

Victoria County History of Cumbria Project: Work in Progress

Interim Draft

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Parish/township: **CASTERTON**

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LANDOWNERSHIP

Before the conquest Casterton, assessed at three carucates, was part of the lands of Earl Tosti listed under Whittington (Lancs), which came to the Crown after 1066.¹ At one time Casterton and Hutton Roof, though separated by the river, may have been linked as one manor.² If so, by the eighteenth century they had long been separated,³ although some element of twinning remained: as late as 1778, one of the Kirkby Lonsdale churchwardens represented both townships.⁴

There is no direct evidence of the descent of Casterton in the century after the Conquest, but in 1202 a release of land associated the township with estates in Kaber and Warcop, villages near Brough under Stainmore.⁵ Further evidence of a link is provided by the unusual dedication to St. Columba, shared by the church at Warcop and the chapel in Casterton. In 1202 Eleanor, widow of Robert de Kabergh, held land in Casterton as part of her dower and passed it to her stepson, Hugh de Kabergh.⁶ His granddaughter Matilda, wife of Nicholas de Buelles, in 1222 granted a moiety of the manor to Alice, daughter of Gilbert, then the current tenant of the holding. Future transactions indicate that Alice was the sister of William de Lancaster III and wife of William de Lindsay, and it would seem that she and her brother were related to the de Kabergh

¹ *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation* (London 2003), 796.

² Writing in 1692, Thomas Machell stated that Hutton Roof 'is now esteemed but half a lordship as joined with Casterton' but noted that tenants of Hutton Roof had 'never of old' appeared at Casterton court: Ewbank, *Antiquary*, 44.

³ N & B, I, 249.

⁴ Butler, *Cumbria Parishes*, 132.

⁵ *Rec. Kend.* II, 328.

⁶ *Rec. Kend.* II, 328.

line.⁷ At a later date Hugh de Kabergh and another holder of land in Casterton, John Gernet, released their holdings under an action of mort d'ancestor to William de Lancaster, who settled them on his sister and brother-in-law. In 1247 another holding in Casterton passed from the de Kabergh family to William de Lindsey, probably concentrating the whole manor in his hands.⁸ It was however still in one way a divided holding. The inquisition post mortem of William de Lindsey's son Walter in 1272 shows that whereas he held most of his Casterton possessions (which rendered no more than 60s. in annual rent)⁹ of the barony of Kendale of the king in chief by knight's service, a smaller part of the holding, about a quarter of the vill, was held of Sir Peter de Brus by a yearly service of twelve pence.¹⁰ It is uncertain how this division occurred.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century the estate descended to Walter de Lindsey's granddaughter Christiana, wife of Ingram de Gynes,¹¹ but after Christiana's death in 1334 and the death of her son, Robert de Gynes, a childless priest, ten years later, it escheated to the crown. At the end of the fourteenth century Robert de Bellingham held the manor, probably from Robert de Vere, duke of Ireland, then lord of the Richmond fee of Kendal barony.¹² The manor of Casterton descended with the Richmond fee, passing to the Crown in 1411. Members of the Bellingham family continued to head the list of tenants until the mid-sixteenth century, when a Bellingham daughter, Katherine, married Richard Assheton of Middleton in Lancashire.¹³ Their property descended by the marriage of Elizabeth, daughter of Katherine Assheton, to the Davenport family of Bromhall in Cheshire who sold it in 1638 back into the Bellingham family of Levens.¹⁴ Elizabeth, daughter and coheir of Sir Henry Bellingham, married about 1650 John Lowther of Lowther,¹⁵ and so it came into that family. 'Casterton Hall', the focus of the estate, was the house in High Casterton, now called the Old Manor. Almost entirely of nineteenth-century date, there are some seventeenth-century walls in the north-west block,¹⁶ as well as the remains of a large arched hearth. It was noted by Machell in 1692 as 'an old ruinous building

⁷ *Rec. Kend.* II, 326.

⁸ *Rec. Kend.* II, 328.

⁹ *Lancashire Inquests, Extents and Feudal Aids Pt. I*, ed. W. Farrer (Record Society of Lancs & Ches. 48, 1903), p. 235.

¹⁰ *Rec. Kend.* II, 331. No evidence has been found as to how this division occurred.

¹¹ *Rec. Kend.* II, 330.

¹² *Rec. Kend.* II, 331.

¹³ Court roll, 1560: CAS (Carlisle), DLONS, Kendal Barony, n. 3. Presumably at this time the manor house was abandoned and fell into the ruin observed by Machell.

¹⁴ *Rec. Kend.* II, 334.

¹⁵ *Visitations of Cumberland and Westmorland*, ed. J. Foster (Carlisle and Kendal, 1890), 9, 85

¹⁶ RCHME, *Westmorland*, 66.

now only fit to contain a farmer'¹⁷ and was still listed as a farm well into the twentieth century,¹⁸ reverting, by the beginning of the twenty-first, to private use as two houses.

The larger part of the township was granted in 1669 to Edward Wilson of Park House in Burrow (later of Nether Levens) on a 96-year lease by Charles II's queen, Catherine of Braganza,¹⁹ on the very peculiar terms that the lease depended on Edward's three sons living until the end of that period.²⁰ That lease was the renewal of one acquired by Wilson during the interregnum, and whatever the precise meaning of the terms when the lease was granted, by 1705, when he wrote his will, he had fully acquired the estate, which with other land he left to his children by his second wife.²¹ It descended to his son, Roger Wilson (d. 1690), who built the house in Low Casterton, originally called Beckside Hall, now sometimes confusingly known as the Old Manor House. The house has retained many original features, windows with three and four transomed lights, chimney stacks with twin shafts set diagonally.²² The elaborately carved overmantel and fireplace surrounds in the main room, and a cupboard in the same room, are older than the house,²³ and presumably were imported features.²⁴

Roger Wilson died in 1690 at the age of 27, leaving a widow four months pregnant with their third child. It seems likely that she had moved back to her own family, perhaps until the elder son, another Roger, came of age in 1708.²⁵ Of the second Roger's six children only two daughters married. The elder, Ann, married Rev. Marwood Place, vicar of Kirkby Lonsdale, but had no children. The younger, Elizabeth, married William Carus and had a son, also William, who inherited from his aunt Ann Place on her death in 1790, with the proviso that he should add the name Wilson to Carus. Apparently the first of the family to move into public life, William Carus Wilson (1764-1851) became a J.P. and Deputy Lieutenant for Westmorland, and

¹⁷ Ewbank, *Antiquary*, 27.

¹⁸ TNA, MAF 32/194.

¹⁹ H. P. Brown *Edward Wilson of Nether Levens (1557-1653) and his kin* (Kendal 1930), Table 1

²⁰ N & B, I, 249-50. As the eldest son would have been aged 114 at the expiry date, this may have been just a legal fiction to terminate a lease.

²¹ Brown, *Wilson of Nether Levens*, 63.

²² RCHME, *Westmorland*, 66.

²³ RCHME, *Westmorland*, 66 and Plate 58.

²⁴ The cupboard is dated 1613 and initialled 'W' on the left, 'H' above 'A' on the right. The line from Edward Wilson, of Nether Levens (1557-1653) who was childless, was through his stepdaughter Agnes Richardson, who married Henry Fisher. The family name reverted to Wilson with their daughter, who married Thomas Wilson. The cupboard may be marked 'W' for Wilson, 'H' and 'A' for Henry and Agnes. See Brown, *Wilson of Nether Levens*, Table I.

²⁵ Brown, *Wilson of Nether Levens*, Table 1. She was Jane Foxcroft of Whittington in Lancashire.

briefly (1821-1827) represented Cockermouth at Westminster. His son, William Carus Wilson (1791-1859), was the founder of the Casterton schools.²⁶ The elder William Carus Wilson built the more modern and prestigious Casterton Hall in 1811,²⁷ leaving the older house to be used by his land agent.²⁸ The new house, described as a 'stately mansion... standing upon an eminence and surrounded by fine plantations',²⁹ was probably designed by John Webb of Staffordshire, and has been described as 'a perfect example of its type, a neat neo-Classical house of smooth ashlar stone...Much of its effect derives from the geometrical contrast between the overall rectangular form and semi-circular features, a segmental bow on one front and a Tuscan porch on the entrance front.'³⁰ There is a fine hanging staircase circling the entrance hall. A guide book of 1820 recommends that travellers to the Lakes, passing through Kirkby Lonsdale, should take the time when visiting the church, to admire the view from the churchyard from which Casterton Hall is 'a prominent feature in the charming scene.'³¹

Kirfitt Hall is something of an enigma. In 1638 William Moore of Casterton and his son John sold 'a certain close called Kirkfitt and the ancient messuage' to Roger Moore of Middleton for £50.³² Kirfitt Hall was clearly built as a gentry house, but there is no information as to who built it originally or later undertook various additions and reconstructions. Originally on an L-shaped plan, a four-storey staircase tower was added in the late seventeenth century and a further wing in the eighteenth.³³ In 1682 it was owned by Edward Wilson of Dallam Tower.³⁴ In 1726 Hugh Ashton who married Susannah, elder daughter of Thomas Godsalue of Rigmaden,³⁵ bought it from his father-in-law. The young couple lived there until her death in 1731, and then the second Godsalue daughter, Margaret, and her husband Thomas Mawdesley lived there until at least 1735.³⁶ Machell did not mention it,³⁷ nor did Nicolson and Burn,³⁸ and it may quite soon

²⁶ Juliet Barker, 'Wilson, William Carus (1791-1859)', *ODNB*.

²⁷ J. M. Robinson 'Like the Countenance of a Madonna: Houses of the Lune Valley' *Country Life*, 28 (Jan.1982), 248-50.

²⁸ Mannex, *Dir. Westmorland with Lonsdale and Amounderness* (1851), 360; Bulmer, *Dir. Westmd.*(1906), 364.

²⁹ Mannex, *Dir. Westmd* (1851), 351.

³⁰ Robinson 'Like the countenance of a Madonna'.

³¹ J. Otley *A Concise Description of the English Lakes and adjacent Mountains* (Keswick 1820).

³² Kirfitt Hall deeds 1638-1795: CAS (Kendal), WD/CW. As the text indicates, it was much older than that. Local tradition sets it back at least to the early sixteenth century, which may well be true, unlike the accompanying suggestion that Henry VIII lodged there while courting Katharine Parr at Kendal Castle.

³³ RCHME, *Westmorland*, 66. The east end and staircase tower are largely ruinous.

³⁴ Kirfit Hall deeds: CAS (Kendal), WD/CW.

³⁵ See under 'Mansergh'

³⁶ CAS (Kendal), Kirkby Lonsdale Parish Register

³⁷ Ewbank, *Antiquary*, 26-7.

³⁸ N & B, I, 249-50.

have been downgraded to a tenant farm. From 1740 to 1800 the parish register shows entries under eight different surnames, none of which has been traced as having any social importance. It was certainly a farm in 1829,³⁹ and has remained so.

Other estates

By 1773 considerable holdings in Casterton belonged to people living outside the township. Sir James Lowther of Lowther was the second largest landowner, Joseph Gibson and James Harrison of Barbon the third and fifth respectively.⁴⁰ The largest holding in that year (accounting for almost one-third of the township's total Land Tax assessment) was the Wilson estate, then in the name of the Rev. Marwood Place, vicar of Kirkby Lonsdale. He and his wife may have lived at Beckside Hall until 1783, when Place rebuilt the Kirkby Lonsdale Vicarage.⁴¹

Another large house, Casterton Grange, just to the north of Low Casterton, was built in 1848 on Wilson family land by the Rev. David Barclay-Bevan, who married the younger William Carus-Wilson's daughter, although it is doubtful if they ever lived there.⁴² They were married at Casterton in 1837, and from 1843 to 1857 he was rector of Burton Latimer in Northamptonshire. The architect was Ewan Christian, a devout evangelical, which was no doubt the reason for his connection with Carus-Wilson's family. Christian was much influenced by Pugin, and this house, designed round a toplit central staircase, has features strongly reminiscent of Pugin's own house in Ramsgate. It has had many owners, and considerable periods of standing empty, but was sensitively restored from 2003 according to the original plan.⁴³

By 1816 2,200 acres (890 ha.) of common land (accounting for half of the township's total acreage) were enclosed, most of it fell land on Brownthwaite and Casterton Fell. Joseph Gibson of Whelprigg⁴⁴ acquired 1,500 acres (607 ha.) the greatest part of it by sale from the commissioners, notably the Brownthwaite area of moorland for shooting. At this date the Carus-Wilsons were allotted 400 acres (162 ha.), the Lonsdale estates 220 acres (90 ha.), and

³⁹ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.*, 696.

⁴⁰ CAS (Kendal), WQ/R/LT 1773 (Lonsdale Ward).

⁴¹ R. P. Brown, 'The Vicars of Kirkby Lonsdale', *CW*2, 29 (1929), 189.

⁴² K. Humphris, 'Casterton Grange', *Kirkby Lonsdale & District Civic Society Newsletter* (Winter, 2012-3).

⁴³ Humphris, 'Casterton Grange'.

⁴⁴ See Barbon.

James Harrison 88 acres (35 ha.). Apart from these, the allocations were very small, many of them with only the right of turbary, not grazing.⁴⁵

By 1910 the Carus-Wilson family, by then of Faversham in Kent, had retained only 95 acres (38 ha.) and some shooting rights. The Underley estate in Kirkby Lonsdale had over 1,400 acres (567 ha.).⁴⁶ The Lonsdale estate, as owners of the Richmond fee, kept the lordship of the manor until 1979, when it was sold, probably to an American buyer, the mineral rights being retained.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Casterton enclosure award, 1816: CAS (Kendal), WQR/I /14.

⁴⁶ CAS (Kendal), WT/DV/2/33. No evidence has been found as to the exact date of purchase.

⁴⁷ Inf. from the Lonsdale Estate Office, Lowther, 2011.