy, though Edmund Witton (d. 1679) had six oxen among his 28 cattle, worth in all £63. A communal bull was provided by William Tatham under his will in 1606, who left money to buy a bull which was to be kept by his brother John, ‘and to kepe the said bull for ever, if the towne will helpe to kepe him in the somer, if they will not, then to have none of him.’

The number of farmers recorded in the township were 23 in 1829,<sup>21</sup> 21 in 1851,<sup>22</sup> and 24 in 1906.<sup>23</sup> But if the number of farms remained constant, the methods of working altered. In 1851, there were sixteen cottagers in the township labelled as agricultural labourers.<sup>24</sup> In 1891 there were only two. This change may have been due to the introduction of peripatetic Irish labourers during the busy summer months.

By 1943 the number of farms had dropped to sixteen, only two of which were owner-occupied.<sup>25</sup> The Underley estate in Kirkby Lonsdale owned five, the Whelprigg estate in Barbon three. By the end of four years of war, farms had been encouraged towards crop growing, and most of them reported at least a small acreage of oats, kale, potatoes, barley, even ‘trying a little wheat’. Some were more efficient than others, and the Ministry’s inspector from time to time expressed his frustration (‘Born lazy’. ‘incompetent’, ‘hopeless’). There were a number of smallholdings under twenty acres in extent, many owned by people living in Kirkby Lonsdale just across the Lune. The farms were still small, almost all under 100 acres, and unlike most neighbouring townships, nearly all of them kept commercial numbers of poultry, up to 300 hens.<sup>26</sup> Whether this was the result of wartime encouragement is not clear. Ten farms are noted as having no electricity, five as having no water, two others with water only to the house. Kirfit Hall, Cragg House and the township’s Bellgate had petrol engines, presumably stationary ones rather than vehicles. No tractors or mechanised vehicles are mentioned. In 2013 only four working farms

---

<sup>21</sup> Parson & White, *Dir. C & W*, 696.

<sup>22</sup> Mannex *Dir. Westmd*, 1851, 360.

<sup>23</sup> Bulmer *Dir. Westmd*, 1906, 364.

<sup>24</sup> 1851 Census returns: TNA, HO 107.

<sup>25</sup> TNA, MAF 32/198/76.

<sup>26</sup> TNA, MAF 32/198/76.

remained: Kirfitt Hall, Bee Nest, Fell Yeat, and Old Manor Farm. These mainly provided grazing for sheep, but Bee Nest and Fell Yeat also had dairy herds.<sup>27</sup>

An inn at Low Casterton was called at least since 1829 the ‘George and Dragon’,<sup>28</sup> more recently the ‘Pheasant’. Very close to the site of the blacksmith’s forge, it may well have been established when the road was turnpiked; no earlier mention of an innkeeper has been found. There was a forge from at least the seventeenth century, Thomas Ustonson’s inventory of 1683 valuing his ‘smeddy tooles’ at £1 1s.6d.<sup>29</sup> It was mentioned again a hundred years later,<sup>30</sup> probably always on the same site in Low Casterton,<sup>31</sup> to be replaced in 1973 by a garage and motor repair shop which in 2013 employed nine people.<sup>32</sup> Other opportunities for employment arose in the twentieth century from the growth of tourism. By the later twentieth century, there was a considerable parking space at the end of the Devil’s Bridge, well-known as a gathering place for motor-cyclists. A tea-bar van was established here in 1955 and in 2013 continued in the same family ownership, with six employees.<sup>33</sup> On the hillside between the bridge and Chapelhouses is Woodclose Park, a family-run caravan park on about fifteen landscaped acres. It started modestly in the early 1960s but by 2013 was licensed for 121 static and mobile holiday homes, with two full-time and two part-time employees.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> Local inf. (Mrs B. Magee).

<sup>28</sup> Parson & White *Dir. C. & W.*, 696.

<sup>29</sup> Lancs. Archives(Preston), WRW/L.

<sup>30</sup> Holt (ed.), *Diary of Thomas Fenwick* I, 142. On the 28 July, 1781, Fenwick ‘paid Harry Roberts, blacksmith at Casterton, 10s. for grate etc.’

<sup>31</sup> Specifically stated to be in Low Casterton in 1829 and 1851: Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.*; Mannex, *Dir. Westmd.*, 1851.

<sup>32</sup> Local inf.

<sup>33</sup> Local inf.

<sup>34</sup> Inf. M. McAvoy, manager.