

Parish/township: MOSSER

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Date of draft: 13.10.2011

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

After the tithes of Mosser were assigned to Brigham in 1220, the township community presumably looked to the parish church of Brigham, four miles away, for religious needs and rites of passage: by the seventeenth century, the inhabitants of Mosser were regularly baptised, married and buried at Brigham.¹

The church of St Michael (formerly dedicated to St Philip), a 'tiny fell chapel' with a bellcote and plain, oblong windows,² stands in the fields between Mosser Mains and Mossergate. Its origins lay in the foundation of a chantry in Brigham parish. In 1546 Mosser chapel was held by an elderly priest named Harry Bankes, who received an annual stipend of £4 from Thomas Salkeld of Corby, the lord of the manor, though the chantry was endowed with lands and a watermill, of which at least some appear to have been in Mosser, yielding an annual rental income of over £7.³ In 1653, John Banks, a fifteen-year-old youth, son of a local fellmonger, was reader at Mosser chapel: whether his family was connected with that of the chantry priest Harry Bankes has not been established. His duties were to read the Scriptures and homily, sing psalms and lead prayer on Sundays, for which he received a salary of 12d. yearly from each household on top of free board and lodging, probably an example of the 'whittlegate' system by which readers in Cumbrian chapels of ease were often maintained.⁴ The chapel seems to have fallen into disrepair not long afterwards: it was said to have been 'down' for about one hundred years when it was rebuilt by subscription in 1773.⁵ Prior to rebuilding, the site was bought by three trustees, who vested the right to nominate a curate in all who contributed chapel dues.⁶ The subscribers included inhabitants of the neighbouring townships of Blindbothel and Whinfell, as well as Mosser,⁷ suggesting that the chapel was intended to serve Anglicans in the three communities, none of which had a chapel of ease and all of which contained significant numbers of Quakers. The chapel was endowed with an annual salary of £4, given by the subscribers, the income from a small field, valued in 1779 at 25s. per year, augmented by a grant from Queen Anne's Bounty

¹ *Reg. St Bees*, nos 104-5; CRO (Carlisle), transcript of Brigham bishop's transcripts, 1676-1766.

² Hyde and Pevsner, *Cumbria*, p. 534.

³ R. L. Storey, 'Chantry of Cumberland & Westmorland, Part I' CW2 60 (1960), p. 87. The value of the endowment was given as £7 9s 2d in 1547 (*ibid*) but as £7 17s 3d c.1555 (PRO, C1/1466/41). At least three of the five tenants of the chantry lands listed in 1548 (*Cal. Pat.* 1548-9, p. 70) and c.1555 (Joan Watson, John Williamson of Mossergate ('Mosgate') and Anthony Fletcher) are probably to be identified as inhabitants of Mosser. (Conclusion drawn from comparison with names recorded on muster roll of 1535: PRO, E101/549/13, f. 4).

⁴ *Journal of... John Banks*, 2-3.

⁵ Fletcher, *Diary*, p. 271(16 Aug. 1773); Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, p. 155.

⁶ CRO, DRC/10/26: lease and release (7-8 May 1773); Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, p. 156.

⁷ PRO, HO 129/570/2/6.

of £200.⁸ In 1829 the endowment was valued at £45 15s. and in 1851 at £55 to £60.⁹ The chapel of St Philip and its small adjacent burial ground were consecrated in 1776.¹⁰

In the late eighteenth century, the right to nominate was claimed by the inhabitants of the chapelry (defined as the townships of Mosser, Blindbothel and Whinfell), who regarded themselves as patrons with the right to 'elect and appoint' curates.¹¹ In 1802, however, Viscount Lowther nominated and the Lowther family thenceforth exercised patronage,¹² until the earl of Lonsdale transferred the advowson to the bishop of Carlisle in 1889.¹³ The district served by the church was redefined in 1883 when a new ecclesiastical parish was established, combining Mosser with the townships of Eaglesfield and Blindbothel and the western part of Whinfell township.¹⁴ A new church, the John Dalton Memorial Church, was built outside the village of Eaglesfield in 1890-1, replacing the church at Mosser as the focus for religious life in the newly-expanded parish.¹⁵ The dedication to St Philip was transferred to the new church, the old chapel at Mosser church becoming known as St Michael's.¹⁶

In the years following the rebuilding of the chapel in 1773, services were held twice on Sundays, except during the two winter months, and communion only rarely. The congregation appears to have been small, the number of communicants in 1779 being only 14.¹⁷ In the late eighteenth century the curacy was held in rapid succession by a series of young local men in their twenties.¹⁸ Greater stability was achieved in the nineteenth century when the chapel was held in plurality with neighbouring livings, first, from 1802 to 1823 by John Sibson, incumbent of Lorton, then from 1823 to 1870 by Samuel Sherwen, rector of Dean; both appointed assistants to act in their stead.¹⁹ In 1851 services were held morning and afternoon in alternate weeks: the afternoon congregation on census day was 22, but attendance varied widely depending on the weather. The curate noted 'I have been there when there was none present on a wet day & I have seen above 100 in the chapel'.²⁰ After the building of the new church, the old chapel was used only for Sunday afternoon services during the summer months.²¹ The church was renovated in 1923-

⁸ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, p. 155.

⁹ CRO, DRC/10/26: nomination 14 Jul. 1829; PRO, HO 129/570/2/6.

¹⁰ CRO, DRC/10/26: sentence of consecration, 5 Aug. 1776.

¹¹ CRO, DRC/10/26: nominations, 1774-1787.

¹² CRO, DRC/10/26: nomination, 1802. Lord Lonsdale nominated in 1823 (*ibid.*) and was subsequently regarded as patron: Mannex & Whelan, *Dir. Cumb.* 1847, p. 529; Bulmer, *Dir. W. Cumb.* 1883, pp. 491-2.

¹³ Order in Council, 15 Oct. 1889 (copy in CRO, DRC/23/1889).

¹⁴ Order in Council, 23 Aug. 1883 (*London Gazette*, 28 Aug. 1883) (copy in CRO, DRC/23/1883).

¹⁵ The later history of the parish of Mosser will therefore be treated in the township history of Eaglesfield.

¹⁶ No formal record of the re-dedication of the old church to St Michael has been located but the change had occurred by 1938: CRO, YPR/30/10.

¹⁷ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, p. 155.

¹⁸ CRO, DRC/10/26: nomination papers, testimonials, proofs of baptism 1774-1799.

¹⁹ CRO, DRC/10/26: nominations, 1802, 1821, 1823; PP (HC) 1861 [517], *Returns relating to pluralities*, p.

9. For Samuel Sherwen see W. Dickinson, *Cumbriana* (1876), 153-9.

²⁰ PRO, HO 129/570/2/6.

²¹ Bulmer, *Dir. Cumb.* 1901, p. 738.

4 and continued in use as a subsidiary chapel.²² In 2011 ‘the fell church of St Michaels’ remained in occasional use for services.²³

A substantial proportion of the inhabitants of Mosser were nonconformists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Quaker meeting just outside the township at Pardshaw Hall, established as a result of George Fox’s preaching journey through Cumberland in 1653, was one of the largest rural meetings in England and included inhabitants of Mosser from its earliest days.²⁴ Writing in 1687, Thomas Denton commented that the inhabitants of Mosser were ‘almost all Quakers, being too near neighbours to Pardsey-crag, and too far distant from any church’.²⁵ Prominent among the first generation of Quakers were John Banks, the young reader at the chapel, and John Steel of Graythwaite.²⁶ Across the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Mosser contained a strong body of interconnected yeomen Quaker dynasties: the Robinsons of Beech Hill; Wilsons of Graythwaite; Burnyeats of Mosser Mains; Allasons and Fawcetts of Mossergate; Harrises, Rogers and Fletchers of Underwood and Fletchers of Whinnah.²⁷ By the latter decades of the century, when the number of Quakers in the chapelry was said to be declining,²⁸ there were seven Quaker families in the township, probably accounting for approximately one-third of the population.²⁹ The decline in the number of Quakers in the later eighteenth century can be attributed in large part to disownments as a result of marriage to non-Quakers.³⁰ By the early twentieth century the Quaker community at Mosser had declined to extinction.³¹

In the later eighteenth century, at least one family in Mosser appear to have been members of the Independent congregation at Cockermouth.³²

²² Kelly, *Dir. Cumb. & Westd* 1934, p. 215; CRO, YPR/30/10-11.

²³ Parish notice sheet, April 2011.

²⁴ For the history of Pardshaw meeting, see Fletcher, *Diary*, pp. xx-xxiv; Butler, *Quaker Meeting Houses*, I, 103-7.

²⁵ Denton, *Perambulation*, 121.

²⁶ N. Penney (ed.), *The First Publishers of Truth* (1907), pp. 38-9; *Journal of ... John Banks*, p. 3.

²⁷ For these farms and families, see biographical and topographical notes in Fletcher, *Diary*, pp. 418-52, 464-9.

²⁸ Butler, *Cumbrian Parishes*, p. 155.

²⁹ Fletcher, *Diary*, p. xx.

³⁰ E.g. Jacob Fletcher of Whinnah, disowned 1755; John Burnyeat of Mosser Mains, disowned 1757; Jonathan Wilson of Graythwaite, disowned 1758; John Fawcett of Mossergate, disowned 1775: Fletcher, *Diary*, 420, 422-3, 425, 450.

³¹ No members of the Religious Society of Friends were living in Mosser by 1919: *List of members of Cumberland Quarterly Meeting 1919*.

³² Joseph and Mary Porter of Mosser Mains: Fletcher, *Diary*, p. 440.