

Victoria County History of Cumbria Project. Draft parish/township histories

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Parish/township: HELSINGTON

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HELSINGTON

LANDOWNERSHIP

Manor of Helsington

Before the Conquest Helsington was one of the nine members of Gillemichael's estate centred on 'Stercaland' (a name preserved in Strickland Ketel and Strickland Roger).¹ By 1100 it was in the possession Ivo de Taillebois. Following the death of William III de Lancaster, baron of Kendal, in 1246, the manor of Helsington passed to his nephew, Peter de Brus (d.1272).² Peter's cousin and coheir, Walter de Lindsay (d.1271), also acquired some interests there, having held twenty acres of land and twenty-one acres of meadow in Helsington, which descended as part of the Richmond fee.³ On the division of Kendal barony between the four sisters and coheirs of Peter de Brus in 1272, Helsington passed to Margaret de Ros (d.1307).⁴ By 1297 she had granted to her son, William de Ros, forty-five acres of Helsington's demesne (subsequently part of the Marquis fee), while the manor, including the remaining demesne, meadow, park, mill and tenants, was granted to her nephew, Marmaduke de Thweng (d.1322).⁵ On the death of Thomas

¹ *Rec. Kend.*, I, 130.

² *Cal. Inq. p.m.*, I, no.114.

³ *Cal. Inq. p.m.*, I, no.820. This appears to have become Holeslack Farm, which was the only property held of the Richmond fee in Helsington: CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/2/11/169.

⁴ *Cal. Close*, 1272, p.40.

⁵ *Cal. Pat.*, 1297, pp.304-5; *Final Concords of the County of Lancaster*, ed. William Farrer, (Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, XXXIX, 1899), 213-215; *Lancashire Inquests, Extents and Feudal Aids* (Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, XLVIII, 1903), 320-322.

de Thweng without issue, in 1374, Helsington manor became part of the Lumley fee, descending through the Lumley family until 1531/2, when John, Lord Lumley, exchanged it and other northern estates with Henry VIII, who gave them to his illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, duke of Richmond.⁶ When Richmond died in 1536, Helsington reverted to the crown.

The manor house at Helsington Laithes is first mentioned separately from Helsington in 1511.⁷ Once the location of the manor court,⁸ the earliest parts of the building date from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.⁹ Plasterwork bearing the initials I and AB, and the date 1538, probably records the Bellingham family,¹⁰ who leased Helsington Laithes from Lord Lumley in 1517.¹¹ A lease of 1540 describes it as having been 'late in the tenure of Thomas Bellingham'¹² and four years later, in 1544, Allan Bellingham purchased the manor of Helsington and its members from the crown for £137 10s.¹³ As the Bellinghams subsequently resided at Levens Hall, the manor house at Helsington Laithes was leased out. William Curwen, a member of a cadet branch of the Curwens of Workington,¹⁴ was assessed jointly with Christopher Hudson for nine hearths at Helsington Laithes in 1670; in 1674 Curwen alone was assessed for seven.¹⁵ The manor house was the 'Helsington Hall' Machell described in 1692 as

⁶ *Statutes of the Realm*, III, 409-410.

⁷ Inquest citing the possessions of George Lumley: *Rec. Kend.*, I, 151.

⁸ Rev. J. Whiteside, 'Notes on the Chapelry of Helsington', *CW2*, vii (1907), 119. For Helsington court rolls 1552-1730, see Levens Hall Bagot MSS, Box 2/2.

⁹ Hyde & Pevsner, *Cumbria*, 445. It includes a pre-Reformation chapel widow.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* It has been suggested that this represents the Bindloss family: see N&B, I, 86-87; Parson & White, *Dir. C & W*, 649; Rev. J. Whiteside, 'Notes on the Chapelry of Helsington', *CW2*, vii (1907), 119. The family were free tenants of the manor in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century for Wattsfield: Levens Hall Bagot MSS, Box 2/2; *Rec. Kend.*, I, 166.

¹¹ Whiteside, 'Notes on the Chapelry of Helsington', 120. The lease was reported to be at Levens in the early twentieth century.

¹² *Rec. Kend.*, I, 155; original at Sizergh.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁴ J.F. Curwen, *A History of the Ancient House of Curwen* (1928), 314.

¹⁵ *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, ed. C. Philips, C. Ferguson, A. Wareham (London: British Record Society, 2008), 176, 226. The probate inventory of William Curwen (d.1679) makes references to his goods at Helsington Laithes, but his principal residence was apparently Holeslack: Lancs. Archives (Preston), WRW/K/R420d/29; CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/2/11/169.

having been recently re-built by the then lord of the manor, Col. Grahme.¹⁶ By 1693, the demesne farm was occupied by Christopher Wilson (d.1731),¹⁷ and in 1766 by Richard Wilson.¹⁸ William Stavert, one time High Sheriff of Westmorland, who served as church warden in Helsington for 43 years, was living at Helsington Laithes with a large household in 1891.¹⁹ In 2013 the manor house provided Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

Helsington manor remained in the Bellingham family until 1689, when Allan Bellingham (d.1693), burdened with significant debts, sold it and other estates to Colonel James Grahme (d.1730).²⁰ Like Bellingham, Grahme also faced financial difficulties. In 1699, he mortgaged Helsington and other properties to Christopher Musgrave for £3,000 (later increased to £4,000).²¹ The debt was not paid off until 1722.²² In 1700, at this time of financial crisis, Grahme enfranchised at least three of his customary tenants in Helsington: Lancelot Thompson, who paid £101 5s for three messuages;²³ John Jackson, who paid £37 18s 4d for his estate at Netherwells;²⁴ and Robert Kilner who paid £63 10s 5d for his estate at Berryholme.²⁵ The latter also had a separate arrangement to enfranchise timber, trees and underwood there.²⁶ After Grahme's death, Helsington descended with Levens, coming in 1883 to the Bagots, who remained lords of the manor and one of the principal landowners thereafter. At enclosure, the lord of the manor was awarded 217 acres [88 ha] on High Common, in addition to 117 acres [47

¹⁶ *Antiquary on Horseback*, ed. Jane M. Ewbank (1963), 67.

¹⁷ A. Bagot and J. Munby, '*All thing is well here:*' letters from Hugh James of Levens to James Grahme, 1692-5, CWAAS, 10 (1988), 177.

¹⁸ CAS (K), WDFCF/1/66.

¹⁹ Census 1891.

²⁰ J.V. Beckett, 'Art. XIV: The Finances of a Former Jacobite: James Grahme of Levens Hall', *CW*2, 85 (1985), 132.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 137.

²² *Ibid.*, 138.

²³ CAS (K), WDX/405, T2.

²⁴ CAS (K), WDRIG/Box 12 (Netherwells Deeds), no.1

²⁵ *Ibid.*, no.19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, no.18.

ha] at Helsington Laithes.²⁷ By 1910 the Bagots possessed 694 acres [281 ha] in the township, including 255 acres [103 ha] at Helsington Barrows.²⁸

Manor of Sizergh

Between 1170 and 1180, Gervase Deincourt²⁹ was granted fifteen librates of land in Sizergh, Natland, 'Bothelford' (in Natland³⁰) and 'Windergh' (Winder?) by William de Lancaster, in return for the service of $\frac{3}{4}$ of a knight's fee.³¹ Gervase was succeeded by a son Ralph, who was in turn succeeded by a son, Ralph. The latter was in possession by 1235, when he is recorded as holding one knight's fee of the barony of Kendal.³² However, Ralph Deincourt may have resided at Natland rather than Sizergh, for in 1246/7 he was given privilege to have a private chapel at his 'court at Natland'.³³ He was still alive in 1251,³⁴ but his widow was demised property at Sizergh c.1260.³⁵ Ralph left two sons, both of whom had died without issue by 1271.³⁶ Sizergh consequently passed to his daughter, Elizabeth, and her husband, Sir William Strickland, in whose family it remained until the twentieth century.³⁷

Sizergh was held of the lords of Helsington. But in the late sixteenth century, the precise relationship between Sizergh and Helsington was a matter of dispute. In 1592, Thomas Strickland (d.1612) denied that he held his estate at Sizergh of James Bellingham by knight

²⁷ CAS (K), WPR/8/14/1/5.

²⁸ CAS (K), WTDV/2/40.

²⁹ A cadet of the Deincourts of Thurgarton (Notts.) and Blankney (Lincs.).

³⁰ A. J. L. Winchester, 'Early Estate Structures in Cumbria and Lancashire', *Medieval Settlement Research*, 23 (2008), 19.

³¹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 130; original at Sizergh. Grant confirmed by William Marshal 1184x89 and by Roger Fitz Rinfred 1190x1200: *Ibid.*, 131.

³² *Book of Fees*, I, 552

³³ S.H. Lee Washington, 'The Early History of the Stricklands of Sizergh – Part II: The D'Eyncourts and Le Flemings', *CW2*, xlv (1944), 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁵ Dodsworth MSS, vol 149, fo.137d.

³⁶ De Banco Roll, Westmorland, Easter 5 Edward II [1312], no.192, as cited in Washington, 'Stricklands of Sizergh – Part II', 17-18, 28.

³⁷ S.H. Lee Washington, 'The Early History of the Stricklands of Sizergh – Part I', *CW2*, xlii (1942), 211.

service and 2s rent as Bellingham claimed.³⁸ The issue was still unresolved at the time of Thomas's death in 1612, for an inquisition recorded that he held Sizergh of Bellingham by service unknown.³⁹ In 1640, the Stricklands were named by Daniel Fleming as among five freeholders in Helsington,⁴⁰ and Helsington manor court rolls also identify them as such.⁴¹ The Stricklands had enfranchised many of their own tenants as early as 1491.⁴² Sizergh was referred to as a manor in its own right in the Drainage Act of 1838.⁴³

In 1292, Sir William released Sizergh and other Deincourt properties to his eldest surviving son, Walter.⁴⁴ From then on, Sizergh descended from father to son for another fourteen generations, until the death of Walter Strickland without issue in 1761. As his eldest surviving brother, William, had become a Jesuit priest in 1756, Sizergh passed to Walter's youngest brother, Charles, who married the Lancashire heiress Cecilia Towneley in 1762.⁴⁵ When her husband died in 1770, Cecilia took over the management of the estate until their son, Thomas, came of age in 1784.⁴⁶ Thomas (d.1813) left Sizergh to his younger son, Thomas (d.1835). Thomas's son, Walter Charles, was born in Paris in 1825. Aged ten when his father died, Walter Charles did not come of age until 1846. Encumbered by debt, in 1896 he entailed the estate upon his fourth cousin, Sir Gerald Strickland (1861-1940).⁴⁷ On Walter Charles's death in 1903, Sizergh passed to Gerald Strickland and to Walter's children, Roger, Ida, Henrietta and Mary, as tenants in common, with remainder to Gerald Strickland and his children in tail. In 1931 Sir Gerald settled the estate on

³⁸ *Rec. Kend.*, I, 160-161. The Bellinghams and Stricklands did not see eye-to-eye: a fray between Thomas Strickland's father, Walter, and Allan Bellingham, resulted in Strickland being imprisoned in the Fleet in 1546: *Acts of the Privy Council 1542-1547*, new ser., I (1890), 367.

³⁹ *Rec. Kend.*, I, 163-164.

⁴⁰ CAS (K), WDRY Box 28/17, (Fleming of Rydal notes), 197.

⁴¹ Levens Hall, Bagot MSS, Box 2/2.

⁴² N&B, I, 98.

⁴³ CAS (K), WPR 8/14/1/6.

⁴⁴ *Rec. Kend.*, I, 136; original at Sizergh. Walter (knighted in 1306) was rewarded for his military service in Scotland by a grant of free warren in 1307: *Cal. Chart.*, III, 100.

⁴⁵ The Stricklands did not acquire the Towneley estates at Standish and Borwick until 1807: *VCH Lancs.*, VI (1914), 170-175.

⁴⁶ Her detailed accounts survive at Sizergh.

⁴⁷ CAS (K), WD/PP/Box 9, bdl 2, no.28.

his eldest daughter, Mary, and her husband Henry Hornyold-Strickland (d.1975).⁴⁸ They and their son, Thomas Hornyold-Strickland (1921-1983), made a gift of the estate, totalling 1,500 acres [600 ha], to the National Trust in 1950.⁴⁹

Between 1292 and 1310, Sir Walter Strickland constructed a substantial house at Sizergh, which included a great hall and service block.⁵⁰ The property may have been damaged in 1321, when William de Thweng and numerous armed men broke into the close at Sizergh, where they set fires, took goods and assaulted servants.⁵¹ The four-storey high solar tower, which dates from the mid-fourteenth century,⁵² was added by either Sir Walter (c.1255-c.1343) or his son, Sir Thomas Strickland (1290-1376). During the lifetime of Sir Walter Strickland (1516-1569), the medieval house underwent considerable remodelling, beginning with the addition of a new south wing and first floor hall in 1555.⁵³ This was followed by the rebuilding of the service block as a three-storey tower, and the extension of the north wing, with a kitchen, service rooms and servant accommodation.⁵⁴

In the late seventeenth century, Sizergh was described variously as ‘a very fair house and a pleasant seat’,⁵⁵ and ‘a noble but irregular old house surrounded with woods with a park at the door.’⁵⁶ However, owing to their Roman Catholicism and royalist sympathies, the seventeenth century saw a period of decline for the Stricklands, and resulted in long absences from Sizergh. Having supported Charles I in the Civil War, the Stricklands had their estates sequestered, for

⁴⁸ Goodall, *Sizergh Castle: Architectural Survey Report*, 88.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁵⁰ OAN, *Sizergh Estate*, 67.

⁵¹ *Cal. Pat.*, 1321, p.56

⁵² I. Goodall, *Sizergh Castle: Architectural Survey Report* (English Heritage, 2000), 8. [move full details to 1st citation]

⁵³ OAN, *Sizergh Estate*, 67.

⁵⁴ Goodall, *Sizergh Castle*, 2.

⁵⁵ Sir Daniel Fleming’s ‘Description of Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness’ (1671) in E. Hughes (ed), *Fleming-Senhouse Papers* (1961), 11.

⁵⁶ *Antiquary on Horseback*, 67.

which they compounded.⁵⁷ Following the Restoration, Sir Thomas Strickland (d.1694) spent much time in London, serving as knight of the shire for Westmorland from 1661 until he was expelled in 1676/7.⁵⁸ His duties obliged him to neglect his estate; ‘these Stricklands are in a declining condition’, wrote a contemporary, ‘occasioned by Sir Thomas living at Court’.⁵⁹ The hearth tax returns of 1670 and 1674 shows that Sizergh Hall, with its 22 hearths, was then occupied by Mr Thomas Shepherd, Strickland’s steward.⁶⁰ In 1689, Sir Thomas Strickland joined the exiled court of James II at Saint-Germain and, to prevent the confiscation of Sizergh, placed the estate in trust by making it over to two (Protestant) servants: his steward, Thomas Shepherd, and Robert Carne.⁶¹ After the death of Sir Thomas Strickland in 1694, Lady Strickland returned to Sizergh, followed by their son, Walter, in 1699.

Among the changes to the house that followed the Stricklands’ return, were alterations to the hall and the expansion of family and servant accommodation. A private chapel for celebrating mass was also built in the east end of the long gallery before 1773.⁶² The Stricklands were largely absent from Sizergh during the late eighteenth century and up to the mid-nineteenth century, and in 1841 the hall was home to the Kendal banker, William Crewdson.⁶³ Walter Charles Strickland (d.1903) was resident there with six servants in 1851, when the hall was described as ‘Sizergh Castle.’ Walter Charles oversaw the addition of a two-storey banqueting hall between 1852 and 1888,⁶⁴ but by 1890, the house was reported to be in a ‘ruinous state’.⁶⁵ In 1891 the

⁵⁷ *Cal. Com. for Compounding, Dom. Ser. 1643-1660*, pt. i, 176, 203; *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1660-1690*, III, ed. B.D. Henning (1983), 504.

⁵⁸ *The History of Parliament: the House of Commons 1660-1690*, III, ed. B.D. Henning (1983), 504.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, 176, 226. A Thomas Shepherd was described ten years earlier at Sir Robert Strickland’s estate at Thornton Bridge in Yorkshire as ‘a servant at Sizir’, and a man of the same name was steward of Sizergh in 1689: *Sixth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (1877), 466; Goodall, *Sizergh Castle*, 39.

⁶¹ Goodall, *Sizergh Castle*, 39.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 51.

⁶³ Census 1841.

⁶⁴ Goodall, *Sizergh Castle*, 80-81.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

panelling of the Inlaid Chamber was sold to the South Kensington Museum (renamed the Victoria & Albert Museum in 1899)⁶⁶ for £1000, and many items from the house were auctioned in 1896.⁶⁷ Substantial modernisation work was carried out by Sir Gerald Strickland between 1897 and 1902, including the insertion of a carriageway through the ground floor of the hall range.⁶⁸ This was followed by work to the gardens from 1926 to 1928. The Castle was designated a Grade I Listing in 1952, with outbuildings listed as Grade II in 1983.⁶⁹ The panelling from the Inlaid Chamber was returned from the Victoria & Albert Museum and reinstated in 1999-2000.⁷⁰

By the 1820s, the Sizergh estate included 975 acres [395 ha] in Helsington.⁷¹ In 1855, the Strickland Trust were awarded 123 acres [50 ha] on Helsington common, in addition to their purchase of a further 191 acres [77 ha] of former common.⁷² In 1910 the Stricklands were still largest landowners in the township, with almost 1,000 acres.⁷³ Besides the Bagots of Levens and the Stricklands, there were fifteen other landowners in 1910, nine of whom also occupied at least part of their property.⁷⁴ Christopher Wyndham Wilson of Rigmaiden (d.1915)⁷⁵ owned several ancient tenements, including Berryholme (149 acres; 60 ha of land and 26 acres; 11 ha of wood), Bridge House (87 acres; 35 ha),⁷⁶ Lane Head (87 acres; 35 ha), and Netherwells (52 acres; 21 ha), as well as 80 acres [32 ha] on Low Common. The Wilsons of Rigmaiden had accumulated these freehold estates over several generations, beginning with the purchase of Netherwells in 1753 by Thomas Wilson of Natland (d.1757).⁷⁷ His son, the Kendal hosier and banker, Christopher

⁶⁶ *The London Gazette*, Issue 27081, 19 May 1899, p.3186

⁶⁷ Goodall, *Sizergh Castle*, 82.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁹ OAN, *Sizergh Estate*, 71, 101.

⁷⁰ Goodall, *Sizergh Castle*, 100.

⁷¹ CAS (K), WDB/22/3/1 (Sizergh estate plan dated to c.1820s).

⁷² CAS (K), WPR/8/14/1/5.

⁷³ CAS (K), WTDV/2/40.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* The Sedgwick Gunpowder Co. owned 166 acres at Hawes farm, which they leased out. But they owned and occupied 20 acres of wood there.

⁷⁵ CAS (C), PROB/1915/A126.

⁷⁶ Held of the Marquis Fee.

⁷⁷ CAS (K), WDRIG/1/12/1, no.38.

Wilson (1731-1804), acquired Berryholme in 1786⁷⁸ and Bridge House in 1798.⁷⁹ The Wilsons of Rigmaiden were still significant landowners in 1932.⁸⁰ By the close of the nineteenth century, several estates had also been accumulated by the Braithwaite-Wilsons, including Lane Head, Lane Foot and Stainbank Green, the latter of which was sold off in 1946.⁸¹

Another landed presence to be noted from the mid-nineteenth century is the owner of Prizet. The mansion house, situated on the estate formerly known as Prizet End,⁸² was built in 1860 by the banker and gunpowder manufacturer, William Henry Wakefield (mayor of Kendal 1860-61 & 1868-69).⁸³ Though Prizet's estate farm was not large – approximately fifty acres⁸⁴ – the mansion house was comparable to Sizergh in terms of the size of the household.⁸⁵ Prizet was subsequently home to the Metcalfes,⁸⁶ and in 1891 to a retired army captain, E. J. Garstone.⁸⁷ By 1901, it was in the ownership of William Stavert (d.1905), J.P., D.L.⁸⁸ His widow continued to occupy the house until her death in 1911. In 1924 the Stavert family sold it to Colonel John Heaton, in whose possession it remained until its sale by auction in 1955.⁸⁹ The estate then included a dairy farm and cottage, both of which were leased out, and a bungalow known as the 'South Lodge' by Hawes Lane. The house was later divided into three residential properties. The stables were converted into a B&B business in the 1970s.⁹⁰

In 2013, Levens Hall Estates and the National Trust were still the largest landowners in Helsington.

⁷⁸ CAS (K), WDRIG/1/12/3, no.9; purchased from the devisees of William Wilson.

⁷⁹ CAS (K), WDX/405/T22-23; purchased from William Bird of Crosby Garrett, clerk.

⁸⁰ CAS (K), WQRC/6.

⁸¹ CAS (K), WDAG Boxes 154-155.

⁸² CAS (K), WDW 2/6/5 (surveyed 1802; then the property of Joseph Maude esq.)

⁸³ <http://www.kendaltowncouncil.gov.uk/content/view/21/37/> [accessed 9.8.14].

⁸⁴ CAS (K), WDB/35/1/59.

⁸⁵ In 1861 there were seven servants besides a governess, coachman and gardener.

⁸⁶ Bulmer, *West. Dir.* (1885), 503.

⁸⁷ Census 1891.

⁸⁸ Formerly resident at Helsington Laithes.

⁸⁹ CAS (K), WDB/35/1/59. The purchaser was a Mr Kendall who bought it for £8,000.

⁹⁰ <http://fox-hall.co.uk/prizet-prizet-stables.htm> [accessed 7.6.14].