

Parish/township: MOSSER

Author: Angus Winchester

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ECONOMIC HISTORY

The township's economy was largely agricultural until the later twentieth century and had a strong pastoral bias. Crop land was limited and restricted to the vicinity of the farmsteads, in a zone hemmed in between the wet mossland and meadows of Mosser Moss, along the township's north-west boundary, and pastures on the spur of higher ground at around 250m stretching to Bramley Seat. Small cores of open-field arable land are probably recorded in field-names such as 'Stoney Dales' and 'Short Butts', near Mosser Mains, and 'Flatts', at Mossergate and Beech Hill. Parts of the higher ground were recorded as 'outfield' land in the eighteenth century, implying that sections of the pasture were cultivated on a long-ley rotation.¹ Enclosure of shared arable land and meadow appears to have taken place in piecemeal fashion over an attenuated period, through exchanges of ground between neighbours, as recorded in 1690 and between 1756 and 1759, though 25 acres of common fields remained in 1874.² Reclamation of Mosser Moss, an area of wetland containing c.20 ha, was undertaken by agreement in 1767 and 1772.³

In the mid-eighteenth century, each farm consisted of a comparatively small acreage of farmland, typically of between 35 and 55 acres (14-22 ha), together with grazing rights on the common. Much of the enclosed farmland was under rotational grass: at Underwood, Isaac Fletcher generally ploughed only three fields each year. He ploughed the ley for oats in the first year, manuring it the following year for barley or potatoes, which was followed by one or more grain crops until the land was put down to grass again. The better land was cropped for four or five years, followed by a ley period of three to seven years; on fields which would probably have been formerly classed as 'outfield' land, only two or three crops were taken in succession and the ley period ran for up to nine years.⁴ The pastoral accent of farming in Mosser was marked: in 1801 little more than 112 acres (a mere 7.5 percent of the township's acreage) was under crop, the bulk of it under oats (80.5 acre). The only other significant crops were barley (16.75 acres) and potatoes (10.75 acres).⁵ In 1920 the acreage under crops was slightly greater: oats (94 acres) had replaced barley and the acreage under roots (44 acres) had increased. Sheep and cattle breeding dominated the farming economy: almost 90 percent of the sheep flock (which totalled 1518) comprised sheep (695) and lambs (670), while cattle rearing focused on small-scale dairying and

¹ CRO, YDX 208/92: sale, Brown to Robinson, 1736. Fields near Wilkes How were named 'Outfield' in 1840: CRO, DRC/8/134.

² Agreement between Allan Allanson and Peter Fawcett, 6 Sept 1690 (in possession of Mrs D. Fawcett, Broughton, Hants., 1991); Fletcher, *Diary*, pp. 1 (17 Jan. 1756), 27 (29 Mar. 1757), 60 (24 Jan. 1759); PP (HC) 1874 [85], *Incllosures*, p. 35. In 1840, the surviving undivided strips were in the Outfield and other fields on higher ground to the south of Mossergate: CRO, DRC/8/134, parcel nos. 161-5, 170-2, 181-194.

³ Fletcher, *Diary*, pp. 197 (11 Feb. 1767), 247 (21 Feb. 1772),

⁴ Fletcher, *Diary*, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁵ PRO, HO67/26/310, which, unusually, gives full details of crops on each holding.

suckler herds. Milk cows and heifers accounted for approximately one-third of the 313 cattle and young under one year old for a further one-third.⁶

Two areas of common waste, totalling 464 acres, survived until the nineteenth century: Mosser Common, 70 acres on the western edge of the township, separating Mosser's farmland from that of the hamlet of Sosgill, and Mosser Fell, 394 acres of hill grazings on the slopes of Fellbarrow, on which the tenants had rights of pasture and turbary.⁷ In the early seventeenth century the lord of the manor attempted to enclose part of the common, claiming his right to approve the residue of the commons.⁸ Whether any enclosure took place then is not known. The township community proposed enclosure in 1758 and were again said to be keen to enclose in 1827 but neither initiative appears to have succeeded.⁹ The commons were finally enclosed by act of Parliament under an award of 1867.¹⁰ The smaller section of the former common at Leady Moss was reclaimed and much of it was planted with conifers in the later twentieth century, but on Mosser Fell enclosure created a landscape of stone-walled allotments of rough grazing without reclamation for more intensive use.

The number of farm holdings in the township dropped from 15 in 1801, to 13 in 1880 and to 10 by 1910.¹¹ In 1920 all the holdings were let to tenants. Apart from one smallholding, the majority (7 holdings) then contained between 50 and 150 acres; only two fell into the 150-300-acre category.¹² By 2011 there were only four working farms.¹³ As farms were laid together in the later twentieth century, many of the farmhouses were sold as private dwellings, though one steading was built on a new site at Mosser Heights in 2001.¹⁴

There were two corn mills in the township. One, close to Mosser Mains at Milldam (a name recorded from 1602), was known in 1736 as Briscoe's Mill, and is perhaps to be identified with the mill which formed part of the endowment of Mosser chantry in the 1540s.¹⁵ The mill had gone out of use before 1840.¹⁶ According to local tradition its stones and machinery were taken to Aikbank, on the northern edge of the township, where a mill, recorded from 1698,¹⁷ remained in use until the twentieth century. The mill dam immediately above the farmstead at Aikbank drew water from three streams: Catgill Beck (which was dammed under an agreement of 1713),¹⁸

⁶ PRO, MAF68/2965.

⁷ The common rights were recorded in 1614: PRO, C2/JAS I/B31/62.

⁸ PRO, C2/JAS I/B31/62.

⁹ Fletcher, *Diary*, pp. 55-7 (20 and 28 Oct, 15 and 29 Nov. 1758); CRO, D/WM/11/405: case and instructions for plea (1827), p. 12.

¹⁰ CRO, QRE/1/127.

¹¹ PRO, HO67/26/310; MAF68/1090; CRO (Carlisle), TIR/4/106, pp. 5-7.

¹² PRO, MAF68/2965.

¹³ In 2011 the four working farms were Mosser Mains, Mossergate, Fellside and Mosser Heights.

¹⁴ Lake District National Park Authority: planning application no. 7/2000/2264 (decision dated 13 Feb. 2001).

¹⁵ At approx. NY 1175 2495: OS 6" map, Cumb. sheet 62 (surveyed 1864). CRO, D/WM/11/405: list of deeds (Salkeld to Wilkinson, 1602); CRO, YDX 208/92: sale, Brown to Robinson, 1736. In 1684 Lancelot Briscoe was responsible for maintaining the mill dam: CRO, YDX 159/1/9.

¹⁶ No evidence of a mill at Mosser Mains is recorded on the tithe plan: CRO, DRC/8/134.

¹⁷ CRO, YDX 159/1/2: sale to John & Ann Dixon, 10 Feb. 1698.

¹⁸ [Reference to be checked: CRO, YDX 208/92 or YDX 159/1/2].

Mosser Beck and Kirkby Beck. In its latter days the mill had two pairs of stones and also ran a saw, thresher and grindstone.¹⁹

Small veins of lead ore in the Ordovician Skiddaw Group rocks have been noted in geological surveys of the Mosser Beck valley. Isaac Fletcher of Underwood explored a vein of lead on his property 'in the gill' in 1758 and made several attempts to mine lead between 1765 and 1773, though little ore appears to have been won. One trial resulted in a shaft, abandoned because of flooding in 1771, which reached a depth of 12 fathoms.²⁰ Further mining took place on the former common in the western corner of the township at Leady Moss in the later nineteenth century.²¹

By 1840 a tile works making field drainage tiles had been established on the northern edge of the township near Aikbank by William Dixon of Toddell. In 1847 it was run by his son, Jonah Dixon. Production had ceased by 1864; the site of the clay pit survives as a water-filled depression.²² Other economic activity in the township has included handloom weaving at Mossergate in the early nineteenth century and fish smoking at Aikbank in the late twentieth.²³

¹⁹ Field observation, 1968.

²⁰ Fletcher, *Diary*, xxv-xxvi, 232-4; Brian Young, 'Lead mining at Mosser: a geological note', *ibid* 483-4.

²¹ A level there, disused by 1898, appears to post-date 1864: OS 6" map, Cumb. sheet 62 (surveyed 1864); sheet 62 NE (2nd edn; revised 1898).

²² Mosser tithe plan, parcel no. 128: CRO, DRC/8/134; Mannix & Whellan, *Dir. Cumb. 1847*, p. 530; Ordnance Survey 1st edn 6" map, Cumb. sheet 62 (surveyed 1864).

²³ Information on Joseph Allison (c.1777-1845), weaver, from Martha T. Johnstone, Rochester, NY, 2002; local inf.