

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

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Parish/township: HELSINGTON

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HELSINGTON

SOCIAL HISTORY

Social Structure and Character

Brigsteer village was the only site of concentrated settlement in Helsington township, the rest of the community being dispersed among several farms and hamlets. Of the thirty-four households recorded in 1674, twenty had a single hearth.¹ More than two thirds of these were found in Brigsteer, which was largely home to peat cutters and agricultural labourers. Except perhaps for a brief period in the sixteenth century, the lord of the manor was absent, while increasing enfranchisement in the 1700s further weakened the lord's influence within the township, at least among the yeomanry. In the long-term, more immediate social leadership was likely provided by the Stricklands. The family had been resident at Sizergh from at least the thirteenth century, albeit with significant periods of absence from the late seventeenth century.²

From the mid-nineteenth century, Helsington was increasingly home to individuals of independent means and professionals. Stonecross, a Victorian villa on the northern border of the township, was home to solicitor Joseph Swainson (d.1906).³ An even more significant addition to local society followed the building of a villa at Prizet by the Wakefields of Kendal in 1860. Prizet

¹ *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, ed. C Phillips, C. Ferguson, A. Wareham, (London: British Record Society, 2008), 226.

² See Landownership.

³ CRO (Carlisle), PROB/1906/WCOD/797.

was later home to William Stavert (d.1905), one time high sheriff of Westmorland, who served as Rural District councillor for the township. These large houses were also home to a number of domestic servants: in 1861 Sizergh Castle had six live-in servants, plus a gardener; while at Prizet there were seven servants besides a governess, coachman and gardener.⁴ Throughout the nineteenth century, however, most of Helsington's working community was still engaged in agricultural activities. During the first half of the twentieth century, the character of Helsington began to change as increasing numbers of residents began working in Kendal. Indeed, by the 1950s, the population was described as 'urban'.⁵

Community Activities

By the late nineteenth century, Helsington's communal buildings included St John's Church, the adjoining school, and the church room in Brigsteer village.⁶ From 1946, the parish council attempted to procure a village hall using money from the sale of timber at Strickland Quarry.⁷ A site for the hall was offered by the lord of the manor, Oliver Bagot in 1949.⁸ It was not until 1958 that a hall was acquired, in form of an old Nissan Hut. It was used as a venue for various communal activities, as well as meetings of both the parish council and the Brigsteer Women's Institute, until it was demolished in 2009.⁹ In 2010, a new eco-friendly Community Hall was built, the £400,000 cost of which was largely met by Lottery funding and donations.¹⁰ In 2013, regular activities included pilates classes, table tennis, and circle dancing. The hall also continues to host meetings of the parish council and the Brigsteer W.I.

⁴ Census 1861.

⁵ CAS (Kendal), WDSO/209/1.

⁶ In 1913 the use of this room was charged at 5s for non-parochial purposes and 2s 6d for parochial purposes: CAS (Kendal), WPR 27/1/2/1.

⁷ CAS (Kendal), WPC/34/1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ http://helsingtonpc.org.uk/5_8_2009.pdf

¹⁰ *Westmorland Gazette*, 29 Oct. 2010:

http://www.thewestmorlandgazette.co.uk/news/8478886.Eco_friendly_400_000_building_for_South_Lakeland_village/

Kendal's first racecourse was constructed on Helsington's northern border, on a site at Bradleyfield farm. The venture was short-lived, with the first race taking place there in 1821,¹¹ and the last in 1834.¹² The land was afterwards returned to pasture. During the 1960s, Helsington hosted annual and bi-annual motocross races, organised by the Westmorland Motor Club.¹³

Education

In his will, John Jackson (d.1739) left 13s 4d a year from the rent of a shop in Kendal to provide for the education of three poor children, boys or girls, in Helsington.¹⁴ Jackson's endowment of St John's chapel with the Scar House estate had also been intended to provide a stipend for a teaching curate and for a school room to be built adjoining the chapel.¹⁵ Records show a small school to have existed in the township by 1778, with quarterly payments for instruction.¹⁶ This may have been replaced, however, for in 1822 it was reported that a school had been built by subscription some twenty-five years previously.¹⁷ By the early nineteenth century, a school master had been appointed, whose salary was made up partly from John Jackson's endowment, subscriptions and school pence, whilst the remaining sum was met by the curate himself.¹⁸ The earliest known master (and probably the longest serving) was Joseph Pearson (d.1861), who was both clerk of the chapel and master of the school for 40 years. His tombstone in Helsington churchyard was erected by a grateful former pupil.¹⁹

¹¹ *Westmorland Gazette*, 4 Aug. 1821.

¹² *Ibid.*, 24 May 1834.

¹³ CAS (Kendal), WDSO/51/3/2.

¹⁴ Lancashire Archives, WRW/K/R449a/57.

¹⁵ N&B, I, 103-104. This was later questioned by the Charity Commissioners: CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/12/1/5/1.

¹⁶ Cheshire Record Office, EDV/7/mff44/4.

¹⁷ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/12/1/5/1 (extract from Charity Commissioners Report).

¹⁸ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/5/1.

¹⁹ Transcription of Tombstone provided by the W.I. churchyard survey of 1984, available in Kendal Archives Centre.

In 1853 a new school building was erected adjacent to the church, at a cost of around £300, which was met by subscription.²⁰ A house for the school master followed in 1861.²¹ The church room in Brigsteer was also used as an infant school from 1867, with the curate contributing to the mistress's salary.²² In 1903, Westmorland County Council took over the running of Helsington School from the Church, but appointed Helsington's vicar, Joseph Whiteside, and the people's warden, William Stavert, to the board of managers, along with two other Helsington residents.²³ By this time, the school's endowment not only included Jackson's charity of 13s 4d, but various rents from other shops and properties in Kendal and Brigsteer.²⁴

From 1886, all but two of the teachers were female; indeed, on the retirement of Miss Jackson in 1919, it was remarked that there was 'no chance of a male teacher being appointed for such a small school'.²⁵ Between 1886 and 1910, the school was served by ten teachers, none serving more than six years in post.²⁶ One of the shortest serving teachers stayed barely six months, citing the lack of cleanliness at the school as one of her reasons for leaving (her nine-mile walk from Gatebeck must also have been inconvenient).²⁷ Short terms of office continued after the First World War: six headmistresses were appointed between 1920 and 1939. In 1920 the Education Commission were approached about the possibility of hiring a supplementary teacher; the first appointment to this post was made the following year.²⁸

There were fifty-two children on the books in 1899, but average attendance was only thirty-seven.²⁹ Work on farms or peat mosses often kept children away, as did poor weather.³⁰ As the

²⁰ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/3/2/1.

²¹ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/5/1; WPR/27/5/1/1.

²² CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/5/1.

²³ CAS (Kendal), WDX/132.

²⁴ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/11/2/1.

²⁵ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/11/2/1.

²⁶ One teacher died, while another left to get married without giving notice.

²⁷ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/11/1/1.

²⁸ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/11/2/1.

²⁹ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/11/1/1.

school building was used for meetings of the parish council, the children also received a half holiday when meetings were taken during school time.³¹ There were thirty-five children on the register in 1903, falling to nineteen by 1909,³² and then rising to fifty by 1930.³³ However, numbers began to decline thereafter, and the school was threatened with closure in 1946.³⁴ After opposition was raised, the school was allowed to remain open. The School's primary school status was affirmed in 1960, when children aged eleven were ordered to continue their education in Kendal.³⁵ In March 1965, Helsington School closed with just four pupils on the roll.³⁶ The children were transferred to Kendal and the teacher, Mrs M. J. West, retired, having worked at the school since 1939.³⁷

The building was leased between 1966 and 1984 by Bury Grammar School.³⁸ Thereafter, Bramley Parish (Yorkshire) leased the premises before they were bought for the benefit of Bramley parishioners by the Stonestreet Trust in 1985.³⁹ The building was developed by Bramley Parish Community Projects as a residential centre for children from the Leeds area.⁴⁰ Re-named 'Lumley Fee', the centre opened in August 1987. It has been run by Bramley and Rodley Community Action Group (BARCA-Leeds) since 1997.⁴¹

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *The Westmorland Gazette Directory* (1930), 217.

³⁴ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/11/2/1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid..*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/2; WPR/27/6/1/3.

³⁹ CAS (Kendal), WPR/27/6/1/3. Named after the Rev. Stonestreet.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ CAS (Kendal), WPC/34/Acc6722; <http://barca-leeds.org/lumleyfee.pdf>.

Charities and Poor Relief

The Howard Orphan Home, built in 1864 and opened in 1865, was founded by the lady of Helsington manor, the Hon. Mary Howard of Levens (d.1877).⁴² The Home took in girls aged four and above, primarily from the Kendal Union Workhouse, and trained them for domestic service. There were 29 residents in 1891⁴³ and 44 by 1911.⁴⁴ Following the Home's closure in 1954,⁴⁵ the property was purchased at auction in August 1956 by Westmorland County Council for £4,500⁴⁶ and was used as a nursery school from September 1957 to May 1958,⁴⁷ before being converted into an old people's home in 1960.⁴⁸ The Home closed in 1990 and the premises were sold. The building subsequently became the Stonecross Manor Hotel.

There were no privately-endowed charities in Helsington for the benefit of the poor. In 1778/9 it was reported that money collected at the offertory was given to the poor, who usually attend in person to receive it.⁴⁹

⁴² *Kendal Mercury*, 8 April 1865. A donation of £1,600 was made to the project by John Wakefield.

⁴³ Census 1891.

⁴⁴ Census 1911.

⁴⁵ CAS (Kendal), WDSO/209/1.

⁴⁶ CAS (Kendal), WDSO/165/3/2/4; WC/W/A1568/Box18/W/5/10a.

⁴⁷ CAS (Kendal), WC/W/A1568/Box18/W/5/10a.

⁴⁸ CAS (Kendal), WSMBK/11/3/12/M188 (plans approved Dec. 1959). The first resident was admitted in Jan. 1961: WC/W/A1568/Box18/W/5/10a.

⁴⁹ Cheshire Record Office, EDV/7/mff44/4.