

Victoria County History of Cumbria Project: Work in Progress

Interim Draft

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Parish/township: **KIRKBY LONSDALE** (township)

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ECONOMIC HISTORY

The economic history of Kirkby Lonsdale is mainly divided between agriculture and the small but busy market town. Apart from small-scale quarrying, there is little evidence of industrial activity in the rural parts of the township. The underlying geology did not yield minerals, as noted by Leonard Hodgson of Ingleton, called in to inspect the Lonsdale estates in 1843: 'There was no prospect of finding any coal or minerals'.¹ Both building stone and limestone were quarried in the nineteenth century. A town quarry marked on the Tithe Map, about two miles north of the town, beyond Kearnstwick, was probably for the quarrying of stone to build field walls.² Eleven limekilns have been identified, of which three are in the hamlets of High and Low Biggins, and five, probably from the mid-nineteenth century, at Tearnside, where a quarry is identifiable in a field now grassed over.³

Agriculture

Agriculture in the township was from early times centred on single farmsteads, with the exception of the hamlets of Biggins, Tearnside and Kearnstwick. The land is nowhere very high, and the soil is well-drained, coarse and loamy over the underlying rock. It is mainly suitable for stock rearing, though cereals can be grown, particularly near the river. Of the township's total of over 3,000 acres, nearly 1,000 acres of common pasture, mainly in the north and on the

¹ CAS (Kendal), WD/PP/Box 8

² CAS (Kendal), WDRC/8/231.

³ These were part of a commercial venture which is not identified in directories. P. F. Barker, *A Survey of Limekiln Sites in S. Cumbria and N. Lancashire* (Milnthorpe 1997), 69-70, 72-3.

western border of the township, were enclosed in 1810.⁴ Alexander Nowell was allotted 230 acres and purchased another 150 to extend Underley. The Lonsdale estate acquired 250 acres, and Deansbiggin 70 acres. Many of the other allotments were very small, measured in roods rather than acres, reflecting the patchwork of smallholdings into which part of the land, particularly that lying south of the Kendal road, was divided. The Tithe Map of 1848 shows these varying between two and seven acres - the Abbot Hall farm, for instance, letting out 25 of its 90 acres in eight small parcels.⁵

Smallholders had other occupations. In 1851 only ten farmers were listed as such, and these mainly tenants of the big estates.⁶ By 1906 the pattern had changed, the number of farmers had increased to 23, although only two of them were owner-occupiers.⁷ In 1943 of 26 holdings, seven were held by Biggins in the southern part of the township, and twelve by Underley towards the north and west. At this time, apart from some smallholdings mostly in the Tearnside area, farms were between 100 and 150 acres, with the exception of Underley, Biggins, Deansbiggin and Spittal, all over 250 acres.⁸ By 2012 only five working farms remained in the township: Wood End, Spittal, Hotridding, Underley and Deansbiggin, the first three covering some 800 acres between them, the last two of 700 acres each.⁹ The farmhouses, and many farm buildings, had been converted to dwellings for people working in the towns or retired.

In earlier times there was more cultivation of crops than was the case later. Inquisitions post mortem such as those of Thomas Carus in 1575¹⁰ and Lady Elizabeth Curwen in 1611,¹¹ indicate a fairly even division between ploughland and pasture. Seventeenth-century inventories show the main crops to have been oats and barley, hay for winter feed and occasionally wheat.¹² Beans were an unusual but not unknown crop, possibly in gardens rather than in fields: in 1684 John Briscoe of Kearsrick had 'beanes growing on the ground', and in 1693

⁴ CAS (Kendal), WQ/R/I/48.

⁵ CAS (Kendal), WDRC/8/231.

⁶ Mannex, *Dir. Westmd* (1851), 359.

⁷ Bulmer, *Dir. Westmd* (1906), 525.

⁸ TNA, MAF 32/194.

⁹ Inf from Henry Armitage, Davis and Bowring, land agents (2010).

¹⁰ *Rec. Kend.* II, 307.

¹¹ *Rec. Kend.* II, 319.

¹² Analysis of 40 Kirkby Lonsdale inventories, 1675-1720 in Lancashire Archives (Preston), WRW/L.

William Briscoe, probably his son, had beans listed with his oats and bigg.¹³ It is said that potatoes were introduced to the district in 1730.¹⁴

In 1791 a traveller commented that the Lune Valley ‘consists principally of grass farms which is certainly a wise conformity to the climate and the country, for crops of corn must be very uncertain where so much rain falls and where the winter sets in so early. Here is however, some tolerably looking wheat, and the oats and barley are luxuriant.’¹⁵ In 1848 of the township’s 3000 acres only 400 (13 per cent) were dedicated to arable, although some of the meadow was occasionally ploughed.¹⁶ During the Second World War between fifteen and twenty per cent of the land was ploughed but much of this was due to wartime encouragement or instruction: the main crop was oats, with small areas of wheat and barley, and significant amounts of kale, turnips and potatoes.¹⁷ By then the first steps had been taken towards mechanisation: there was one tractor at Spittal and ten farms had electricity to drive an engine.¹⁸

In 1799 the Kendal Agricultural Society was formed, covering an area including Kirkby Lonsdale. In 1839 Kirkby Lonsdale set up its own annual show, possibly because at that time the Kendal Show was in financial straits.¹⁹ It was held on the second Tuesday in August, and has so continued ever since. Classes for shorthorn cattle were introduced in 1845, marking the demise of the traditional longhorns. In this as in other respects the Underley estate exercised considerable influence in the nineteenth century. In 1868 Lord Kenlis started a shorthorn herd on which he lavished money - in 1874 he sold 55 animals for nearly £20,000.²⁰

Although foot-and-mouth disease was endemic on the farms in early times, Kirkby Lonsdale market was only once affected, a particularly bad outbreak in 1749 leading to its closure.²¹

¹³ Lancashire Archives (Preston), WRW/L: inventory John Briscoe of Kearsrick, 1684; inventory William Briscoe of Kearsrick 1693.

¹⁴ *Rec. Kend.* III, 283.

¹⁵ A. Walker, *Remarks made in a tour to be taken of Westmoreland and Cumberland in the summer of MDCCXCI* (London 1792), 48.

¹⁶ CAS (Kendal), WDRC/8/231.

¹⁷ TNA, MAF/32/194.

¹⁸ TNA, MAF/32/194.

¹⁹ F. W. Garnett, *Westmorland Agriculture 1800-1900* (Kendal 1912), 225.

²⁰ Garnett, *Westmorland Agriculture*, 128.

²¹ *Rec. Kend.* III, 70-1.

Market Town

A Thursday market was granted to the parson John de Kirkeby in 1227²² and has been held ever since, although it would seem with varying success. In the sixteenth century John Leland seems to have been more impressed by the church, calling Kirkby Lonsdale ‘a very great and famous parroch’, while naming Kendal as the ‘one good market town’ in Westmorland.²³ In the century after Leland wrote, the market seems to have grown in importance, as did also the yearly fair which John de Kirkeby had been granted, to be held on church land on 7-9 September, the eve, feast and morrow of the Nativity of St. Mary.²⁴ By 1675, Daniel Fleming could describe Kirkby Lonsdale as ‘a fair Market Towne....a town of note, whither all ye people round about repair to church and mercate,’²⁵ and in 1692 Machell wrote that the lord of the manor had all the tolls both of fair and market, and that both fairs and market afforded ‘great store of cattle and all sorts of grain in great plenty.’²⁶

The market centred on Market Street next the church which was probably originally a square.²⁷ When new market rules were introduced in 1822, with the building of the new Market Square, the detailed directions for the sale of livestock and heavy goods probably reflected the customs already in place. All cattle were to be shown in Fairbank²⁸ and Mitchelgate, sheep and drove pigs in Queen Street, and bulls in the south-west corner of Queen Street; horses in the New Road between the junction of Mitchelgate and the corner of Mr. Roper’s stables, and all shows and caravans were to be stationed near the wall of the church yard.²⁹

At the same time the market cross was moved from its position at the junction of Market Street and Main Street to a small square between Mill Lane and the churchyard,³⁰ which was called the Coal Market³¹ or later the Swine Market.

²² *Rec. Kend.* II, 307.

²³ *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the years 1535-1543*, ed. Lucy Toulmin Smith (London 1964), V. 45-7.

²⁴ Below, ‘Religious History’.

²⁵ E. Hughes, *Fleming-Senhouse Papers*, 5.

²⁶ Ewbank, *Antiquary on Horseback*, 24.

²⁷ Above, ‘Introduction.’

²⁸ *PNW*, I, 43. The name, quoted in 1611, is originally topographical rather than having any reference to the sale of beasts.

²⁹ From a contemporary poster (copy in possession of Kirkby Lonsdale Civic Society).

³⁰ RCHME, *Westmorland*, 138.

With the consent of Lord Lonsdale, lord of the manor, and public subscription,³² the new Market Square was established at the south end of Main Street, on the gardens of Jackson Hall, a mansion which after the destruction of the old Rose and Crown by fire, became the new inn of that name, changed to the Royal after Queen Adelaide slept there on a visit to the lakes in 1840.³³

The new market rules of 1822 were both precise and elaborate, though it is not certain that all the goods mentioned were ever actually on sale. 'At the Market Cross called the Little Market might be sold Fish, Coal, Turf and Fuel. In the New Market Place on the South Row of stalls Butchers shall stand with their stalls facing South. In the remaining stalls on the said Row and in the middle Row should be shown Hardware, Linen, Fustian, Cotton, Leather, Hats, Brushes, Hemp and Flax Manufactures, Haberdashery, Hosiery, Books and Wooden Wares. The 3rd Row of Stalls should be set apart for Clothiers and people exposing woollen goods for sale. Against the North Wall should be shown Pots, Glass, Earthenware, Butter, Eggs, Fowls, Fruit and other produce exposed in baskets. On Market Days Potatoes should be placed at the bottom of the New Market Place but on all Fairs in the Horse Market.'³⁴

The number of fairs had increased from the original grant: Machell adds Maundy Thursday, St. Thomas' day,³⁵ and a fortnightly fair between an unidentified Thursday and Michaelmas.³⁶ In the first quarter of the nineteenth century this was reduced to five - Maundy Thursday, Holy Thursday,³⁷ three weeks after Holy Thursday, 5th October and 21st December.³⁸ By the beginning of the twentieth century Maundy Thursday had been replaced by the second Thursdays in February and March.³⁹ The auction mart opened in the town in 1903. In 1905 948 head of cattle and 1278 sheep were offered for sale. From 1914 livestock sales were held in a new Auction Mart building at the side of the

³¹ OS 1:2500 sheet Westmorland XLVII-8 (surveyed 1859).

³² Pearson, *Annals*, 173.

³³ see Casterton.

³⁴ Poster in possession of the Kirkby Lonsdale Civic Society.

³⁵ Probably either 3 or 7 July, the Translation of St. Thomas the Apostle, or the translation of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

³⁶ Ewbank, *Antiquary on Horseback*, 24.

³⁷ An old name for Ascension day, four weeks after Maundy Thursday,

³⁸ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.*, 687.

³⁹ Bulmer, *Dir. Westmd* (1906), 511. This author adds 'and every alternate Wednesday' which seems to indicate that the word 'fair' had been downgraded to mean no more than a cattle market.

Market Place,⁴⁰ but about 1970 the building converted was to shops.⁴¹ Stock sales in the town were finally stopped by the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in 2001.⁴²

In the third quarter of the seventeenth century there was considerable growth in the town. The inventories of those who paid on more than one hearth in 1671, where these are available, indicate industry only on a domestic scale, but there was important commercial growth at this time and into the eighteenth century. There was already one important inn, as Lady Anne Clifford and her retinue, en route from Appleby to Skipton, stayed overnight at Kirkby Lonsdale in 1657, 'in the Inne there, as I usually doe in my journey betwene Westmerland and Craven.'⁴³ Soon after this several other inns were recorded, evidence of the town's position as a trading centre on a busy confluence of routes close to the county boundary. The richest tradesmen in the town were those who kept an inn or a shop, many of them lending out their profits. Miles Hodgson, gent., died in 1683, leaving £350 in bills and bonds, £50 worth of plate, and an inn, which he calls 'my manor house' and names in his will as 'The Red Dragon', containing sixteen rooms.⁴⁴ Richard Preston, another innkeeper, also died a rich man in 1711.⁴⁵ His inn had fifteen rooms and can be identified from his initials over a dated fireplace.⁴⁶ Mr. John Baynes left in 1696 a house of thirteen rooms, as well as goods in the 'High Shoppe' and the 'Apothecary Shoppe'.⁴⁷ Simon Washington's inventory of 1698 amounted to £862, of which nearly £600 was lent out. His trade is not mentioned, but his house had fourteen rooms, and included a workshop and a 'selling shoppe.' Tempest Husband died in 1703, with shop goods worth £339 in two shops,⁴⁸ and a house with fourteen rooms.⁴⁹ Not all ventures were successful. Mr. James Hudson died in 1690, owning an eighteen-roomed house, including some 'new building', but with assets totalling only £35.

⁴⁰ The building is dated.

⁴¹ Local information.

⁴² Local information.

⁴³ D. J. H. Clifford, *The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford* (Stroud 2003), 137-8. With thanks to J. Argles, who drew attention to the quotation.

⁴⁴ In the main street, near the old market place, still (2013) trading under the same name.

⁴⁵ Lancashire Archives (Preston) WRW/L Richard Preston 1711

⁴⁶ Also in Main Street, nearer the new Market Place. The Green Dragon, regrettably renamed in the 1990s the 'Snooty Fox'.

⁴⁷ He had a third shop, ten miles away in Ingleton, Yorkshire.

⁴⁸ The second one was probably in Bentham, Yorkshire, where a branch of the Husband family lived.

⁴⁹ Lancashire Archives (Preston) WRW/L Tempest Husband 1703

All the above, except Miles Hodgson, were new names in the town since the 1669 hearth tax. Kirkby Lonsdale was clearly seen as a place worthy of commercial investment.

The development in the late eighteenth century of mill-based industries depended on the management of water power. The land outside the town is well-watered by becks finding their way down to the Lune, several of which run underground for part of their course, and are therefore difficult to trace. At the north-east corner of the township, Terry Bank Tarn lies at 150m., and it was long believed that it was this water, over its last few hundred yards down Mill Lane to the river, which provided power for a number of small industries.⁵⁰ In fact, this water re-emerged at Kearstwick, where at one time it operated a sawmill on the Underley estate, while water for industries in the town was gathered from various springs to the west of the town.⁵¹ The date of its first channelling is not known, but may have been much earlier, as two manorial flour mills are listed in 1611.⁵² Early in the eighteenth century Defoe included Kirkby Lonsdale among the 'pleasant, populous and manufacturing towns' of the north-west, although the manufacture he specifies ('chiefly woollen cloths'),⁵³ would at that time have been a domestic industry.

In 1773 Sir James Lowther owned more than one mill in the town,⁵⁴ marking the development of larger industries. In 1801 manufacturing was well-established, the beck turning seven wheels on its way to the river, one of which was for the making of snuff and one serving a fulling mill.⁵⁵ The same observer remarked that stocking knitting by hand, once a considerable industry, had greatly declined. Thirty years later two thrashing and grinding mills, a wool carding mill, and two tanneries, among others, were cited as being turned by the same water power.⁵⁶ The town's corn mill was at the bottom of the hill on the river bank. A carpet and blanket factory supported a number of workers who wove coarse linen cloth, gingham and calicoes. From 1777 the clerk keeping the parish register had

⁵⁰ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.* (1829) p. 686

⁵¹ OS 1:2,00 Westmorland sheet XLVII-3 (1911 ed.). Inf. M. Kingsbury and J. Thompson.

⁵² *Rec. Kend.* I, 319.

⁵³ D. Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (London 1983), III, 149.

⁵⁴ CAS (Kendal), WQ/R/LT Land Tax (Kirkby Lonsdale). 1773. The document does not say how many.

⁵⁵ Pearson, *Annals*, 67.

⁵⁶ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.*, 686.

begun to identify trades, particularly of bridegrooms - mason, apothecary, cordwainer, weaver in that year. In 1804 are named an ostler, brazier, mason, roper, gardener, butcher, watchmaker, chaise driver, shopkeeper, innkeeper, postmaster, joiner, tailor, grocer, two manufacturers, three tanners, four shoemakers and four weavers. The list is from the marriage register and therefore weighted towards the younger end of the population. Nevertheless, it indicates a busy little town of trades and tradesmen - labourers hardly feature.⁵⁷

Many of the manufacturing trades had declined by the mid nineteenth century, when only a printing works, a mill and a tannery were mentioned as water-powered.⁵⁸ Linen textile manufacture survived in 1829 but had ceased by 1851.⁵⁹ Other trades which disappeared between 1829 and 1851 included chairmakers, hatters, maltsters, and fellmongers. By the beginning of the twentieth century manufacturing had vanished from the town except for two wheelwrights, a smithy and a saddler. They had been replaced by the building and decorating trades which service house owners, enough retail shops to completely serve the needs of the population, and the new transport trades - cycle shops and motor engineers.⁶⁰

The economy of the town has been mainly based on tourism since the widespread development of motor transport in the mid-twentieth century. In 1982, the old fairs long dead, but the original date still a memory, a Victorian Fair was set up on the first weekend in September, which attracted up to 20,000 visitors and raised large sums of money for charity,⁶¹ until, enthusiasm waning, it died a natural death in 2007, to be replaced in 2010 by a Christmas Fair.⁶²

Many of the older houses in the town, picturesque but congested, became second homes or holiday lettings. By the early twenty-first century, many shops catered for hill-walking and other outdoor pursuits, and for holiday-makers. There were numerous cafes and restaurants, probably more than the town could

⁵⁷ CAS (Kendal), W/PR191/1/9.

⁵⁸ Mannex, *Dir. Westmd* (1851), 348.

⁵⁹ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.* (1829), 694-5; Mannex, *Dir. Westmd* (1851), 358-9.

⁶⁰ Bulmer, *Dir. Westmd* (1906), 524-6.

⁶¹ Pearson *et al*, *Annals Today*, 276-7.

⁶² Inf. Janet Atkins.

support, since they tended to change hands very frequently. In 2012, six of the old licensed houses continued to trade.⁶³

The establishment of Booths, a large supermarket at the top of New Road, in 2000, resulted in the closure of most food shops in the town, though an old-fashioned butcher, a specialist cheese shop, and a home bakery, survived in 2013.

⁶³ The Red Dragon and Snooty Fox mentioned earlier, the Royal, the Kings Arms, the Sun and the Orange Tree (originally called the Fleece; renamed in 1996 after the famous Twickenham pub to appeal to Rugby enthusiasts).