

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

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Parish/township: RENWICK

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RENEWICK¹

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The authority of Queen's College, Oxford, as lords of the manor was usually exercised through their stewards, working with juries drawn from the tenantry, at manor courts which were intended to be held annually, but may have suffered from significant periods of lapse: in the 1620s and 1640s and from 1656-74, perhaps.² Occasionally College provosts visited Renwick in person, the last known to do so being Dr Gerard Langbaine in 1654;³ and from time to time the College commissioned local persons of influence to make special inquiry, such as arch-deacon Nicolson who rode a bounder at their request in 1686 and corresponded with them in 1690/1, and William Kilner, vicar of Dufton, when statutory enclosure was under discussion in 1811/2.⁴ The stewards appointed by the College before 1675 were usually clergymen, for example George Warwick, vicar of Great Salkeld, steward 1609-1620; or gentlemen, for example William Langbaine of Barton (brother of the provost), steward 1649-1656. From 1624 to 1631, the steward was a lawyer, John Bankes of Keswick (d.1644) who later rose to high judicial office, and after 1675 the College routinely appointed lawyers as stewards.⁵ Between sittings of the manor court, authority was usually exercised by the bailiff, a

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² QC, 5A series and Renwick Court books; manor court records survive for 1561, 1571, 1573, 1587-1600 (most years), 1603, 1607, 1610, 1631, 1635, 1638, 1640, 1647-1655 (most years), and (in court books) from 1675 onwards.

³ QC, 5A-89.

⁴ Nicolson, *Misc Actt*, 119-20; QC, 5A-98, 171/2 (1690/1); and 5A-121/145 (1811/12).

⁵ QC, 5A-48a (appointment of Warwick 1609); 5A-54 (appointment of Bankes 1624); 5A-96b (letter from Provost Langbaine to his brother William 1649); Renwick Court Book *passim*.

customary tenant to whom the College paid 10s per year:⁶ for this he collected the rents, and was supposed to protect the interests of the College in relation to, *inter alia*, proper management of the woodland - but the advice given in 1637 by Thomas Lough, College fellow responsible for Renwick, to steward Lancelot Dawes, referring to the bailiff John Cowper, was eloquent of the lack of trust between the College and its bailiff at that time: 'Sir', wrote Lough, 'you know him a Crafty companion, & unles[s] you over-rule & make good inspection he will cheat us'.⁷

An undated document, perhaps by steward Bankes in the 1620s, records an exhortation to the Renwick jury in both Court Leet and Court Baron:⁸ but Elizabethan and Stewart courts, insofar as legible headings survive, were usually only Courts Baron, and there are very few instances of the courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction. The last surviving record of small claims was in 1655, and of pain making and amercement 1733;⁹ after which business was largely confined to changes of tenant and control of grazing on the commons.¹⁰ In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the manor court dealt with alleged trespasses on the Renwick commons by (usually) the tenantry of Stafffield,¹¹ and with rights of way, the maintenance of the mill and of watercourses, and the resolution of disputes between tenants. The last recorded perambulation was in 1811.¹²

The manor, parish and constablewick of Renwick were coterminous. In 1597 the manor court, as court leet, appointed a constable;¹³ but given the absence of any similar appointments in seventeenth century court rolls it can be inferred that parochial government was increasingly in the hands of the vestry from c.1600, acting through churchwardens, constables, overseers of the poor and surveyors of highways.¹⁴ In 1832 the vestry were employing a salaried assistant overseer.¹⁵

In September 1873, the recently established Penrith Rural Sanitary Committee received a report from their Medical Officer Dr Robertson about sanitary conditions in Renwick, and approved a

⁶ QC, 5A-59, a rental dated by internal evidence to 1616.

⁷ QC, 5A-63.

⁸ QC, 5A-60.

⁹ QC, 5A-46 (1655); Renwick Court Book p235 (1733) - which also recorded appointment of 'forthmen'.

¹⁰ cf note 52 above for appointment of Stints Committee

¹¹ QC, 5A-53, 1620 (cf note 73 above).

¹² QC, second Court Book p. 37.

¹³ QC, 5A-47 (notes extracted from Elizabethan court rolls by Provost Langbaine in 1656).

¹⁴ cf note 99 above for appointment of parish officers.

¹⁵ cf note 137 above.

modest scheme of drainage works and removal of nuisances. There was opposition from the increasingly powerful figure of Joseph Nicholson of Ravenwood, and the works were not completed until 1879. Improved sewerage was not enough to free the township from the threat of water-borne disease, and in 1888, after a public inquiry, a system of piped water was installed.¹⁶

After local government reorganisation in 1894, the parish meeting, sometimes styled 'ratepayers' meeting', usually met once in each year. It made occasional appointments (e.g. school managers in 1903, and trustees of the Percival charity in 1912), was involved in arrangements for the management of the Reading Room (1905 and 1914), and consulted about the installation of telephone services in 1925.¹⁷ In 1934 Renwick lost its identity as a separate administrative unit when it was combined with Kirkoswald to create an enlarged Kirkoswald Civil Parish.¹⁸

¹⁶ CAS(C) SRDP/1/1, pp13/18, 63, 100, 176; SRDP/3/4/4 for plan of Renwick waterworks; *Penrith Observer* 3 Jan. 1888 (death from typhus) and 29 May 1888 (approval of water supply scheme).

¹⁷ CAS(C) SPC/35/1/1.

¹⁸ Cumberland Review Order 1934.