

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

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Parish/township: HELSINGTON

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HELSINGTON

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Helsington township lacked its own place of worship until the 1700s. As a chapelry of Kendal parish, Helsington's community instead looked to the parish church of the Holy Trinity for their religious needs: by the sixteenth century, the township's inhabitants were regularly baptized, married and buried in Kendal.¹ Helsington became a separate parish in 1728,² and St John's Chapel of ease was consecrated in 1745.³

The church of St John occupies a site above Brigsteer village with commanding views over the Lyth valley. Founded in 1726 by John Jackson (d.1740), the chapel's position probably owes much to the fact that Jackson lived at nearby Holeslack farm. In addition to an initial grant of £200 from Queen Anne's Bounty, Jackson himself endowed St John's with Chambers Tenement⁴ and the Scar House estate in Brigsteer.⁵ These endowments were granted on condition that Helsington's inhabitants subscribed £100 towards obtaining an augmentation from the Bounty.⁶ The sum of £44 12s was duly raised, with a further £55 8s donated by the

¹ Kendal parish registers date from 1558, and are available in print.

² F.A. Young, *Guide to the Local Administrative Units of England, Vol. 2: Northern England* (Royal Historical Society, 1991), 462.

³ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 207.

⁴ Approximately 27 acres, leased for £50 per annum in 1894: CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/4/4/2.

⁵ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 207.

⁶ *Ibid.*

curate, James Matson.⁷ In 1735, these subscriptions and £200 from the Bounty were used to purchase Kirkbarrow Field near Kirkland, Kendal, and land at Rawnrigg in Barbon.⁸ In his will of 1739, John Jackson also left a small parcel of land called 'Jack Parrock' specifically for the use of the parish clerk.⁹ The living was further endowed in 1762 with £200 given by the Dowager Countess Gower, and a further £200 from Queen Anne's Bounty. This money was used to purchase Scar Foot Farm in Underbarrow.¹⁰

By 1779 the living was valued at £77 10s.¹¹ This increased significantly during the nineteenth-century, largely through subscriptions, a further augmentation from Queen Anne's Bounty in 1838, and interest from invested stock in the Furness Railway.¹² In 1876, the living was further increased by a grant of £10 per annum from Trinity College, Cambridge out of Kendal rectory.¹³ The total value subsequently amounted to £157 9s.¹⁴ In 1907, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners awarded a further £250 to Helsington vicarage, which equated to £7 10s per annum.¹⁵ In 1919, the Glebe land at High Chambers Tenement was sold to Trinity College for £1,401.¹⁶ By c.1929 the living amounted to £246 16s 10d per annum, of which £170 came from Queen Anne's Bounty, £35 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and around £29 from the rent of the remaining Glebe land.¹⁷ The latter included Kirkbarrow Farm, which was leased to Kendal Corporation prior to their purchase of it in 1931.¹⁸

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ CRO (Kendal), WPR 27/3/2/1; Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 207; N&B, I, 103-4.

⁹ Lancashire Archives, WRW/K/R449a/57.

¹⁰ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 207; CRO (Kendal), WPR 27/3/2/1.

¹¹ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 207; N&B valued it at £80.

¹² £337 of Furness Railway Stock yielded £13 4s annually: CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/3/2/1.

¹³ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/2/2; WPR/27/3/2/1.

¹⁴ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/3/2/1.

¹⁵ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/2/4.

¹⁶ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/2/5. High Chambers was a 40 acre freehold farm.

¹⁷ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/2/7; WPR/26/3/1/2

¹⁸ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/2/7. The sale fetched £725 which was invested and the dividends paid to the incumbent: WPR 27/2/2/9.

According to his will, John Jackson desired the living to be in the gift of the owner of Holeslack and the vicar of Kendal.¹⁹ However, there is no evidence that subsequent owners of Holeslack exercised patronage. In 1779, it was noted that the vicar of Kendal alone had the right to nominate.²⁰ At this time, the perpetual curate was John Wilson, M.A., of Lambrigg, who was appointed as a young man in 1767,²¹ and remained until his death in 1791.²² His successor, William Moore of Kirkland, M.A., held the perpetual curacy of Helsington for forty years until his death in 1831.²³ The next longest serving incumbent was Thomas Whitwell Rogers, M.A., who came to Helsington aged 34 in 1861 and remained there 34 years until his death in 1895.²⁴ Robert George Elton Bowers (1929-1959) served as curate for thirty years.²⁵ Some incumbents, including Moore and Rogers, matriculated from Trinity College, Cambridge; but most took their degrees elsewhere.

Helsington appears to have been without a resident curate until the parsonage house was built in 1840. The presence of an assistant curate in 1778 implies this,²⁶ and in 1783 it was reported that the minister did not reside permanently in the parish, but provided a 'sufficient person in full orders' to attend for him.²⁷ George Wilson of Heversham is known to have officiated on behalf of William Moore.²⁸ In the late eighteenth century Divine services were held twice on Sundays during the summer months and Holy Communion was celebrated four times a year.²⁹ At that time the church also lacked an enclosed churchyard and font, though it was claimed that there

¹⁹ Lancashire Archives, WRW/K/R449a/57.

²⁰ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 206.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

²² Cheshire Record Office, EDA/1/9 (Act Book).

²³ *Ibid.*; EDA/1/11 (Act Book 1825-35). Moore was buried at Helsington.

²⁴ *Alumni Cantabrigiensis*, v (ii), 346. Rogers was buried at Helsington.

²⁵ Crockford's *Clerical Directory*, (1914, 1958-59).

²⁶ N&B, I, 103-4.

²⁷ CRO (Kendal), WDX/140/6.

²⁸ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.*, 649.

²⁹ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 206.

was a 'decent bason' for baptisms.³⁰ Whether use was made of this is uncertain, for the baptismal registers do not begin until 1813.³¹ The churchyard, meanwhile, remained unconsecrated until 1822.³² The parsonage, built during the incumbency of Rev. James Muckalt (1838-50), was enlarged in 1852 and a coach house added in 1867.³³ In 1867 a Mission Room was built in Brigsteer for use as a Sunday school. Restored in 1905, it was also used for evensong in the winter months,³⁴ and as a venue for meetings of the parish council.³⁵

The church was declared 'insufficient for comfortable accommodation' in 1858, presumably reflecting the township's increasing population.³⁶ The chapel was subsequently enlarged by removing the stable on the west end and adding a vestry room. The existing gallery and pews were also removed and rearranged, and a bell gable (containing a single bell) added.³⁷ Just over £500 was raised by subscription for this work.³⁸ Further internal alterations were made in 1897, partly to accommodate an organ and boiler house.³⁹ The stained glass east window, made by Kayll & Co. of Leeds, was also installed, having being given by William Stavert, church warden, in memory of his sister, Elizabeth Vose of Liverpool.⁴⁰ A replacement chamber organ, made by Renn of Manchester c.1845, was purchased in 1902.⁴¹ Further work was carried out in 1908 when a new vestry was built and oak panelling added to the north, east and south walls.⁴² At this point the position of church clerk was extinguished, and the rental income of 'Jack Parrock' instead

³⁰ CRO (Kendal), WDX/140/6.

³¹ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/1/1; WPR/38/1/6/4. The marriage register begins 1823.

³² CRO (Kendal), WRP/27/4/8/1.

³³ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/4/4/2.

³⁴ John Hodgkinson, *The Township and Chapelry of Helsington* (2007), 22.

³⁵ CRO (Kendal), WPC/34/1; WPR/27/6/1/1.

³⁶ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/4/2/1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*; WPR 27/3/2/1: £80 was donated by Mary Howard, £68 18s 8d by William Wakefield of Prizett, and £50 by Trinity College, Cambridge.

³⁹ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/4/2/2.

⁴⁰ Hyde & Pevsner, *Cumbria*, 404.

⁴¹ CRO (Kendal), WDX/132; WPR 27/15/1/1.

⁴² CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/4/2/3; WPR/27/2/8. The parsonage land totalled 5 acres.

used to pay for a caretaker.⁴³ Perhaps the most notable feature of the church is a mural at the east end, painted as a war memorial in 1919 by Marion Saumarez. Electric lighting was installed in 1938⁴⁴ and the churchyard extended and consecrated in 1957.⁴⁵ A kitchen extension was added to the church's north west corner in the late twentieth century.⁴⁶

The Parochial Church Council first met in 1920.⁴⁷ In 1929, R. G. E. Bowers was given permission to hold Helsington in plurality with Underbarrow.⁴⁸ Two years later, Helsington and Underbarrow became a united benefice, with the Glebe House at Underbarrow being chosen as the new vicarage.⁴⁹ As a result, Helsington parsonage and two adjoining fields in Brigsteer were sold off.⁵⁰ By 1948 the former parsonage was known as 'Helsington Lodge'. Scar Cottage, the home of the school mistress, was also sold in 1931,⁵¹ though the church room in Brigsteer village was retained. The room continued to serve as a venue for the Sunday school and vestry meetings into the late 1970s.⁵² However, after the Sunday School was discontinued in 1979,⁵³ the church room fell into disuse. It was sold at auction in 1984 and became a private dwelling.⁵⁴

Despite Helsington being joined with Underbarrow, morning and evening services continued to be held each week at St John's until 1938. Matins and Holy Communion then took place every fortnight, though evensong continued to be held weekly.⁵⁵ This pattern continued until 1959, after which there was only one service each Sunday, with Holy Communion and Evensong held

⁴³ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/4/4/3.

⁴⁴ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/4/2/4.

⁴⁵ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/6/2/10; WPR/27/4/8/4.

⁴⁶ <http://list.english-heritage.org.uk/resultsingle.aspx?uid=1393890>.

⁴⁷ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/1.

⁴⁸ CRO (Kendal), WPR/26/2/1/5-6.

⁴⁹ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/3/3.

⁵⁰ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/3/8. Sold for £927 10s, the proceeds were used for improvements to Underbarrow vicarage: WPR/27/2/2/8.

⁵¹ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/2/3/1.

⁵² CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/5/1.

⁵³ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/2.

⁵⁴ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/3.

⁵⁵ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/1/5/2 (Service Register 1932-1941).

on alternate weeks.⁵⁶ From 1970, family communion was held on a weekly basis, but evensong only every third Sunday.⁵⁷ This change coincided with the unification of the benefice of Underbarrow and Helsington with Crook in 1970.⁵⁸ Two years later, the ecclesiastical boundaries of Helsington parish were re-defined to bring them into line with those of the civil parish (formed in 1969).⁵⁹ Some in the PCC feared that this would mean the loss of some of their ‘strongest support’ in the Lumley Road area.⁶⁰ But the result was a net enlargement of Helsington ecclesiastical parish. Although land between Milnthorpe Road and the River Kent were transferred to Kendal, and part of Park Moss west of Brigsteer Park was lost to Levens, Helsington gained half of Brigsteer village and a large area to the west that had historically belonged to Levens.

In 1978, the merger with Crook was reversed, with Helsington, Underbarrow and Crook becoming separate benefices.⁶¹ That year Alexander Lofthouse was appointed vicar of the parishes of Helsington, Underbarrow and Levens,⁶² holding Holy Communion and evening services on alternate Sundays at St John’s.⁶³ On his retirement in 1995, he was succeeded to all three parishes by Alexandra Stockley.⁶⁴ In c.2005, Helsington joined the Two Valleys Team, an informal group of eight churches,⁶⁵ with weekly services and Holy Communion held every fortnight at Helsington. In 2013, joint services with other churches were held every fifth Sunday.

⁵⁶ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/1/5/3 (Service Register 1942-1960).

⁵⁷ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/1/5/4 (Service Register 1960-1980).

⁵⁸ CRO (Kendal), WPR/37/2/3/1.

⁵⁹ CRO (Kendal), WPR/98/4/5/6.

⁶⁰ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/1.

⁶¹ CRO (Kendal), WPR/98/4/5/7.

⁶² CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/2; Crockford’s *Clerical Directory* (1998/99), 433.

⁶³ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/1/5/4; WPR/27/6/1/2.

⁶⁴ CRO (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/4.

⁶⁵ <http://www.crosthwaiteandlyth.co.uk/twovalleys.html>

Nonconformity

There was a significant Catholic presence in Helsington during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, largely centred on Sizergh.⁶⁶ In 1767, nineteen Catholics were recorded in Helsington, nine of whom were either members of the Strickland family or their servants at Sizergh.⁶⁷ Ten were native to Helsington township, of whom eight were children. Out of thirty-six resident families recorded in 1779, sixteen were Papists., and it was noted that Sizergh Hall served as a 'meeting house' for Catholics.⁶⁸ In 1431/2, Pope Eugenius IV had granted to Sir Thomas Strickland licence to possess a domestic chapel and portable altar.⁶⁹ A Catholic chapel had been constructed at Sizergh Hall by 1773,⁷⁰ and a priest resided there.⁷¹ The Strickland family continued to adhere to the Catholic faith into the twentieth century.

Methodism failed to take root in Helsington, despite the fact that the Methodist preacher, Stephen Brunskill of Orton, leased the Berryholme estate in c.1790. Brunskill initially held services at his home, where he said the 'multitudes flocked together'.⁷² However, his landlord, Christopher Wilson, did not approve.⁷³ Brunskill had more success in Levens township, where he founded a Society at Beathwaite Green in 1793. In 1751 a servant living in Helsington was described as a Quaker⁷⁴ and in 1779 there was one Quaker family of five in the township.⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Sizergh was searched for weapons at the time of the Popish Plot: *History of Parliament 1660-1690*, III, 505.

⁶⁷ *Returns of Papists 1757, Diocese of Chester* (Catholic Record Society, 1980), 156.

⁶⁸ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, 206-7.

⁶⁹ Printed in N&B I, 95.

⁷⁰ Goodall, *Sizergh Castle*, 51.

⁷¹ Cheshire Record Office, EDV/7/mff 44/4.

⁷² *Stephen Brunskill*, 45.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁴ CRO (Kendal), WQ/SR/22/12.

⁷⁵ CRO (Kendal), WPR/98/4/5/6.