

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

### Interim Draft

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Parish/township: **CASTERTON**

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### SOCIAL HISTORY

Until the 1830s Casterton's social character appears to have been typical of other rural townships in Westmorland. The backbone of the community consisted of small farmers, many living in small hamlets or isolated dwellings. The township had no church and no proper village. The old manor house stood isolated and downgraded to a farm, and the inn was probably a recent establishment after the road was turnpiked. In 1695 it was reported that, 'Wee have no person above the degree of a yeoman nor no person of £50 lands or £600 personal Estate within our township.'<sup>1</sup>

Change came with the establishment of the school which William Wilson Carus-Wilson founded as the Clergy Daughters' School in Cowan Bridge, Lancashire, in 1823,<sup>2</sup> and ten years later moved with 90 pupils to custom-built premises at Casterton, providing a higher and more healthy site, which was moreover on his own family estate.<sup>3</sup> It is to Carus-Wilson's credit that at a time when girls' education had barely been considered, both his foundations were for girls. Even before the Clergy Daughters' School, about 1820 he had started the Servants' School, to instruct girls of a lower social class in basic household skills and a carefully restricted amount of general education.<sup>4</sup> This institution was also moved to Casterton, to a house built for the purpose facing the Clergy Daughters' building from the opposite side of the beck which runs through the village. In the 1880s, the original objectives being out of date, it was re-founded as

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<sup>1</sup> CAS (Kendal), WD/RY/5/2890 (HMC).

<sup>2</sup> Famous for the brief attendance of the four Brontë sisters.

<sup>3</sup> Above, 'Landownership'.

<sup>4</sup> 'It is deemed a vital point to guard against the evils of over-education': *Report on the Servants' School*, 1846. (copy in Casterton School Library).

the Endowed Church School, a boarding school for girls, but by 1921 the numbers being too low for viability, it was fused with its neighbour and its premises renamed Bronte House.<sup>5</sup>

The Casterton village school also owed its origins to Carus-Wilson, who in 1841 sold a plot of land between the two boarding schools to the church authorities of Casterton,<sup>6</sup> and built a single-roomed school, 36 feet by 14, to which a second room was added in 1913.<sup>7</sup> Its fortunes were varied. In 1917 it was reported that ‘The work, tone and general management of the school reflect great credit upon the mistress’.<sup>8</sup> The numbers rarely rose above twenty. In 1939 there were only thirteen pupils, a number augmented by ten evacuees and a teacher from Newcastle. At different times the question was raised as to whether it would be better to send some of the children, either the boys or the older children, into Kirkby Lonsdale, a suggestion always defeated by the dangerous state of the road between the village and Devil’s Bridge. By 1951 the decision was taken that it was to close, and in 1972 this was finally carried out, and transport provided to Kirkby Lonsdale.<sup>9</sup> The building was acquired by Casterton School as part of its junior department.<sup>10</sup>

The antagonistic portrait of Carus-Wilson and his school, painted by Charlotte Bronte in *Jane Eyre* and later by Mrs. Gaskell in her *Life of Charlotte Bronte*,<sup>11</sup> was contradicted by Emma Jane Worboise, also a pupil of the school, whose novel *Thornycroft Hall* provides a contrasting picture to that in *Jane Eyre*. Carus-Wilson was clearly a character to provoke strong feelings: there is no doubt that he had a great interest in children, and the most sympathetic picture of him is that of his entertaining children who were left at school during the holidays (many of the early pupils were admitted through the Church Missionary Society and their parents were therefore scattered world-wide) at his seaside house in Silverdale, Lancashire, arranging a steamer trip on Windermere, or a picnic on the fells.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> M. Williams *Notes on the Clergy Daughters’ School, Casterton* (Beverley 1935). Miss Williams was headmistress 1892-1921, and could call on the personal recollections of women who had been at the school since its inception.

<sup>6</sup> CAS(Kendal), WDS/40/13

<sup>7</sup> Casterton School Managers’ Minute Book 1903-1965: CAS (Kendal), WDS/40/6.

<sup>8</sup> Diocesan Inspector’s Report: CAS (Kendal), WDS/0/6

<sup>9</sup> Casterton School Managers’ Minute Book 1966-1972: CAS (Kendal), WDS/40/6.

<sup>10</sup> Local inf.

<sup>11</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (first published 1847): Chaps 5-8 describe ‘Lowood Institution’; Elizabeth Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Brontë* (first published 1857), Chap. 4.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 14 (‘Casterton’) provides this enthusiastic portrait of Carus-Wilson by one who spent seven years as a pupil.

In 1840 the school was unexpectedly visited by Queen Adelaide, who, on her way to the Lakes had noticed the uniformed children lining the road by Kirkby Lonsdale bridge. In spite of the shortness of time available, a suitable welcome was organised. ‘Over a tasty wreath at the entrance of the Clergy School, “Long Live Queen Adelaide!” appeared in letters of gold. The passage from the front door to the school-room was covered with scarlet cloth, and a handsome arm chair, adorned with flowers, was placed for the Queen.’<sup>13</sup>

Apart from this event, the 1840s and 1850s were a time of great difficulty for the school, marked by constant changes of staff and the failing health of its founder. In 1840 it suffered an outbreak of typhus, which resulted in two deaths at the Clergy Daughters’ and one at the Servants’ School.<sup>14</sup> The years 1844-8 saw a succession of four Lady Superintendents as well as the publication of *Jane Eyre* in 1847. Carus-Wilson retired to the south of England and tried to ensure continuity in school and parish by getting his son-in-law, Rev. Henry Shepherd, an equally convinced Evangelical, appointed to the curacy, and handing over the school to a committee of churchmen, but the two failed to work together.<sup>15</sup> In the early 1850s ‘a large number of girls had to be expelled. The numbers went down to 67, there were difficulties among the Trustees.’<sup>16</sup> In 1856 Dorothy Beale, later founder of Cheltenham Ladies’ College, was appointed but left after a year. Shepherd brought an accusation of Tractarianism against the school, which failed because it appeared to have no grounds except that Miss Beale had a crucifix hanging on her bedroom wall. She commented adversely on the extreme restriction and monotony of the pupils’ lives, and a system which had punishments but no prizes. She also seems to have been the first to doubt whether it was a good idea that all the pupils had the same clerical background.<sup>17</sup> 1857 saw the publication of Mrs. Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Bronte*, with its damaging picture of life at the school.<sup>18</sup>

The 1860s however marked a turning point. The coming of the railway in 1861, with its rapid connections all over the country at a much cheaper rate than the stage coaches, widened the catchment. Two lengthy incumbencies, of the Rev. Frank Armitage (1865-1889) and the Rev.

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<sup>13</sup> *The Queen Dowager’s Visit to Kirkby Lonsdale, July 23, 1840* (Kirkby Lonsdale, 1840). The school has preserved the ‘Queen’s chair’.

<sup>14</sup> Williams, *Notes on Clergy Daughters’ School*, 35-6.

<sup>15</sup> G. Sale, *The History of Casterton School* (Casterton, 1983), 53-5.

<sup>16</sup> Williams, *Notes on Clergy Daughters’ School*, 41.

<sup>17</sup> E. Raikes, *Dorothea Beale of Cheltenham* (London 1908), Ch. 3 ‘Casterton’.

<sup>18</sup> All unsold copies of the first edition had to be destroyed after action by Carus-Wilson: Jenny Uglow, ‘Gaskell [née Stevenson], Elizabeth Cleghorn (1810-1865)’, *ODNB*.

Arthur Burton (1889-1920), both of them of a much broader persuasion than Carus-Wilson, but with an equal interest in the school's progress, saw the facilities and the educational aims steadily improved.<sup>19</sup> In 1871 there were 82 pupils with fourteen staff and thirteen servants, in 1891 113 pupils with twenty staff and twelve servants.<sup>20</sup> At that time all the teachers lived in, and it may be presumed that the presence of the school affected the life of the village mainly through the employment of servants and outdoor workers.

As the twentieth century advanced, increasing demands for modernised buildings and a more complex curriculum could not be met from the low fees offered to clerical families, and numbers declined. In 1935 there were 100 clergy daughters to 70 from lay families, with a resulting serious lack of funds.<sup>21</sup> This situation was altered in the ensuing years, and by 2011, although the right to lower fees for clergy daughters remained, in fact none of the pupils, now divided between junior and senior schools and including boys in the junior department, was eligible.<sup>22</sup> However, for some years the numbers of secondary pupils had declined and in 2013 the school, its numbers now unfeasibly low, combined with Sedbergh School, the remaining senior girls moving to a building in Sedbergh, and some of the Casterton buildings becoming the junior or preparatory department.<sup>23</sup>

From its inception the school had a considerable influence on the life of the village. To some extent it has resulted in two populations, the smaller of which has sometimes felt overwhelmed, although some on each side at different times have done their best to integrate.<sup>24</sup> Another cause of fragmentation is that Casterton is divided into High and Low Casterton. Low Casterton is compact and contains the village amenities: church, school, inn, garage and village hall. High Casterton straggles down a narrow back lane towards the river crossing, its most notable building being the original Casterton Hall. In the early twenty-first century the population of the whole township contained a high proportion of those of working age, attracting parents who valued being able to send their daughters and young sons as day scholars to the school.

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<sup>19</sup> Sale, *Casterton School*, 81-90.

<sup>20</sup> Census enumerators' returns, 1871/1891.

<sup>21</sup> Sale, *Casterton School*, 90-4.

<sup>22</sup> Inf. from Casterton School..

<sup>23</sup> Local inf.

<sup>24</sup> Council Minutes of 1986 report the schoolgirls helping with a village litter-pick. The Deputy Head (retired 2013) was president of the Women's Institute and chairman of the Village Hall Committee (local inf.).

The village hall, near the church, was originally a mission hall, given to the village in 1913 by the Misses Bickersteth, members of a long-standing Kirkby Lonsdale family who at the end of the nineteenth century lived at Casterton Hall;<sup>25</sup> the building is still owned by the diocese of Carlisle. At its centenary in 2013 it was the centre of a lively village life which included church and parish meetings, Cub Scouts, dancing classes, a Women's Institute with about 35 members, and numerous one-off lettings for private and public occasions.<sup>26</sup> Between the Devil's Bridge and Casterton village, on the east side of the road, is golf course, which originated as the Kirkby Lonsdale Golf Club Course and moved to Casterton from Biggins in 1954. The Kirkby Lonsdale Club moved again, to Barbon, in 1990, but the nine-hole Casterton course remained.<sup>27</sup> Other recreational potential lay in the uninhabited eastern part of the township, which has been used for walking, potholing and grouse shooting.

A charity known as the Poor Lands was set up in 1682 and administered by five overseers, their heirs and assigns for the use of the poor of the township. It owned three small pieces of land in the township (2.5 acres on Casterton Fell, 8 acres called Poor Carrs nearer to the Roman Road, and a small patch called Hospital Garden near the site of the old chapel).<sup>28</sup> Over the years the rents varied considerably, but in 1956 amounted to about £20 per annum. In that year the Charity Commissioners were appealed to because the administration of the charity had become entangled with that of the parish council. They clarified how the trust was to be administered, and the purposes for which the income could be used: material gifts, convalescent grants, weekly allowances, none of them to run from one year to the next, subscriptions to charitable institutions, and, perhaps unusually, grants to those setting up in a trade.<sup>29</sup> The land was then sold and the proceeds invested, producing about £12 a year which in recent times, has been administered by a committee meeting twice a year, in small gifts to Casterton people recently bereaved or in poor health.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bulmer, *Dir. Westmd* 1885, 1906.

<sup>26</sup> Inf. J. Sykes, chairman.

<sup>27</sup> *Kirkby Lonsdale Golf Club 1906-2006 The Centenary Book*.

<sup>28</sup> The chapel was long since demolished and had never been a hospital. This name seems to have been a 17th-century error.

<sup>29</sup> CAS (Kendal), WPC/40/1/1. No original documents have been found. All information from the Charity Commissioners' instructions on the running of the charity, preserved with the parish council minutes.

<sup>30</sup> Inf. from chairman of Casterton Poor Fund.