

Victoria County History of Cumbria Project: Work in Progress

Interim Draft

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

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LANDOWNERSHIP

In medieval times St. Mary's Abbey, York, held most, possibly as much as three-quarters, of the modern township of Kirkby Lonsdale, of which a small part on the southern boundary, was given, about the year 1200, to Cockersand Abbey. The remaining portion, based on Deansbiggin, was held of the barony of Kendale. After the Reformation, the township was divided between private estates, of which the main ones were Underley to the west of the township, progressively absorbing Deansbiggin and subsequently much of the town, the Lowther estate with no capital messuage, and Biggins to the south. These three estates grew throughout the nineteenth century, but all broke up in the twentieth, Underley alone continuing into the twenty-first, by which time the township was largely the property of small owner-occupiers.

Manors.

Kirkby Lonsdale

Before the Conquest Thorfinnr held Kirkby Lonsdale as one of his twelve manors in Austwick. By 1100 Ivo Talebois held it as Baron of Kendal and gave the church with its land, amounting to perhaps three-quarters of the township, to the monks of St. Mary's Abbey, York.¹ At the dissolution it passed to the Crown and was granted in 1558 to the lawyer Thomas Carus of Halton near Lancaster who became a justice of the Queen's Bench.² He was succeeded by his son, another Thomas Carus, who held the manor in chief by one part of a knight's fee, and

¹ *Rec. Kend.* II, 305. See under 'Religion'.

² *Rec. Kend.* II, 304.

died in 1575.³ His only child and heir was Elizabeth, wife of Sir Nicholas Curwen of Workington,⁴ whose estate at her death in 1611 was estimated at 30 messuages, 7 tofts, 2 mills, 1 dovecot, 30 gardens, 300 acres of land, 300 acres of pasture, 10 acres of wood, and 1500 acres of furze and heath. Her heirs were her daughters, Mary, wife of Henry Widdrington of Widdrington Castle in Northumberland, and Jane, wife of William Lambton, also of Northumberland.⁵ It is not known when the manor passed from them to George Preston of Holker, who was seised of it at his death in 1640,⁶ with Over Biggins Hall as its capital messuag. In 1640 Preston was succeeded by his son Thomas,⁷ who was succeeded by another Thomas. One of the two⁸ had sold the manor to Sir John Lowther by 1672, on the evidence of the manor court records.⁹ The Lowther family thereafter kept an agent in the town who is presumed to have lived in the 'Old Manor House' on Mill Brow, but probably not until it had been rebuilt in its present form: Richard Trotter, steward, conducted the manor courts from 1672 to 1684 but does not appear in the Hearth Tax returns of 1674.¹⁰ From 1685 to 1694 the courts were conducted by Roger Moore, steward,¹¹ who died at Holmehouse in Whittington parish but left directions for his burial in Kirkby Lonsdale.¹² James Knowles, who followed Moore as steward to the Lowther estate, almost certainly lived in the house until 1727, because his inventory details a large house on four floors, including both 'garrats and cellers',¹³ a very unusual type of house in the area at the time, but possible in this case owing to the steep slope of the ground. The house was finally sold from the Lonsdale estate in 1839, to Arthur Foster, printer and bookseller.¹⁴

The Lowthers were still lords of the manor in 1822 when the newly laid out Market Square was bought by public subscription and transferred to the

³ *Rec. Kend.* II, 305

⁴ *Rec. Kend.* II, 315-17.

⁵ *Rec. Kend.* II, 319.

⁶ *Rec. Kend.* II, 321.

⁷ *Rec. Kend.* II, 322.

⁸ *Rec. Kend.* II, 306.

⁹ CAS (Carlisle), D/Lons/LS/2/12.

¹⁰ *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, 123-4.

¹¹ CAS (Carlisle), D/Lons/LS/2/12.

¹² Lancashire Archives (Preston) WRW/L Will of Roger Moore 1695

¹³ Lancashire Archives (Preston) WRW/L Inventory of James Knowles 1727

¹⁴ House deeds, courtesy of the owner

manor to be held in trust for the townspeople. Their rights were not finally extinguished until 1928.¹⁵

Deansbiggin

The manor of Deansbiggin was held of the Barony of Kendale.¹⁶ In 1229 John de Kirkeby queried the right of Richard de Copeland to own land in Deansbiggin which Richard had held since before 1200. A concord between them regarding an exchange of land was made in 1231.¹⁷ The Deansbiggin quarter to the north of Kirkby Lonsdale town was confirmed to the Copeland family and held in 1283 by Alan de Copeland from William de Lindesay baron of Kendal.¹⁸

Before 1400 it was in the estate of Sir Thomas Tunstall of Thurland Castle in Tunstall, Lancashire, and it was granted in that year by trustees to his younger son, also Thomas, not directly from his father, but from Robert Banes of Melling and Robert Holme, who had received it as a gift from Sir Thomas the father.¹⁹ The reason for these transactions has not been found.

In 1523 it was held by Edward Middleton by fealty and a rent of 2d. per annum.²⁰ In 1605 Christopher Middleton died holding the manor of Deansbiggin of Thurland Castle, in socage by fealty and a rent of twopence yearly for all services. He was succeeded by his son James aged thirteen,²¹ but it was sold before 1623 to Joseph Booth, a Kirkby Lonsdale lawyer. At this date rebuilding took place, marked by the datestones on an upstairs fireplace and on the two-storeyed porch. Three generations of the Booth family remained at Deansbiggin until a later Joseph Booth sold it in 1680 to John Borrett, a lawyer of the Inner Temple, son of Edward Borrett, mercer of Kirkby Lonsdale. In 1777 Susanna Borrett, John Borrett's granddaughter, sold the estate to John Batty of Kirkby Lonsdale, grocer.²² After his death in 1791 it was sold to Henry Bickersteth,²³ on

¹⁵ See 'Local Government'

¹⁶ The name of Deansbiggin has been adduced as showing a connection to the church, but it has also been strongly argued that the origin is a personal name with no religious connections: see W. H. Chippindall, 'The Manor of Kirkby Lonsdale' *CW2*, xxvi (1926), 298-306.

¹⁷ *Rec. Kend.* II, 308.

¹⁸ *Rec. Kend.* II, 309.

¹⁹ *Rec. Kend.* II, 312.

²⁰ *Rec. Kend.* II, 305.

²¹ *Rec. Kend.* II, 88.

²² W.H. Chippindall 'Deansbiggin near Kirkby Lonsdale' *CW2*, xxix (1929), 242-7. The deeds, used by Chippindall, were then at Underley, but their earliest date is not clear.

whose death in 1821 it was acquired by Alexander Nowell of Underley Hall and added to that estate.²⁴

Other Estates

Cockersand Abbey

Between 1184 and 1200 four acres of land were given by the hereditary parson Ketel de Kirkby to the canons of Cockersand ‘for the health of his soul and the soul of Heixstilda his wife’, followed by another four acres.²⁵ Adam son of Ketel confirmed these gifts and added another nine acres.²⁶ This land lay to the west of the vill. Its exact boundaries are unknown, the reference being to ‘Ruhcroft’, a name which has been lost. It was defined as ‘by the stream of Lindale well to another stream which descends into Lupton brook,’ and thence along the boundary of Lupton to the boundary of Hutton Roof, and so back to the well.²⁷

Biggins

The hamlet of Biggins, to the south of the town, developed into a separate landed estate from the seventeenth century. Over Biggins Hall had been the capital messuage of the manor of Kirkby Lonsdale in 1640, but the manor house seems already to have been separated from the rest of the manor by then.²⁸ Thomas Carus, later a judge of the Queen’s Court under Elizabeth²⁹ had been granted the Kirkby Lonsdale manor in 1558, which included Biggins. His son, another Thomas, married Anne Preston, and their daughter and heir Elizabeth, after the death of her husband Sir Nicholas Curwen of Workington in 1605,³⁰ gave part of the Biggins estate to the Kirkby Lonsdale school,³¹ and enlarged the tenement buildings, marking the new wing with a datestone ‘EC 1606’. The group of

²³ M. I. Kirkby Lonsdale Church

²⁴ Chippendall, ‘Deansbiggin, 242-7

²⁵ *The Chartulary of Cockersand Abbey* (Chetham Society New Series 56), p. 912.

²⁶ *Cockersand Chartulary*, p. 913.

²⁷ *Cockersand Chartulary*, p. 911.

²⁸ *Rec Kend.* II, 319.

²⁹ *Rec. Kend.* II, 315.

³⁰ J.F. Curwen *A History of the Ancient House of Curwen* (Kendal 1928), 129.

³¹ See ‘Social History’.

buildings, with considerable medieval features, had fallen into a very poor state of preservation³² until restored, late in the twentieth century, to three dwellings.³³

In the late eighteenth century Thomas Tomlinson of Arkholme in Lancashire and his wife Ann Battersby acquired the Biggins estate and built a house which still stands. Eight children of their son Edward remained unmarried but continued to live together.³⁴ In 1848 the 300-acre estate was held in three parts, in the names of two surviving brothers and 'the Misses Tomlinson'.³⁵ In 1889 Elizabeth, the last of the family, died, by then owning the whole estate, which she left to a very distant relation, Dr. William Paget. Born at Forton in 1848, he practised medicine for eighteen years at Blundellsands and London, until his inheritance, when he added the name of Tomlinson,³⁶ built himself a large country house at Biggins,³⁷ and until his death in 1937³⁸ devoted himself and much of his fortune to the affairs of Kirkby Lonsdale. He was the church choirmaster for 45 years,³⁹ gave £1,000 and land for tennis courts to the Queen Elizabeth School,⁴⁰ was prominent in the foundation of the Institute,⁴¹ and founded the Kirkby Lonsdale Fellowship, an adult education group, in 1927.⁴² He was a considerable landowner and employer, a Deputy Lieutenant, and in 1897 served as High Sheriff of Westmorland.⁴³ In 1928, to celebrate his 80th birthday, the people of Kirkby Lonsdale presented him with a piece of plate and an illuminated address.⁴⁴

Underley

From at least the seventeenth century, Underley, lying about a kilometre north of the town, was an important holding in the township, though there is no early

³² RCHME, *Westmorland*, 136.

³³ Part of this complex of buildings is still known locally as 'the Courthouse'.

³⁴ M. I., Kirkby Lonsdale Church.

³⁵ CAS (Kendal), WDRC/8/231.

³⁶ *Westmorland Gazette*, 11 Feb. 1937.

³⁷ This burnt down in 1942, and no trace remains. A photograph can be found in N. and P. Dalziel, *Kirkby Lonsdale and District* (Stroud 1996), 71.

³⁸ Cumbria Family History Society, *The Memorial Inscriptions of St Mary the Virgin Kirkby Lonsdale* (2000) pp. 73, 78.

³⁹ Wall Tablet in St. Mary's Church, Kirkby Lonsdale.

⁴⁰ Pearson *et al*, *Annals Today*, 157-8.

⁴¹ CAS (Kendal), WPR 19/13/2/1.

⁴² Pearson *et al*, *Annals Today*, 157-8.

⁴³ *AWL*, 298.

⁴⁴ *Westmorland Gazette*, 11 Feb. 1937.

information as to the extent of its land. Henry Wilson of Blackwell Hall in London, a rich man and benefactor to the church and school, held at his death in 1640 a capital messuage there.⁴⁵ In 1670 his great-nephew and heir, another Henry Wilson, paid on eight hearths, more than any other house in the township.⁴⁶ In 1732 Mr. Thomas Wilson, son of Henry, sold to Hugh Ashton of Bispham, whose widow was still there in 1773,⁴⁷ and who died in Kirkby Lonsdale in 1782.⁴⁸ Her great-grandson, Joseph Burrow, sold in 1808 to Alexander Nowell, originally from Gawthorp Hall in Lancashire, who had made his fortune in Bengal and became a landowner and notable racehorse trainer.⁴⁹ The estate at that time consisted of 'Underley Hall now used as a farmhouse' with a 'total acreage of 133 acres'.⁵⁰ In 1825-8, having demolished the old house, Nowell employed George Webster to design in Jacobean style a fine country mansion of its time,⁵¹ but one which proved much too small for the later Victorian dynasty started by William Thompson in the 1840s and continuing until the 1940s. Paley and Austin were responsible in the 1870s for additions to the Webster house, more than doubling the length of the garden front and adding a 100ft. (31m.) tower as its central feature. The gardens were in keeping with the house, covering over 50 acres. A bridge across the Lune to give access to the nearest railway station at Barbon was built between 1872 and 1875 and cost £10,000.⁵²

Alderman William Thompson, who bought the estate in 1840 for £120,000, was born at Grayrigg, went south and made his fortune in the iron trade, and became an alderman for the City of London, serving as Lord Mayor in 1828.⁵³ He became MP for Westmorland in 1841, the previous member having inherited his father's title as Baron Lowther and moved to the House of Lords.⁵⁴ Thompson retained his seat until his death in 1854. His daughter Amelia had married an Irish peer, Thomas Taylour, earl of Bective; their son, another Thomas, inherited the property on the death of his mother in 1864 and the title

⁴⁵ *Rec. Kend.* II, 323.

⁴⁶ *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, 161.

⁴⁷ CAS (Kendal), WQ/R/LT Land Tax (Lonsdale Ward) 1773.

⁴⁸ CAS (Kendal), W/PR 19 /1/1/9.

⁴⁹ *AWL*, 218.

⁵⁰ Underley Estate Title Deeds (in private hands).

⁵¹ Taylor, *Websters of Kendal*, 115.

⁵² Hyde & Pevsner, *Cumbria*, 466.

⁵³ *AWL*, 293.

⁵⁴ *Return: Members of Parliament 1705-1874* Part II p. 389

on the death of his father in 1893, but died the following year.⁵⁵ Once again the heir was a daughter, Caroline, who had married Lord Henry Cavendish-Bentinck.⁵⁶ The estates she inherited stretched to about 25,000 acres (10,000 ha), including large tracts beyond Kirkby Lonsdale, in Kendal, north Lancashire, and Dent in Yorkshire.⁵⁷ Lady Bentinck died childless in 1939, and a distant relative inherited. Doris Crichton was a great-great-granddaughter of William Thompson, through two female lines. She married Philip Pease of Co. Durham, and in 2013 the Pease family remained in possession.⁵⁸ It is said that Lady Bentinck had made no provision for inheritance tax, and much of the property, including Underley Hall, was broken up and sold. The Underley estate shrank to a little less than 5,000 acres (2,000 ha), the greater part lying within Kirkby Lonsdale township.⁵⁹ It was shared between two branches of the Pease family, one based at Underley Hall, and one in Co. Durham.

⁵⁵ *AWL*, 292.

⁵⁶ *AWL*, 292.

⁵⁷ Maps of Underley estate, in possession of Davis and Bowring, estate agents, Kirkby Lonsdale.

⁵⁸ *AWL*, 292-3, 228.

⁵⁹ Inf. from Henry Armitage, Davis and Bowring, estate agents, Kirkby Lonsdale (2010)