

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

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Parish/township: SKELSMERGH

Author: **Tony Cousins**

Date of Draft: 08.02.2013 [Updated 23.01.15]

SKELSMERGH¹

Skelsmergh was a small, rural, township of 2,093 acres (847 ha) two miles north-east of Kendal, nestled between the river Kent and two of its tributaries, the Sprint and Mint. In 1935 land north of Mint Bridge was annexed to Kendal and later developed for industry and housing, reducing the size of the parish to 1,939 acres (784 ha) and introducing an urban element to a section of the former township. The rivers mark the southern, western and much of the eastern boundaries of the township but the north-eastern boundaries with Patton and with Whitwell and Selside are not as clearly related to topographical features. That section was described in detail c.1230-40 but the only name still identifiable in the perambulation is Goodham Scales ("Skallere-goodwine").² The modern boundary, usually following small watercourses or field walls, is probably that described then.

In 1777 Skelsmergh and Patton were described as 'one constablewick, but... separate divisions for a long time.'³ The link with Patton, particularly for taxation purposes, was common but not invariable between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴ The name Skelsmergh, first

¹ The author would like to thank Bridget Machell, Geoff Brambles, the Kendal Local Studies librarians, Michael Dolan at the Talbot Library and all the staff at the Kendal Archives for their assistance in the preparation of this article.

² *Rec. Kend.* I, 251, 391-2; *PNW, Part 1*, (Cambridge, 1967), 149.

³ N&B, 123.

⁴ Below - Local Government.

recorded in the late twelfth century,⁵ has been interpreted as combining two Old Norse elements: the personal name Skjaldmar and *erg*, ('dairy farm' or 'summer pasture'), probably indicating Scandinavian settlement.⁶

Landscape

The flat flood plain beside the confluence of the rivers at the southern tip of the township quickly gives way to an undulating topography of drumlins, mostly elongated in the southward direction of glacial flow. These hills are unnamed with the exception of Helme Bank, Harry Bank and Heights.⁷ In less than five kilometres, the altitude rises from 49m in the south to 214m on Skelsmergh Fell, from whence the aspect is of a markedly more upland character. The boundary rivers reflect this variety, sometimes meandering through meadows but characterised elsewhere by rocky stretches or steep sided valleys, where fast moving water has cut deeply into the drumlins. Although the landscape was once tree-covered, by the medieval period there were probably only scattered woods in the demesne park and on steeper banks. The higher ground to the north-east was unenclosed common land in contrast to the settled and enclosed farmland of the lower parts of the township.⁸

The eighteenth-century vista of rolling fields and rounded hills demarcated with hedges and dry stone walls was noted by Arthur Young in 1771, who described the view southward from Skelsmergh Fell as, 'one of the finest landscapes in the world.'⁹ Thomas West incorporated Young's detailed description into his guidebook, identifying Stone Crag¹⁰ as the appropriate viewing 'station'.¹¹ The modern landscape is more built up, has fewer fields¹² and, with the decline of arable farming, a more homogenous appearance, but Young's description of three foreground hills and a patchwork of enclosures can still be recognised.

The drumlins are mainly composed of moulded glacial till – a jumble of clay, silt, sand, gravel and rounded boulders that have been deposited by the retreating ice. These include the distinctive pink Shap granite erratics that are often incorporated into local dry stone walls. The

⁵ Skelesmeresergh: *Rec. Kend.* I, 265.

⁶ *PNW*, I, 146-9.

⁷ Others are named on estate and corn rent maps but have no contemporary currency.

⁸ Below, Economic History, Agriculture.

⁹ Arthur Young, *A Six Months Tour Through the North of England Vol III*, (London, 2nd ed., 1771), 131-2.

¹⁰ On Skelsmergh Fell, precise site unknown.

¹¹ Thomas West, *A Guide to the Lakes*, (London, 1778 ed.), 182-4.

¹² 1836 CAS (K), WQ/R/C/19, Skelsmergh Corn Rent map compared with author's estimate of 2000. A reduction from about 450 to 300, approximately one third.

bedrock differs from the adjacent townships because overlying the Bannisdale Slates in more than half of the township is an outlier of conglomerate, sandstone and limestone to which the Skelsmergh Fault forms an arcing north-eastern boundary.¹³ The limestone is responsible for a number of swallow holes where water drains into the ground in the east of the township. It is also the reason for the unusual nature of the Skelsmergh Tarn SSSI: although the surrounding willow carr and fen is more typical of acid areas, the high proportion of calcium carbonate in the water makes it a marl tarn with a distinctive range of invertebrates.¹⁴

Soils are mostly brown, stony and well drained but some of the flatter riverine areas have coarse loamy and sandy soils over gravel. These and other relatively low-lying areas are often wet, as is suggested by the number of field names with the appendage 'mire' or 'moss'.¹⁵

Settlement

Limited evidence from core samples¹⁶ and early finds¹⁷ suggests several periods of settlement and retreat after 3000BC. The thirteenth-century boundary perambulation describes a landscape of established settlement but it is only from the sixteenth century that a picture of the local community can be reconstructed. At this time, the pattern was of dispersed settlement on farms usually situated in sheltered folds in the landscape. Most were located close to the boundary between enclosed and unenclosed common land¹⁸ or adjacent to watercourses.¹⁹ The only cluster of dwellings was at the hamlet of Garth Row, first recorded in 1604,²⁰ which was also the site of the tithe barn.²¹

Although many of the farm sites are likely to have been established in the medieval period, most farmhouses appear to have been rebuilt after the late seventeenth century. Two exceptions are

¹³ B.G.S., *Geology of the Kendal District* (NERC 2010), Sheet 39: Kendal Bedrock (2007) & Bedrock and Superficial Deposits (2008).

¹⁴ English Nature File ref. SD 59/3 at http://www.english-nature.org.uk/citation/citation_photo/1002010.pdf (Accessed 15 July 2012).

¹⁵ 17 are listed on Corn Rent map. There are also 15 'holmes'.

¹⁶ D. Walker, 'Studies in the Post-Glacial History of British Vegetation XIV Skelsmergh Tarn and Kentmere, Westmorland,' *New Phytologist* 54 (2) (1955), 222-54.

¹⁷ Skelsmergh Hall stone hammer, HER 4113; Holme House stone axe hammer, HER 4112; Carus Green flint knife, CW3 i (2001), 192.

¹⁸ Thornyslack, Hollin Root, Otter Bank, Edge Bank, Garnett Folds and all Garth Row properties.

¹⁹ Old Earth, Beck Mills, Scarfoot, Redman Tenement, Nether House, Stocks Mill, Burton House, Low Groves, Gilthwaiterigg.

²⁰ LRO (Preston), WRW/R446B/9, Will of James Jackson.

²¹ Trinity College, Cambridge, 40 Kendal 67.

Gilthwaiterigg, a much modified fifteenth-century hall-house with cross wings²² and Coppice How²³ which has a date panel for 1702 but incorporates cruck frames and is likely to be of partly pre-seventeenth century construction.²⁴ Summerhow²⁵, Burton House, Garnett Folds²⁶ and Low Groves²⁷ are probably late seventeenth-century houses. Houses with later date panels include Must Hill (1746) Mint House (1783) and Mint Cottage (1821).

There was a gradual accretion of new buildings adjacent to the 'North Road' after it was turnpiked.²⁸ During the nineteenth century, short terraces of houses were developed at Oakbank and Scarfoot for mill workers.²⁹ A few substantial residences were built in the late Victorian and Edwardian period, often in more elevated locations such as Redhills, the Vicarage, Thorny Bank and Meadowbank.³⁰ All the pre-twentieth century buildings were constructed predominantly from local Bannisdale Slate.

Two farm sites (Redman Tenement and Littlemire) were abandoned after 1945 but most farmhouses were converted to private residences in the second half of the twentieth century. The only council housing was developed at Dodding Holme in 1949.³¹ The Kiln Croft hamlet evolved in two stages with the erection of three dwellings beside the Skelsmergh Hall access road followed by the adaption of the farm outbuildings into eleven units in 2001. Laverock Hill was developed as a series of detached houses along a short access road after 1973.³² By 2009 Holme House Farm had developed into a small community with seventeen residential caravans and several industrial storage compounds and containers. This site was developed without planning permission and in 2012 its future was uncertain.³³

By 2010 the rural part of Skelsmergh remained a sparsely-populated parish composed of scattered buildings and hamlets but the area transferred to Kendal in 1935 had become a suburb of the town. Industrial estates were developed here, north of Mint House and Mint Cottage and

²² RCHME, *Westmorland*, (HMSO, 1936), 213.

²³ Formerly Coppack How.

²⁴ Blake Tyson, 'Twenty Cruck Buildings at Skelsmergh, Kendal, c.1600', *CW*2, c (2000), 192-194.

²⁵ Hyde & Pevsner, *Cumbria*, 625.

²⁶ Interior panel with date of 1609.

²⁷ RCHME, *Westmorland*, 213.

²⁸ Mint House, Wilson House, Strawberry Bank, Hylands, Garnett Plain, Summerhill etc.

²⁹ Below, Economic History.

³⁰ Demolished 2012.

³¹ CAS (K), WPC/2 Minute Book: 6 Sept 1948, name proposed to District Council.

³² Area originally known as High Scar Foot.

³³ Planning Inspectorate Appeal Decision 29 Sept 2010. Appeal Ref: APP/MO933/C/09/2108315.

private housing was built along Gilthwaiterigg Lane.³⁴ In 2003 the Hunter's Croft development of eleven houses north of Mint House completed this infilling process.

Communications

The Roman road linking the forts at Watercrock and Low Borrow Bridge is believed to have followed a route over Patton Bridge and Laverock Bridge through Skelsmergh.³⁵ The 'Old Road' from Otter Bank to Watchgate over Skelsmergh Fell was probably a longstanding packhorse route and seems to have been the road to Shap that formed part of the London to Carlisle road depicted on Ogilvy's map of 1675. This was a difficult route for wheeled traffic, as the retreating infantry of the 1745 Jacobite army discovered.³⁶ It became part of the Heron Syke to Eamont Bridge turnpike road after 1753.³⁷ In 1822 McAdam abandoned the direct route over Skelsmergh Fell and constructed a loop with a gentler gradient that contoured above Garth Row. After 1926 the 'North Road' became the A6 and, in response to increasing motorised traffic, there were a number of minor changes to the alignment. The road lost much of its traffic and its significance as the main west coast route after the M6 motorway was completed in 1970.

Skelsmergh's geographical position has made it a corridor for north-south communications. Bintley's rejected option for the west coast rail route³⁸ would have gone through the township, as did one of the two alternative alignments for the M6.³⁹ The huge Thirlmere (1894)⁴⁰ and Haweswater (1948-55) aqueducts and a gas pipeline pass underneath, as does a fibre optic cable.⁴¹ The Thirlmere aqueduct emerges above ground at three multi-pipe siphon bridges, and the valve house near Low Groves also reveals its presence. The underground progress of the aqueducts across the landscape is marked by groups of valves but more obviously by the chains of iron field gates and occasional stiles.

The boundary rivers are not wide but they are fast flowing and highly responsive to rainfall so travel into and through the township has relied on a series of bridges. Mint Bridge was referred

³⁴ Below, Economic History.

³⁵ I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, (London, 1973, 3rd ed.), 387.

³⁶ Otter Bank has been claimed as the place where Lord George Murray and the Highland Artillery passed the night. *CW1*, xv, (1899), 109.

³⁷ Turnpike Act, 26 Geo. II, 1753.

³⁸ D. Joy, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain Vol. 14: The Lake Counties* (Newton Abbot, 1983), 20.

³⁹ H. L. Yeadon, *The Motorway Achievement - Building the Network: The North West of England* (Stroud, 2005), 141-2.

⁴⁰ J. J. Harwood, *History and Description of the Thirlmere Water Scheme* (Manchester, 1895).

⁴¹ Norweb-Telecom cable laid 2000.

to in 1542.⁴² Sprint Bridge is mentioned in 1537,⁴³ was in need of repairs in 1667⁴⁴ and was rebuilt in 1716⁴⁵ and again in 1860.⁴⁶ Gurnal Bridge was described as a wooden bridge for horses when it fell down in 1724 and was then replaced by a stone construction.⁴⁷ Laverock Bridge was mentioned in 1534.⁴⁸ The narrow packhorse bridge here was widened early in the nineteenth century by bolting on a parallel structure and adding parapets. There was a ford and later a bridge south of Ladyford, close to the modern bridge built to link the two parts of the Carus Green golf course.⁴⁹ The bridges to Mealbank,⁵⁰ Sprint Mill⁵¹ and the two aqueduct bridges were all built in the nineteenth century.

Population and Social Character

Estimation based on the Hearth Tax return would suggest a township population of just over 200 in 1674,⁵² a figure comparable to that recorded in the early nineteenth century (247 in 1801; 220 in 1811). It climbed rapidly to 367 by 1881 but then declined to 309 in 1931. Between 1951 and 2001 the reduced parish had a population that fluctuated between 250 and 297. In 2010 there were more than 30 households in the section transferred to Kendal. The sharp nineteenth-century increase and subsequent decline mirrored the rise and fall of local industry and declining agricultural employment. The relative stability of population for much of the twentieth century and rise towards its end reflected a steady expansion of the housing stock, initially counterbalanced by shrinking family size.⁵³

In 1851 two residents were born in Scotland but the remainder were born in Westmorland or the three adjacent counties. The number born outside the region crept up to seventeen by 1911 and became much higher during the twentieth century.⁵⁴ Even in the nineteenth century, within the

⁴² LRO (Preston), W/R463D/52; Edward Pykerynge will.

⁴³ HER 17573.

⁴⁴ *Rec. Kend.*, III, 61.

⁴⁵ *Rec. Kend.*, III, 144.

⁴⁶ *Rec. Kend.*, III, 149.

⁴⁷ *Rec. Kend.*, III, 136-7.

⁴⁸ *Rec. Kend.*, I, 66.

⁴⁹ *Westmorland Advertiser*, Sep 16 1820, describes collapse of wooden bridge here during Kendal Races.

⁵⁰ Absent from 1836 Corn Rent map but on 1858 OS 1st Ed.

⁵¹ On Corn Rent map but not enclosure road maps: CAS, (K) WDBIG/PLANS/EXTRA/1237-9.

⁵² 45 households with multiplier of 4.75.

⁵³ 1821: 41 families in 42 houses of which 2 unoccupied; 2001:108 households (in reduced parish).

⁵⁴ Estimate based on personal knowledge of the community.

parameter of regional stability, there was significant population turnover. Most young farm workers and servants were short-term residents. Between 1851 and 1911 the proportion of those recorded in the census as born in the township was always less than a third and only one farm was continuously tenanted by a family of the same name over this period.

LANDOWNERSHIP

Manor of Skelsmergh

Skelsmergh may have been included among the group of villas centred on 'Strickland' held by Gillemicel before the Conquest.⁵⁵ It is not named in Domesday but if it was not included in the neighbouring villa of Patton,⁵⁶ it may have been part of the unidentified 'Mimet', which took its name from the River Mint. The farm once named Old Earth near Mint Bridge may record the site of an early settlement.⁵⁷

In the mid-thirteenth century William of Skelsmergh made grants of land to Conishead Priory and others⁵⁸ and in the same period there are references to Patrick of Skelsmergh.⁵⁹ In 1671 Daniel Fleming claimed of Skelsmergh Hall, that it 'did anciently give surname to a good Family,' but nothing more is known of the family.⁶⁰ Between 1230 and 1246 William de Lancaster III granted all of Skelsmergh to Robert de Leyburne,⁶¹ of a Kent family,⁶² for a pair of gilt spurs yearly.⁶³ Robert was succeeded by John and then Nicholas de Leyburne, who served in Gascony and was knighted before 1296⁶⁴ and granted free warren in his demesne lands in 1301.⁶⁵ Sir Roger de Leyburne, living in 1332,⁶⁶ was succeeded by Sir Thomas de Leyburne, who acquired

⁵⁵ The inclusion of part, at least, of Skelsmergh in the later-medieval *villa integra* of Strickland Ketel may suggest such a connection: *Rec. Kend.* I, 252 & 254.

⁵⁶ *Rec. Kend.* I, xvii, Introduction. Farrer suggested Skelsmergh was in Patton.

⁵⁷ Described c.1584 as 'an auncyente tenement': *Rec. Kend.* I, 257.

⁵⁸ *Rec. Kend.* I, 251 & TNA DL/25/403, 1248 Quitclaim by William de Skelmerherch.

⁵⁹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 6.

⁶⁰ *Fleming-Senhouse Papers*, ed. E. Hughes (Cumberland County Council Record Series II, Carlisle, 1961), 13.

⁶¹ As spelled on the plaque to the last member of the family in Kendal Parish Church. Also Layburn(e), Laborn, Labourne, etc.

⁶² One of the witnesses to the grant was Sir Roger de Leyburne of Leyburne Castle, Kent, probably his brother.

⁶³ *Rec. Kend.* I, 391-2.

⁶⁴ CAS (K), WDTGF, T.G. Fahy notes on De Leyburns.

⁶⁵ *Rec. Kend.* I, 252.

⁶⁶ *Rec. Kend.* I, 252.

Cunswick through his wife.⁶⁷ Around this time Skelsmergh ceased to be the principal family residence and the Leyburnes came to be more associated with Cunswick and later Witherslack.

The family retained most of Skelsmergh until the late sixteenth century when James Leyburne made a series of sales.⁶⁸ In 1580 he sold nine Skelsmergh tenements⁶⁹ with others in Longsleddale to Thomas Bellingham.⁷⁰ In 1584 Robert Briggs sold on to James Bellingham a group of Skelsmergh, Strickland Roger and Mintsfeet properties that had probably been recently acquired from Leyburne.⁷¹ The Bellinghams added other Skelsmergh lands when they acquired the 'Spital' estate of the dissolved St Leonard's Hospital in 1548 and 1640.⁷² Bellingham land in the township constituted less than a third of its area but by 1637⁷³ the Bellinghams kept a Skelsmergh court for most of their customary tenants in Skelsmergh and Longsleddale, although most of the former Briggs tenants appeared at the Bellingham's Crook court throughout the seventeenth century. This reputed manor of Skelsmergh passed from the Bellinghams to their successors at Levens Hall. Most of the customary tenancies were enfranchised in the eighteenth century and by 1836, the lord of the manor, Fulke Greville Howard, owned only eighteen acres at Beck Mills.⁷⁴

After James Leyburne's execution and attainder in 1583 there were legal disputes between the Crown, James's brother William Leyburne, and James's widow Bridget, concerning the unsold Skelsmergh lands and the complex arrangements that James had made in the years before he died.⁷⁵ William succeeded to Cunswick but Skelsmergh Park, with hall, demesne farm and some customary tenancies, seems to have been temporarily confiscated although it was leased to Bridget and her second husband in 1589.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1386-1421/member/leybourne-sir-robert> (accessed Dec 3, 2012).

⁶⁸ Others included Wowergrease (probably Low Groves) sold to Thomas Sleddall 1578 and Coppack How sold to Allen Gilpin 1579.

⁶⁹ Probably, Tarn Bank, Otter Bank, Pond Side, Holme House, Spout House, Red Bank, Burton House, Beck Mills and [near] Laneside. Blake Tyson, see: 'Twenty Cruck Buildings at Skelsmergh, Kendal, c.1600', *CW*2, c (2000).

⁷⁰ *Rec. Kend.* I, 156-9.

⁷¹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 256-7.

⁷² *Rec. Kend.* I, 87-9; CAS (C), D Lons/L5/1-21 Spittle.

⁷³ CAS (K), Levens Hall MSS, Box 16/33. Skelsmergh Manor Court Rolls.

⁷⁴ Corn Rent map.

⁷⁵ TNA, E133/4/676, E133/5/731, E133/4/660, E133/4/676, E133/5/731, STAC5/L36/40.

⁷⁶ TNA, E210/10255.

The Leyburne sales and the Crown confiscation gave opportunities for successful Kendal townsmen to acquire land or live close to the town in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Robert Briggs was a clothier and the first Recorder of Kendal and its second Alderman. In 1597 the Skelsmergh Park lease was owned by the chapman and alderman, Robert Jopson.⁷⁷ In 1606 it was let to his relative and fellow chapman, Henry Fisher, for forty years, although litigation broke out again in 1612 between Fisher and John Leyburne.⁷⁸ At Fisher's death in 1616 this estate had already passed to his son Edward and consisted of 15 messuages and tenements in Skelsmergh and 160 acres.⁷⁹ Both Fishers were also Kendal aldermen. Later Skelsmergh landholders probably included the first Kendal mayor, Thomas Sleddall.⁸⁰

Edward Fisher seems to have sold the customary tenancies to Dorothy Braithwaite of Burneside and Richard her son by 1625.⁸¹ They were resold in 1687 by Dame Elizabeth Braithwaite, Sir Thomas Braithwaite's widow, to Robert Stephenson.⁸² Stephenson's 'manor or reputed manor ...known by the name of Skelsmergh'⁸³ included twelve customary properties⁸⁴, and two other rents.⁸⁵ All these Skelsmergh properties, Dodding Green,⁸⁶ the two Bellingham properties for which Stephenson was the customary tenant (Holme House and the Beck Tenement), together with those he owned outside the township, were conveyed via intermediaries to the Stephenson Trust after his death. Most were enfranchised in the eighteenth century so that by 1836 the Skelsmergh part of the Trust estate was reduced to c.150 acres and consisted of Dodding Green, Holme House the Beck Tenement, an enclosure allotment and a few other fields.⁸⁷ The twentieth century acquisition of Red Bank and part of the former Skelsmergh Hall farm more than doubled the size of the Trust's estate in Skelsmergh by 2010.

Although the customary tenancies seem never to have been regained, the hall and demesne farm became a Leyburne seat again during the seventeenth century. John Leyburne and his wife were

⁷⁷ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R446C/60A, Robert Jopson will.

⁷⁸ TNA, E134/10Jas1/East26.

⁷⁹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 261-2.

⁸⁰ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.*, 654.

⁸¹ TNA, C3/337/32 & C2/ChasI/B158/75 Burton v Brathwaite.

⁸² Talbot Library, Dodding Green Letterbook 1, 7-17.

⁸³ Talbot Library, DG Letterbook 1, 9.

⁸⁴ CAS (K), WQ/R/P/Box 1, 1717 Papist returns - Robert Stephenson.

⁸⁵ They probably included Laneside, Littlemire, Garnett Folds, Harry Bank, Red Tree, Cold Harbour, Oakbank, Redbankfoot, Stocks, Hollin Root and Goody Nook; the two other rents were for Scar Foot and part of Hipshow: author's assessment using 1717 Papist returns, property deeds and wills. Tinklar was at Garth Row and Wilson's Wife's Acre at Tarn Bank.

⁸⁶ Stephenson had been a Braithwaite tenant in Dodding but purchased the Braithwaite manor.

⁸⁷ Corn Rent map.

listed as recusants here in 1632⁸⁸ and the hall seems to have been rebuilt around this time⁸⁹ some years before they took over Witherslack Hall. At least two of John's sons joined the Royalist armies in the Civil War⁹⁰ and their lands seem to have been sequestrated again. In 1652 the lands of John Leyburne in Skelsmergh and Esthwaite⁹¹ were reported as in the hands of the County Committee unlet.⁹² John's widow, Mary Leyburne was back living in Skelsmergh Hall in 1664⁹³ and her son George and his wife were the occupiers in 1674.⁹⁴ It was finally confiscated in 1715, after a later John Leyburne took part in the Jacobite rebellion. It was sold by the Forfeited Estates Commission in 1721 to Thomas Crowle of Whittington, purchased by Daniel Wilson of Dallam Tower in 1724 and retained by that estate until 1912.

Skelsmergh Hall was a tower house that was sketched by Machell as H-shaped (1692) but had lost the south wing by the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ The fifteenth-century tower contains no internal second storey and is tunnel-vaulted at the lowest level. The existing southern projection probably dates from the sixteenth and to the east there is a seventeenth century range, with stone mullioned and transomed windows, to which twentieth century extensions have been added.⁹⁶

Other estates.

Although Skelsmergh was granted to the Leyburnes in the thirteenth century as a single manor, Ladyford, Giltwhaiterigg and some other lands in the southern part of the township had a somewhat autonomous existence during the medieval and early modern period. There were two monastic possessions. St Mary's Abbey in York owned land next to Sprint Bridge called Kirkfield until 1539.⁹⁷ St Leonard's Hospital in Scalthwaiterigg,⁹⁸ just outside Kendal, had an estate that included Beck Mills, Priest Leyes, Priest Holme and other land⁹⁹ on the Skelsmergh side of the

⁸⁸ Westmorland Recusancy returns 1632 in CRS Vol 53 Miscellanea, 359.

⁸⁹ CAS (C), D&C, Machell MSS, ii, 120. Machell recorded an inscription, no longer visible, of J+K and J+M (John Leyburne & wives, Katherine and Mary) and a date for which Machell's third digit is unclear, perhaps 1630.

⁹⁰ F. Alison Wright, 'The Layburnes and their World circa 1620-1720, the English Catholic Community and the House of Stuart', unpublished PhD thesis, St Andrews, 2002, Chapter 3.

⁹¹ A tenement in Whinfell.

⁹² *Calendar of the Committee for Compounding*, June 5 1662.

⁹³ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R465A/27, will of Dorothy Patch.

⁹⁴ CAS (K) WQ/I/13, 19 April 1674.

⁹⁵ CAS (C), D&C, Machell MSS, ii, 120.

⁹⁶ RCHM 1936.

⁹⁷ Brit Mus., Harley 607. Held by Christopher Redmayne 1557 - probably the Redman Tenement.

⁹⁸ Area later known as Spital.

⁹⁹ Possibly also Summerhow.

Mint. It was suppressed in 1546 and granted to Alan Bellingham and Alan Wilson the following year.¹⁰⁰

Ladyford. A grant in 1330 by Gilbert de Lancaster to his son, Christopher, of land in Skelsmergh, probably referred to Ladyford.¹⁰¹ At his death, in 1355, Gilbert held, jointly with his wife Margaret, 2 carucates of land, a messuage and two tofts of Roger de Leyburn by fealty for service of 3 shillings in Skelsmergh.¹⁰² 'Le ladefurd' is first named in the Lancaster deeds in 1487¹⁰³ and remained with the Lancasters until the seventeenth century, being usually linked with their Strickland Roger manor. In 1604 the Ladyford demesne was bought by Thomas Benson for £850.¹⁰⁴ It was sold by Charles Benson to Thomas Shepherd in 1690 for £3000.¹⁰⁵ There was other Lancaster land in Skelsmergh that had been linked to Ladyford. In 1623 Lancelot Lancaster of Sockbridge and his nephew Christopher Lancaster sold the Strickland Roger manor with the remaining Skelsmergh property to Hugh Barrow and Matthew Phillipson.¹⁰⁶ This probably consisted of the area immediately north of Ladyford and included Nether House, the Redman Tenement and Must Hill. By 1807, John Gale had acquired all these properties, reuniting most of the Lancaster Ladyford estate¹⁰⁷ although his son, Colonel Braddyll, sold Ladyford in 1841.

Gilthwaiterigg, like Ladyford, was taxed¹⁰⁸ and listed as a hamlet¹⁰⁹ separately from Skelsmergh in tithe rentals and was also assessed apart in rentals for the Marquis fee.¹¹⁰ Whereas most of the township seems to have had moss and turbary rights on Skelsmergh Fell or Crake How Moss in the north-east of the township, Ladyford had such rights on Potter Fell and Gilthwaiterigg had them at Brigsteer. Gilthwaiterigg was occupied by John Cuke in 1431 when it was described as in the vill of Strickland Ketel.¹¹¹ In 1518 Thomas Parr listed Gilthwaiterigg among his possessions and willed it 'to Christofer Godmonde for term of his life.'¹¹² He held the manor of James

¹⁰⁰ *Rec. Kend.* I, 87-9.

¹⁰¹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 252.

¹⁰² *Rec. Kend.* I, 253.

¹⁰³ CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/1/56.

¹⁰⁴ *Rec. Kend.* I, 259.

¹⁰⁵ London Univ., Senate House Library, MS1108. Deeds relating to Lady Fford.

¹⁰⁶ CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/1.

¹⁰⁷ *Westmorland Gazette*, 12 Sept. 1807.

¹⁰⁸ Trinity College, Cambridge, 40 Kendal 3, 1538.

¹⁰⁹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 90.

¹¹⁰ *Rec. Kend.* I, 259 (1593) & TNA E317/Westmor/5, 1650 Parliamentary Survey of Marquis fee.

¹¹¹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 254.

¹¹² *Rec. Kend.* I, 58.

Leyburn by service of socage.¹¹³ It was a Duckett residence throughout the sixteenth century but was sold to meet James Duckett's debts in 1646¹¹⁴ and purchased by the Kendal mercer and alderman Edward Turner who resold it for £1200 to William Rawlinson¹¹⁵ of Graythwaite in 1661.¹¹⁶ The estate was retained by the Rawlinsons until the beginning of the twentieth century and the house, mill and farm of c.120 acres was let to a series of tenants. Gilthwaite-rigg mill and some adjacent land was part of the estate but linked with Nethergraveship in Scalthwaite-rigg manor¹¹⁷ and was not enfranchised until the 1930s.¹¹⁸ The Thornburghs had a long term interest in some of the land in the north of the township near Selside Hall. In 1360 William de held two tenements in Skelsmergh of Roger de Leyburne.¹¹⁹ By 1609 a later William Thornburgh had three messuages and 40 acres in Skelsmergh.¹²⁰ One was at Garth Row and the others included land on Skelsmergh Fell called Patterdale(s) and the adjacent farm called High Thorn that was enfranchised in 1733.

ECONOMIC HISTORY

The local economy was based on agriculture until the twentieth century. Up to the 1950s mixed farming was general, although permanent pasture seems always to have predominated. Farm consolidation and an increasing emphasis on pastoralism were long-established trends and this process accelerated in the second half of the twentieth century. There is a concurrent history of small local industries exploiting the abundant water-power; some of the mills becoming more substantial employers in the nineteenth century. All the water-powered enterprises closed during the twentieth century and agricultural employment contracted. Work became more varied and predominantly based in Kendal and farther afield. The expansion of the town over Mint Bridge and creation of the Shap Road industrial estates in the last quarter of the century introduced an extensive range of manufacturing and service industries to an area that was previously part of the township.

Agriculture

¹¹³ *Rec. Kend.* I, 58.

¹¹⁴ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R425D/38, 1640 will of James Duckett.

¹¹⁵ Later, Sir William Rawlinson, Lord Commissioner of the Great Seal.

¹¹⁶ CAS (B), BDHJ/91.

¹¹⁷ CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/2/11/139 1771-1804 Call Book.

¹¹⁸ CAS (C), D/Lons/L5/2/11/157 1812-1939 Call Book.

¹¹⁹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 253.

¹²⁰ *Rec. Kend.* I, 246.

Core samples taken at Skelsmergh Tarn suggest two episodes of forest clearance before 500 BC.¹²¹ The *aergi/erg* element in the place-name, often interpreted as ‘summer pasture’, may indicate seasonal settlement but the relatively gentle topography accords better with the alternative interpretation, ‘dairy farm’. The area around Skelsmergh Hall has been suggested as a site for a medieval cattle vaccary.¹²² There is evidence that it was once emparked: it is shown as a park on Saxton's 1576 map and field-names such as Far Park and Patch Park occur only in the area around the Hall. In 1588 there was 'within the said parke five score twelve acres of ground or neare there about ...whereof twentie three acres are besett with underwooddes twentie sext acres are meadowe and three score three acres are pasture or arable landes ...'¹²³ As late as 1692 Machell claimed to detect oaks notched with holes to hold racks for feeding deer.¹²⁴ Predominantly pastoral land use was recorded in 1777 when a tithe valuation of the township, excluding the Hall, claimed there were 314 acres of upland meadow, 350 acres of pasture, 80 acres of mire meadow, 3 acres of potatoes, 6 acres of coppice and 96 acres of corn and grain.¹²⁵

The two hundred acres of Skelsmergh Fell, above Garth Row, were enclosed in 1823¹²⁶ but regular field shapes and field names¹²⁷ suggest that all the higher ground on the north-eastern edge of the township had previously been unenclosed pasture. A six-acre field to the west of Skelsmergh Tarn was enclosed and divided between three adjacent farms in 1816.¹²⁸ The road on the southern side of the tarn is still unfenced and the 1816 enclosure may have eliminated the last remnant of a common that once encircled the tarn.

James Leyburne had 28 tenants in 1577.¹²⁹ This list excluded the demesne and a few properties in the south of the township. Leyburne sold the manor soon after this date which opened the way for progressive enfranchisement. In 1649 Fleming listed eighteen freeholders in Skelsmergh and

¹²¹ Walker, ‘Studies in the Post-Glacial History of British Vegetation XIV Skelsmergh Tarn,’ *New Phytologist* 54 (2) (1955), 222-54.

¹²² M. A. Atkin, ‘Medieval Land Use in the Ancient Parish of Kirkby Kendale’, *CW*3, xiii (2013), 132-3

¹²³ TNA, E178/2379 Westmorland: Skelsmergh, Cunswick Park Surveys of the possessions of James Laburne, attainted.

¹²⁴ CAS (C), D&C, Machell MSS, ii, 106.

¹²⁵ Trinity College, Cambridge, 40 Kendal 56. Charles Barnard's valuation.

¹²⁶ Act For Inclosing Lands Within...Whitwell and Selside, Skelsmergh and Crook...23 May 1823.

¹²⁷ Corn Rent map, e.g. Oat Rake (sic), Intack (x4), Waste, New Close. Also plant references: Whins, Brackenny Heath, Broom Close (x4).

¹²⁸ CAS (K), WD/U/48/1. Award and Plan of 29 April 1816 by John Williamson.

¹²⁹ Chester, DCB/5. Papers relating to Lickbarrow Estates in Skelmergh (sic), printed copy of deed of 1577 published for meeting at Skelsmergh Stocks May 1 1801.

Patton.¹³⁰ A 1731 manorial list of customary and freehold tenants included eighteen freeholders for Skelsmergh alone.¹³¹ There were twenty-four customary tenants of whom six possessed only fields within the township and two had cottages with a small amount of land. Some consolidation can be identified and tenement names such as Redbankfoot, Harry Bank, Gibbon Housestead, Nether House and Spout Tenement disappeared, as they were absorbed into neighbouring farms.

The semi-subsistence nature of much local farming emerges from inventories.¹³² Nearly all farms grew a few acres of oats and barley. There are frequent references to meal and malt in small quantities for home consumption. Three-quarters list sheep but only five had flocks of more than a 100 and most had less than 50. The value of sheep was not high but they provided the raw material for cottage industry – around half of the inventories contain references to items such as spinning wheels, cards, studdles, tenters and yarn or small stocks of wool. The largest investment was in various kinds of cattle but only three had more than 50 and over half had fewer than ten beasts; there are a few references to oxen. Most inventories listed a couple of horses and around half mentioned small numbers of pigs, poultry and bees.

The demesne farm at Skelsmergh Hall was the largest property. When Rowland Thornburgh, the tenant, died in 1708, his inventory listed 230 sheep and over 50 cattle. When it was forfeited in 1715 it had 95 customary (c.130 statute) acres¹³³ with additional common rights¹³⁴ but it increased in size in 1724 with the purchase of Harry Bank and Garnett Folds¹³⁵ and was then 132 customary (c.185 statute) acres. In 1836, with the addition of enclosed common land, it was a 386-acre farm.

On the lower land nearer to Kendal, in the south of the township, there were some intermediate sized farms such as Gilthwaiterigg, Ladyford, Summerhow and Low Groves. These more capitalised properties were often occupied or owned by minor gentry or merchant families. Gilthwaiterigg consisted in 1761 of 90 customary (c.125 statute) acres and was valued at £3,231 11s¹³⁶ It was 121 acres in 1836.¹³⁷ Summerhow was a smaller property owned by the Kendal

¹³⁰ CAS (K), WD/RV/HMC 101-200.

¹³¹ Levens Hall MSS, Box 16/33.

¹³² Database of 70 from 1542-1779, probably under-representing poorer farmers.

¹³³ Customary land measurement in Kendal barony was based on a 19.5-foot perch, giving a customary acre containing 6760 square yards, or approximately 1.4 (1.396) statute acres.

¹³⁴ TNA, FEC1/757.

¹³⁵ CAS (K), WDTW/1585/4/2.

¹³⁶ CAS (B), BDHJ/91. Grey's valuation.

chapman Christopher Sprott in 1610¹³⁸ and later Oliver Platt the tallow chandler.¹³⁹ Low Groves, a 135-acre farm in 1836, was probably created by the drover Rowland Scales who merged adjacent properties.¹⁴⁰ Ladyford extended to 68 customary (c.84 statute) acres when it was sold in 1604; ¹⁴¹ in 1836 it was part of a 232-acre estate combining Ladyford, Must Hill and Redman Tenement, although let as two farms.¹⁴²

In 1836 pasture covered 47% of the township, meadow 20%, arable fields 28%, 'seeds' nearly 2% and woods 2%. There were then 31 farmers occupying more than 10 acres, only 5 of whom were not living on their holdings. Nearly all were tenants - there were only three owner-occupiers. Only 7 of the 28 landowners were resident in the township. Agricultural returns from the later nineteenth century combine Skelsmergh with Patton but show that the amount of barley sown was by then small although significant amounts of oats and root crops for fodder were still grown. In 1851, 59% of the inhabitants lived in households whose head was a farmer or agricultural labourer; by 1911 this had declined to 44%.¹⁴³ There was increasing variety in employment and a marked reduction in the number of living-in farm labourers and servants.

Skelsmergh Hall remained the largest farm. The Morton family who were tenants from 1811 until 1918 became well-known shorthorn breeders, exporting pedigree stock to Canada, the United States, Argentina, New Zealand and Australia. Three brothers of this family took out Skelsmergh cattle and set up a stud farm near Melbourne, Victoria, selling 37 head for £27,000 in one famous sale¹⁴⁴ before selling up and returning to Kendal. This was a capitalised and innovative farm that in December 1911 included a water-powered turbine fed from a small reservoir, providing power for machinery such as a milk separator. By this time the farm was slightly smaller in size but was described as having over 100 cattle, mostly pedigree, 4 horses, a small flock of Wensleydale sheep, 130 half-breeds and 25 blackfaces and following a rotation of oats, roots, oats with seeds and five or six years of pasture.¹⁴⁵

The Hall continued to combine dairy farming and cattle breeding under later tenants and then owner-occupiers after the Second World War. In 1990 there were 350 friesians here but by the

¹³⁷ Corn Rent map.

¹³⁸ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R472C/49. Christopher Sprott.

¹³⁹ CAS (K), WDX/510. Deeds. Lowgroves.

¹⁴⁰ Deeds. Lowgroves.

¹⁴¹ *Rec. Kend.* I, 259.

¹⁴² Corn Rent map.

¹⁴³ TNA, HO 107/2441; RG 78/1820.

¹⁴⁴ *Westmorland Gazette*, 18 Oct 1890, An Australian Shorthorn Breeder, 8.

¹⁴⁵ *Westmorland Gazette*, 23 Dec 1911.

end of the century it had ceased to be a farm and the outbuildings were adapted to form the basis of the 2001 Kiln Croft housing development.

By 1941 there were 16 other farms.¹⁴⁶ Only two had electricity. Forty-nine horses were kept for agricultural purposes and there were no tractors. All farms had dairy cattle, sheep and poultry and nearly half kept pigs. Wartime requirements trebled the quantity of oats, potatoes and root crops grown for stock.

Post-war change was rapid. Eighteen Skelsmergh farms had a more or less continuous existence from the seventeenth to the twentieth century¹⁴⁷ but by 2012 there were only four farms with a resident farming family and much of the land was rented out and managed from a distance. Most land was now owned by residents or farmers in adjacent townships apart from that held by the Stephenson Trust.¹⁴⁸ Arable cultivation continued into the mid-twentieth century (in 1964 there were 25 acres of oats, 4 acres of potatoes, 15 acres of roots and 25 acres of clover)¹⁴⁹ Specialisation had eradicated dairy farming and the switch to livestock rearing was almost complete apart from a few fields used for keeping horses for leisure.. Two or three fields were used for maize in the early years of the new century but by 2012 nearly all agricultural land was permanent pasture and grass grown for silage or haylage.

Woodlands

There were 23 acres of underwood in the medieval park in 1588 but this is the only indication that the township was once well-wooded. The fringe of trees alongside the Mint and Sprint rivers forms a more or less continuous narrow strip of woodland that was exploited for centuries - in 1222 Kendal was granted the right to take dead wood from both sides of the Mint here.¹⁵⁰ Other woodland was mainly coppice wood in small parcels on steep riverside or hill slopes, described in 1777 as: 'Copse Wood consisting of small Oak, Ash, Birch and Alder with Hasles and other underwood usually cut clear with the Ground every 16 or 18 Years and chiefly burnt into Char Coal and the rest corded and sold to Bakers'.¹⁵¹ In 1836 29 woods were listed in Skelsmergh, all small - the largest, Chester Hagg, was of less than six acres. Two-thirds of the

¹⁴⁶ TNA, MAF 32/202/66.

¹⁴⁷ Beck Mills, Bowbank, Burton House, Coppack How, Edge Bank, Garnett Folds, Gilthwaiterigg, High Thorn, Hollin Root, Ladyford, Low Groves, Must Hill, Otter Bank, Pond Side, Red Bank, Skelsmergh Hall, Tarn Bank, Thornyslack.

¹⁴⁸ Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Environment Group Survey 2011.

¹⁴⁹ TNA, MAF68/71.

¹⁵⁰ *The Boke of Recorde of Kirkebie Kendall*, R. S Ferguson, CWAAS reprint, 2001, 127.

¹⁵¹ Trinity College, Cambridge, 40 Kendal 56.

farms had such woods attached that were actively managed for the production of coppice wood and timber until the twentieth century.¹⁵² Crow Wood and High Wood¹⁵³ were grubbed up in the nineteenth century and Scar Wood became a reduced woodland pasture but most of the rest survive as neglected woods. In the late twentieth century, the development of the golf course and Watchgate waterworks was accompanied by tree planting and the Skelsmergh tree warden promoted the planting of several small areas for amenity.¹⁵⁴

Manufacturing

In 1537 the leper hospital of St Leonard or Spital held a walk mill and half of a corn mill, which had been 'in decay for thirty-four years'.¹⁵⁵ The Spital mills were close to the hospital at Beck Mills on the Skelsmergh side of the Mint. In 1580 they were described as a 'water grain mill' and two fulling mills.¹⁵⁶ Successive corn mills continued to use the site until the Second World War.¹⁵⁷ In 1723, a new fulling mill was erected by Gabriel Shaw and Jonathan Dodgson of Kendal.¹⁵⁸ In 1804 it was a fulling and flax mill and when advertised for sale in 1816 contained 8 flax spinning frames of 24 spindles each, 4 tow spinning frames of 24 spindles and 3 carding engines.¹⁵⁹ It was a worsted spinning mill between 1829 and 1865¹⁶⁰ and was later used for snuff¹⁶¹ and tobacco grinding, horn comb manufacturing¹⁶² and furniture making.¹⁶³ In 1948 it was converted to flats.¹⁶⁴

Higher up the Mint, below Meal Bank, at Scarfoot, there was also a series of mills. In 1743 it was the site of a logwood mill and a sickle mill.¹⁶⁵ The logwood mill was probably built by George

¹⁵² Advertisements for sale of woods at ten Skelsmergh locations: *Westmorland Gazette*: 3 Dec 1853, Apr 29 1854, 27 Jan 1855, 20 Oct 1860, 10 Aug 1861, 26 Oct 1861.

¹⁵³ Corn Rent map.

¹⁵⁴ Parish Allotment, Cold Harbour Quarry & Gurnal Bridge .

¹⁵⁵ *Rec. Kend.* I, 72.

¹⁵⁶ *Rec. Kend.* I, 158.

¹⁵⁷ 1580, 1701, 1723, 1732, 1743, 1751, 1765, 1796, 1816 & later Directories.

¹⁵⁸ Between 1765 and 1791 it was part-owned by William Pennington, one of the inventors of the carding machine.

¹⁵⁹ *Westmorland Advertiser*, 6 July 1816.

¹⁶⁰ *Westmorland Gazette*, 3 June 1848.

¹⁶¹ *Kendal Mercury*, 18 March 1865, Snuff Mills recently opened by Messrs. Graham & Dodgson.

¹⁶² Bulmer, *Dir. Westmd.* 1885: Henry Brown Comb Manufacturer, Kelly *Dir. Westmd.*, 1894, Joseph Troughton & Sons Comb manufacturers.

¹⁶³ Kelly, *Dir. Westmd.*, 1929 W. Ffrench Gibbs.

¹⁶⁴ CAS (K), WSMB/K11/S533, planning application.

¹⁶⁵ Pastoral Centre, Diocese of Lancaster. Stephenson's Charities: Statement and Appendix of Documents 1862, 68.

Braithwaite who was recorded as a dyer and drysalter in Kendal early in that century.¹⁶⁶ The Braithwaites also had a woollen mill there in the early nineteenth century.¹⁶⁷ Successive logwood mills functioned at the site until 1920 when the weir was dismantled.¹⁶⁸ Raw materials such as fustic, cochineal and logwood were chipped, rasped or ground to produce a wide range of textile dyes and colourings during around two centuries of operation but in the last years it also produced laundry products for Braithwaite and Co Ltd.¹⁶⁹

Mills on the Sprint in Skelsmergh are recorded from 1557 when there were two fulling mills near Sprint Bridge on land which had belonged to St Mary's Abbey, York¹⁷⁰ and there is a 1588 reference to a walk mill on the Sprint.¹⁷¹ In 1616 Alice Duckett left two mills at Nether House in her will¹⁷² but in 1718 a later tenant of this property alleged that houses, mill and mill dam had been pulled down¹⁷³.

There were no buildings on the site in 1847 when Robert Seed purchased Oakbank from the Gandys¹⁷⁴ and over the next few years erected a purpose-built bobbin mill, drying sheds and large house for his family and workers. In 1851 this enterprise employed 45 bobbin turners, 2 sawyers and 5 labourers.¹⁷⁵ The Seed family ran the mill until 1905 when it was taken over by William Shepherd who retained bobbin manufacture but also added tool shafts. The site was then used by Tubbs Hiscocks and Co. Ltd and Leonard Henshaw.¹⁷⁶ James Cropper & Co. Ltd. purchased the Oakbank Woodturning Company in 1964 and used the premises to make plugs for the cores of paper rolls and pallets.¹⁷⁷ Croppers ceased production in 1973 and leased the property to a paper waste company which closed in 1981. The premises were later used as a saw mill but the race was blocked and the dam demolished around this time.

¹⁶⁶ CAS (K), WDB12/6/15 & 16.

¹⁶⁷ *Kendal Mercury*, 28 Dec 1844, 3.

¹⁶⁸ CAS (B), BDHJ/16/3. 1922 Report on Obstructions on Rivers Kent, Mint and Sprint.

¹⁶⁹ CAS (K), WDB 12/1/5.

¹⁷⁰ British Library, Harley 607.

¹⁷¹ TNA, E178/2379 Westmorland: Skelsmergh, Cunswick Park Surveys of the possessions of James Laburne, attainted.

¹⁷² TNA, C93/20/32 Westmorland: Skelsmergh Subject: Charity. (Nether House was near Oakbank).

¹⁷³ Chester, DCB/5. Papers relating to Lickbarrow Estates.

¹⁷⁴ CAS (K), WDTW/77 Oak Bank estate.

¹⁷⁵ 1851 Census.

¹⁷⁶ *Westmorland Gazette*, 'Bobbin boy who bought the mill,' 29 Oct 1993.

¹⁷⁷ Information from Sir James Cropper.

The small but reliable spring of St John's Well, when supplemented with mill ponds, provided power for two further mills. Gilthwaiterigg corn mill is first mentioned in 1640¹⁷⁸ and continued in operation until 1920.¹⁷⁹ Higher up this stream, Stocks Mill was a corn mill in 1710¹⁸⁰ but there must have been much earlier mills at this site or below near Burton House, as the adjacent tenement was already known as Millbeck in 1620.¹⁸¹ It was a tannery with a bark mill when purchased by Thomas Ashburner in 1743.¹⁸² In 1820 William Walker's bobbin mill and house burnt down here¹⁸³ and it remained in use for bobbin manufacture until 1841.¹⁸⁴ After 1842 the site was put to a variety of light industrial uses as a saw mill, blacksmith and joiner's yard¹⁸⁵ and in the twentieth century for building¹⁸⁶ and haulage contractors¹⁸⁷ and as a garage.¹⁸⁸

Quarrying

Nine small quarries, mostly small borrow pits for wall construction and roadbuilding, are marked on nineteenth-century maps. Three, alongside the A6 on Skelsmergh Fell, were larger. Lying on the 1822 realignment of the turnpike road, the two at Cold Harbour and above Garth Row were probably created to build this section. They were reserved for the township in the enclosure award.¹⁸⁹ They also provided some local building stone. Thornyslack quarry, opposite the Longsleddale turn, was of twentieth-century origin.

Other Businesses and Service Industries

Red Tree and the adjacent tenement of Spout House in Garth Row was the site of successive tanneries. It was Robert Nicholson's in 1682 but had previously been held by Rowland Stewardson (d. 1662), whose probate inventory included tanning tools; it was owned by the

¹⁷⁸ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/ R425D/38 Probate, James Duckett.

¹⁷⁹ J. Somervell, *Water-Power Mills of South Westmorland on the Kent, Bela and Gilpin and their tributaries*, (Kendal, 1930), 36.

¹⁸⁰ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R459B/65 Probate, Humphrey Morland.

¹⁸¹ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R456B/44 Probate Peter Mowson.

¹⁸² Printer and publisher of the Kendal Mercury.

¹⁸³ *Westmorland Advertiser*, Jan 15 1820.

¹⁸⁴ Parson & White, *Dir. C. & W.* 1829, Postlethwaite & Taylor; *Westmorland Gazette*, Dec 11 1841, Huddleston and Sons, Stocks Mill Bobbin Turners, Final Dividend.

¹⁸⁵ *Kendal Mercury*, Oct 12 1872, Stocks mill auction of timber, blacksmith and joiners shop, saw and bone mill and two cottages by executors of late Mr John Machell.

¹⁸⁶ Kelly, *Dir. Westmd.*, 1921 Nelson Bros., builders & contractors.

¹⁸⁷ Kelly, *Dir. Westmd.*, 1938 Barnes & Phizacklea haulage contractors.

¹⁸⁸ BT *Phone Book*, Lancaster & South Cumbria Business listings: 2012 Stocks Mill Garage.

¹⁸⁹ CAS (K), WQ/RI/24.

tanner Humphrey Cleator in 1726.¹⁹⁰ In the nineteenth century Garth Row became a small-scale artisan centre with joiners and wheelwright yards and blacksmiths, shoemakers and tailors recorded here. Stocks is marked on eighteenth-century maps¹⁹¹ and may have already been an inn on the turnpike road at this time. It was called the Duke of York in 1809¹⁹² and later the Duke of Wellington but was pulled down in the 1860s following 'a representation made by some of the householders'.¹⁹³ Increasing traffic on the A6 by the 1930s, before the M6 was built, also created opportunities for businesses such as the Strawberry Bank Refreshment room,¹⁹⁴ Cold Harbour Café,¹⁹⁵ and Wilson House Garage.¹⁹⁶ Other retail premises have been largely absent from the township - a reflection of dispersed settlement and good communications with the adjacent market town.

Economic History Since 1945

In 1972 the Watchgate Water Treatment Works was constructed to treat water from Haweswater, Windermere and Ullswater and direct it down the aqueducts to Manchester. The highly automated site, refurbished at a cost of more than £30 million in 2003, employs few people.¹⁹⁷

In 2000 there was a caravan site and other holiday and bed and breakfast accommodation and part of the Carus Green golf course lay within the parish but tourism and leisure was only a small employer.

The first industrial development in the part of Skelsmergh transferred to Kendal in 1935 was the Lakeland Dairy in 1953 which later became Dale Farm Lakeland producing dairy products.¹⁹⁸ In the 1980s industrial estates were created along the Shap road. By 2011 there were nearly fifty businesses here distributed between areas zoned as the Westmorland Business Park, Fell View Trading Park and Meadowbank Business Park. Other manufacturing concerns included English Lakes Ice Cream, Mardix Specialist Switchgear and NJO Technology lighting design. The largest

¹⁹⁰ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R474C/20 Rowland Stewardson; W/RW/K/R461C/13 Probate, Robert Nicholson, Tanner; Levens Hall MSS, Box 16/33. Admittance to Spout House of Humphrey Cleator tanner 24 Nov 1726

¹⁹¹ John Cary, *Cary's New and Correct English Atlas*, Westmoreland (London, 1787).

¹⁹² CAS (K), WD/U/48/3, 1809 Indenture.

¹⁹³ G.E.P. Reade, 'Church Work at Skelsmergh,' *Skelsmergh Church Magazine*, July 1895.

¹⁹⁴ Kelly *Dir. Westmd.* 1934.

¹⁹⁵ Kelly *Dir. Westmd.* 1938.

¹⁹⁶ 'A Tale of Two Contrasts,' *Church News, Skelsmergh, Selside, Longsleddale*, June 1983.

¹⁹⁷ Watchgate WTW, *UK Water Projects Ltd*, (2002), 187-8.

¹⁹⁸ <http://www.dalefarm.co.uk/pages/lakeland/Our+Story> (Accessed 4 March 2012)

site was the Lakeland distribution centre which supplied home and kitchen products to its 57 stores.¹⁹⁹ Grosvenor House Papers Ltd had both headquarters and warehouse here.²⁰⁰ There were ten concerns in the vehicle sales, servicing and hire sector and nine in construction or related trades. There were also agricultural engineering and various specialist design, servicing and consultancy services. The Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency, NFU Mutual and Lakes Training also had premises. At least twenty of these businesses were either mainly retail outlets, with attached shops or functioned as both trade and retail outlets.

SOCIAL HISTORY

Social Structure and Character

Little can be surmised about the medieval social history of Skelsmergh beyond the pre-eminence of the Leyburnes who held Skelsmergh from the mid-thirteenth century but became non-resident lords by the end of the fourteenth. The family ascendancy ended with James Leyburne's sales²⁰¹ although their influence lingered until 1715 through their retention of the Hall and demesne farm and their status as local leaders of Roman Catholicism. By the early seventeenth century social authority was shared between the Bellinghams, who kept a manor court and owned more than a dozen customary tenements in Skelsmergh, and the lessee of Skelsmergh Hall, who held a similar number,²⁰² and tempered by a significant number of freeholders (of whom there were eighteen in Skelsmergh and Patton in 1640). The presence of families with businesses and properties in Kendal and elsewhere further diversified the social structure.

Of the 45 households in the township in 1674, 24 had one hearth, 7 had two, 13 had between three and five and the Hall had nine.²⁰³ The comparatively high proportion of multi-hearth houses for Westmorland might indicate that around a third of families were relatively prosperous. There may have been a similar proportion who were poor; in 1671²⁰⁴ there were four exemptions from the tax even though this list omitted more than a third of the houses listed in the return of three years later.

¹⁹⁹ <http://www.lakeland.co.uk/info/OurHistory> (Accessed 4 March 2012).

²⁰⁰ <http://www.ghpkendal.co.uk/aboutus.asp> (Accessed 4 March 2012)

²⁰¹ Above, Landownership.

²⁰² Above, Landownership.

²⁰³ *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, ed. C Phillips, C. Ferguson, A. Wareham, (London: British Record Society, 2008) 223.

²⁰⁴ TNA, E179/259/14 rot 1d (not included in *Westmorland Hearth Tax*).

Enfranchisement in the eighteenth century further weakened gentry influence, as the township came to be dominated by a fluctuating group of 30-40²⁰⁵ freehold and tenant farmers of some independence but small wealth. By 1796 the three largest farms were rented from non-resident minor gentry - Daniel Wilson (Dallam Tower), John Gale (Whitehaven) and William Rawlinson (Graythwaite).

The records of the Skelsmergh Select Vestry for the Poor in 1820-32 open a temporary window onto a layer of local society that was not previously visible. At least ten township families needed relief because of low pay or intermittent work. Four families were struggling with old age and infirmity, and a widow, two orphans and four apprentices were supported.²⁰⁶

In 1836 there were still 31 farmers in the township but there were just three owner-occupiers and only 7 of the 28 landowners were resident in the township. By 1871 the social structure was more stratified and the yeoman element had thinned out. The number of farming and landowning families had declined to twenty and as well as more than forty people employed as agricultural labourers and servants, there was a single manufacturer and nearly fifty industrial workers employed in the bobbin and woollen mills.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was notable for the burst of energetic paternalism which built and endowed a new church, vicarage, school and parish hall in the township. Although there was strong local support, only one of the major contributors of finance and land to these projects was a resident - Dr Longmire of Thorny Bank. Most were aristocratic landowners²⁰⁷ with an interest in the township or local manufacturers.²⁰⁸

The closure of the mills and declining agricultural employment in the twentieth century was accompanied by increasing residential development. By the beginning of the twenty-first century Skelsmergh had acquired a markedly more middle class population with diverse origins and employment histories.

Community Activities

²⁰⁵ All the assessments for Land Tax, Window Tax, Church Repairs and the Poor in this century were for such numbers

²⁰⁶ CAS (K), WPC2/V1&V2.

²⁰⁷ Hon. Mrs Howard, Earl Bective, G. E Wilson of Dallam Tower, Earl of Lonsdale.

²⁰⁸ W. H Wakefield, Isaac Braithwaite, H. W. Schneider, J. Cropper.

Nineteenth-century Skelsmergh was favoured intermittently as a site for country sporting activities. In 1820 the revived Kendal Horse Races were in a field at Ladyford²⁰⁹ and in the same year the annual Kendal Hunt met at Mint House.²¹⁰ In 1824 the Kendal Harriers met at Skelsmergh Stocks.²¹¹ In 1887 the Kendal Otter Hounds met in the parish and in the same year there was a Hound Dog Trail over a four-mile course.²¹² In 1900 and 1907 the Oxenholme Staghounds met at Skelsmergh Hall.²¹³ These events probably drew their support from the whole district. There are few records of township-based sporting or other social activities before the late nineteenth century.

The Victorian vicarage (1874) included a 'Parish Room' in the basement but a more spacious site for meetings and activities was desired and in 1895 a Parish Room Building Committee was set up.²¹⁴ The premises were built opposite the church in 1897,²¹⁵ on land provided by the Dallam Tower Estate for a nominal payment. It was conveyed as a possible school or teacher's residence or to meet 'the spiritual, intellectual, moral or social wants of the neighbouring population' as the vicar thought proper.²¹⁶ By the 1930s it had become a village hall used for parish meetings, church and social activities that included the lad's club, Girls Friendly Society,²¹⁷ badminton club, dances and whist drives.²¹⁸ The building was extended in 1936²¹⁹ and in 1978 a strip of adjacent land was enclosed to create a car park to mark the Jubilee. A new entrance hall was built in 1982 and the kitchen area extended. Declining usage and the need to raise money for repairs and improvements led to a reappraisal in 2000 and, after several public meetings, the PCC agreed to set up a trust to lease the hall and manage it. This became the Skelsmergh Community Hall registered charity in 2002.²²⁰ A section of the adjacent field was leased soon afterwards, a balcony added in 2006 and in 2008 the hall was extended and refurbished with the aid of a £187,000

²⁰⁹ *Westmorland Advertiser*, Sep 16, 1820.

²¹⁰ *Westmorland Advertiser*, Nov 11, 1820.

²¹¹ *Westmorland Advertiser*, Jan 31, 1824.

²¹² *Westmorland Gazette*, July 2 1887.

²¹³ *Kendal Times*, Dec 15, 1900 and Jan 12, 1907.

²¹⁴ CAS (K), WPR 87/1, School Building Committee .

²¹⁵ External inscription: 'Built in the Diamond Jubilee Year 1897'.

²¹⁶ CAS (K), WPR/87/4/11. Typed copy headed: Extract from Conveyance dated 5th October 1895.

²¹⁷ Founded 'a little later' than 1877: '*Church Work in Skelsmergh*' by G Reade, reprinted from Skelsmergh Church Magazine, July 1895.

²¹⁸ J. Richardson in 'The Great Book of Skelsmergh 2004' - community book kept by Mrs D Bevis, Skelsmergh.

²¹⁹ CAS (K), PCC Minutes 1932-1941

²²⁰ Charity Commission No. 1098387.

lottery grant.²²¹ In the first decade of the twenty-first century, it was in regular use by a children's playgroup and for indoor sports, parties, weddings, funerals, meetings, coffee mornings, farmer's markets etc.

The Garth Row and Skelsmergh Women's Institute²²² was formed in 1920 and met at the Garth Row Mission Room until 1956 and then at the Parish Hall until the branch disbanded in 1992 and most of the remaining members transferred to Selside. This was a lively branch with attendance at meetings of between 30-40 until the 1980s and like the Skelsmergh Mother's Union (pre-1911 to 2008)²²³ provided an important forum for local women.

The Skelsmergh Sports were founded in 1947²²⁴ on the initiative of the Rev. C. W. Gibbons as an annual sports day for adults and children with an evening dance. The Sports Committee held December whist drives and dances to finance the Sports until 1980. This event was still thriving in 2012 and moved in 2004 from a farmer's field next to the Vicarage to the new Community Hall field. In the early years activities such as dog races, tossing the sheaf, pillow fights, wrestling, and the tug of war featured. Latterly, it evolved into an event mainly for younger children with races, a traditional tea and sometimes other entertainment.

Education

The earliest reference to education in Skelsmergh is a record of two boys admitted to Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge in 1582 and 1587 who had been taught by Mr Garnett in Skelsmergh.²²⁵ One was later a well-known recusant²²⁶ and Garnett's school may have been an early example of the Catholic education that must have existed in the area.²²⁷ Clues to the presence of some local provision include 'Garnett Fold' field called Schoolhouse Close²²⁸ and a house at Scar Foot known as School House.²²⁹ In 1715 Thomas Clerk, a cordwainer from Garth Row, left part of the interest and profits of his tenement and land for the maintenance of a

²²¹ http://news.biglotteryfund.org.uk/pr_030608_nw_cb_skelsmergh?regioncode=-l&status=theProg&title=Lotto%20cash%20makes%20community%20hall%20fit%20for%20future (Accessed, October 17 2012).

²²² CAS (K), WDSO 158.

²²³ Records in possession of Mrs R. Turner.

²²⁴ CAS (K), WPR 87 (Misc.), Skelsmergh Sports Committee Minute & Account Book.

²²⁵ Probably the Skelsmergh deponent 'John Garnet Mr of Art', see TNA, E178/2379.

²²⁶ John Preston MP for Lancaster 1593, History of Parliament online.

²²⁷ Below, Religion.

²²⁸ CAS (K), WDTW/1585/4/2.

²²⁹ LRO (Preston), WRW/R516/37, will of George Marshall of 'School house near Scar Foot in Skelsmergh'.

schoolmaster, provided that the inhabitants of Skelsmergh erected a school.²³⁰ This does not seem to have happened. At the beginning of the nineteenth century Richard James of Hole House kept a school for older children at Garth Row.²³¹ Meagre local provision probably inspired Joseph Harling of Tarn Bank in 1802 to leave £100 to Selside School and £100 to Burneside school to admit four poor boys to each school from Skelsmergh.²³² This charity became the Kitching and Harling Charity later known as the Selside Educational Foundation.²³³

When the Education Department identified a need for additional provision in 1872²³⁴ the vicar and vestry committee quickly decided to build a school near Garth Row. The Poor Allotment was proposed as the location but there were difficulties with the Local Government Board. An alternative site was donated by Mr Longmire of Thorny Bank and a National School was built in 1874 at the cost of £291.²³⁵ Because of its northerly position, the school drew its pupils mainly from the Garth Row, Garnett Bridge and Watchgate area and some children in other parts of the township attended schools in Burneside, Meal Bank and Kendal.

The school was always small and usually had only one teacher, sometimes with an assistant or monitor. Sarah Stoddart was headmistress for more than thirty-five years but had to retire in 1920 following an accident when riding home during a November snowfall. Between 1900 and 1915 the number on roll fluctuated between 27 and 49 but it declined to 22 in 1923 when there was a succession of temporary teachers.²³⁶ Under Dorothy Mountford, from 1923-28, the number rose to 28 but by 1933 there were only 10. From 1934 until 1949 Mary Greenbank (later Hawes) was headteacher. The numbers recovered to 19 by 1939 and the war years were busy with evacuees and teachers arriving from Newcastle and South Shields and later from Barrow. There were also private evacuees from London and Liverpool. The school was well-regarded by the Westmorland Director of Education and in April 1941²³⁷ the President of the Board of Education was brought to visit.

An exposed hillside site and limited budgets for maintenance and heating often caused problems and there were snow closures most winters. By 1947 there were only nine on roll and, in spite of

²³⁰ LRO (Preston), WRW/K/R421C/51.

²³¹ *Westmorland Gazette*, 23rd December 1911: A Nonagenarian's Record.

²³² LRO (Preston), WRW/R511/58, Joseph Harling will.

²³³ Charity Commission - Removed Charity 526951.

²³⁴ *Kendal Mercury*, 21 Dec 1872: Education Dept notice.

²³⁵ CERC, NS/7/1/11436.

²³⁶ CAS (K), WPR87/1/5/2. Log Book 1903-30.

²³⁷ CAS (K), WDS93/1. School Log Book 1930-50.

protest and numbers subsequently rising to seventeen, the school was closed in December 1949 and the teacher and most of the children transferred to Selside school in January 1950.²³⁸ Some Skelsmergh children still attended that school in 2012 but others went to Kendal or Burneside schools and most secondary students were enrolled at Kendal schools.

Charities and Poor Relief

In 1616 Alice Duckett left instructions in her will to pay £3 a year from her tenement called Nether House - £1 to Kendal, £1 to Strickland and £1 to Skelsmergh. After the tenant's death it was to be sold and the full rental of £9 given for the use of the poor by the trustees. This gift proved problematic and was the cause of legal disputes that came before the Lords Commissioners in 1659²³⁹ and Chancery in 1753.²⁴⁰ The Commissioners For Inquiry Concerning Charities noted that 'the history of this charity is involved in great obscurity' and that most of the money was going to the Kendal corporation account.²⁴¹ However, money from this source was still being distributed as a dole to the Skelsmergh poor in the nineteenth century.²⁴²

The most significant local charities have been Catholic. They were necessarily clandestine in origin and this secrecy generated uncertainty over their origins, purposes and history both inside and outside the Catholic church. Stephenson's Trust originated when Robert Stephenson, having outlived his wife and children, bequeathed his estate for charitable purposes by a series of deeds between 1698 and 1721.²⁴³ He received the lordship rents to twelve Skelsmergh properties and held the customary tenancies of Dodding Green, Holme House and the Beck Tenement and also had property in Kendal,²⁴⁴ Selside and Whinfell.²⁴⁵ His primary purposes seems to have been to ensure the provision of a local Catholic priest and to assist poor Catholics but he specified a wide range of educational and welfare concerns that included poor housekeepers, apprenticeships, discharge of debts, disability by age and lack of clothes, tools and medical help. He was specific in not excluding Protestants and his trustees included local Quakers.

²³⁸ CAS (K), WPR87/1/5/3.

²³⁹ TNA, C 93/20/32, Westmorland, Skelsmergh, Charities.

²⁴⁰ Chester, DCB/1595/3/5 - Lickbarrow estates in Skelsmergh.

²⁴¹ Further Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities, House of Commons, 1815-35, 490.

²⁴² Below - Local Government.

²⁴³ Over ninety, according to B. C. Foley, 'Robert Stephenson (1650-1723) Dodding Green' in *Some People of the Penal Times* (Lancaster 1991), 39.

²⁴⁴ Kilner House, The Black Bull and Horse and Rainbow.

²⁴⁵ Evett Sike, Moser, Borans & Breamrigg.

Stephenson's dole at the door of Dodding was abolished in 1801 but distributions to the poor in the neighbourhood continued into the twentieth century.

The Moyston Trust, another Catholic charity, was established in 1695 when Peter Mowson and his brother, the London goldsmith and banker John Mowson,²⁴⁶ gave Mill Beck tenement and £140 mortgaged on Garnett Folds for poor Catholics, the support of Catholic apprentices and for Catholic education in the Barony of Kendal.²⁴⁷ Mill Beck was farmed with the neighbouring Burton House which was itself left to the Rev. Thomas Wilkinson of Kendal in 1843 by the Mount family. These two properties were used to support the Kendal mission and to provide distributions to the poor in the town and in 2012 were still owned by this trust.

Robert Johnson, one of the incumbents of Dodding Green, left three additional fields to the Stephenson Trust besides other significant charitable endowments.²⁴⁸

RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Skelsmergh lay within the parish of Kendal. A chapel of ease was recorded in the 1578 visitation, which noted, in relation to 'relics of popery', that 'the altar is defaced but not wholly pulled down'.²⁴⁹ The chapel must have been in disrepair by 1599, when Adam Pykeringe left a legacy, 'to the mending of Skelsmer chappell'.²⁵⁰ It was still in use as a manor court and for rent-paying until 1673²⁵¹ but by 1692 it was in ruins; Machell noting 'the walls only remaining, but some now living remember it covered and seats standing in it...' He also stated that the chapel was dedicated to St John the Baptist and that Sir Uter Gilpin²⁵² had been chaplain here before the Reformation, adding that there had been neither chapel yard nor chaplain's house but that there had been a salary of an unknown amount apportioned by house. Machell sketched a rectangular building 12 yards by 7½ built adjacent to a spring called St John's well, with the water running under a wooden floor. There are no obvious remains and later local tradition assumed that the

²⁴⁶ Mowson chaired the governing body of the Goldsmith's Company and was a conduit of Catholic funds. See Wright, 'The Layburnes and their World', PhD thesis, St Andrews, 2002, 138.

²⁴⁷ Ushaw, UCM III/242, March 16 1784: letter from Robert Johnson to Bishop Matthew Gibson.

²⁴⁸ Below, Religion - Dodding Green incumbents.

²⁴⁹ Borthwick Institute (York) V.1578-9/CB.2 Chester.

²⁵⁰ LRO (Preston), W/RW/R463D/49.

²⁵¹ Below, Local Government.

²⁵² CAS (C) D&C, Machell MSS, ii: '*as appears by a will drawn by his hand*'. Will not located.

chapel site was at Skelsmergh Hall.²⁵³ Machell's description and evidence for the location of St John's well, indicate a site west of Otter Bank.²⁵⁴ Thereafter the township had no place of worship of the established church until 1871.²⁵⁵

Roman Catholicism

The decay and loss of the chapel was probably related to the strength of local Catholicism. In 1583 the Catholic owner of Skelsmergh Hall, James Leyburne, was executed at Lancaster for denying the Queen's supremacy. The strong Catholic identification of this family remained influential until 1715 and was supported by the presence of other Catholic gentry families in adjacent townships.²⁵⁶ The existence of a Catholic enclave north of Kendal seems to have attracted other recusant families to Skelsmergh. Leyburne's personal example was also important and Catholic historians have linked six Catholic martyrs, who were executed within a hundred years of his death, to the township by birth, family or residence:²⁵⁷ the layman John Ma(w)son (1591),²⁵⁸ the priest Thomas Sprott (Lincoln 1600),²⁵⁹ the bookseller James Duckett (Tyburn 1602),²⁶⁰ the priest Thomas Somers (Tyburn 1610),²⁶¹ the priest John Duckett (Tyburn 1644)²⁶² and the Benedictine lay-brother, Thomas Pickering (Tyburn 1679).²⁶³

Seven years after Leyburne's death a commission reported that Christopher Pow and his neighbours had hired an unauthorised Reader at Skelsmergh chapel.²⁶⁴ Names such as Pickering, Wharton, Gilpin, Mowson, Garnett, Machell, Platt and Stephenson appear frequently on

²⁵³ Excursions and Proceedings, *CW1*, vi (1883), 202-3.

²⁵⁴ Blake Tyson, 'St John's Well and Chapel, Skelsmergh: their location and present condition', *CW2*, xcvi (1998), 155-167.

²⁵⁵ Below, Church of England.

²⁵⁶ The Thornburghs of Selside, Ducketts of Grayrigg and Braithwaites of Burneside were often identified as Catholic.

²⁵⁷ Thomas Tunstall was also listed as a 'Skelsmergh martyr' by Sister Agnes, *The Story of Skelsmergh* (Kendal, 1949), 44.

²⁵⁸ Date and name uncertain. R. Challenor, *Extracts from Memoirs of Missionary Priests*, (London, 1742) included both John Mason 1591 and John Mawson 1612. See also Joseph Mawson, 'John Mawson, Layman Martyr, 1612, And Some Catholic Mawsons'. CRS vi (1921) and D. Longmire, *The Seven Martyrs of Kendal*, Kendal 2008 who concludes he may have come from Skelsmergh.

²⁵⁹ Born 1571 Skelsmergh: G. Anstruther, *Seminary Priests*, Vol 1 (St Edmund's College, Ware, 1968).

²⁶⁰ ODNB: Duckett, James: born Gilthwaiterigg and godson of James Leyburne. Also known as John, see Anstruther, *Seminary Priests* Vol ii p 89.

²⁶¹ Born Skelsmergh. Longmire, *Seven Martyrs*, 12.

²⁶² ODNB: Duckett, John: descended from Skelsmergh family.

²⁶³ From Gilthwaiterigg according to pencilled note on an earlier will: Edward Pickering 1542.

²⁶⁴ TNA, E178/2379.

recusant lists between 1606 and 1767.²⁶⁵ A list of convicted recusants in the Kendal and Lonsdale wards in 1625-41 includes sixty-five names for Skelsmergh and Patton,²⁶⁶ more than for any of the other twenty-five townships.²⁶⁷

Dodding Green

Dodding Green is named after the Kendal wool merchant who is believed to have built the house at the end of the fourteenth century.²⁶⁸ By 1665 the tenancy was held by a prosperous Catholic yeoman, Robert Stephenson.²⁶⁹ It was clearly already a mass centre when Bishop John Leyburn, the vicar apostolic of England – and a member of the family who still owned Skelsmergh Hall - carried out confirmations at Sizergh, Witherslack and Dodding Green in 1687.²⁷⁰ Thomas Roydon, a riding priest, was working in the area from 1699 and seems to have used it as a base for his Westmorland circuit but may not have taken up residence until around 1718.²⁷¹ Bow Bank, Millbeck, Garnett Folds and Skelsmergh Hall appear as sites for baptisms and marriages in his registers of 1699–1722.²⁷²

Through a complex series of transactions between 1698 and 1721, designed to circumvent the penal laws, Robert Stephenson bequeathed all his lands and properties for the support of a Catholic priest at Dodding Green and other charitable purposes.²⁷³ Dodding Green is the oldest Catholic mission in Westmorland but after the establishment of premises in Kendal it eventually became a separate Roman Catholic parish that extended from Stramongate Bridge in Kendal to Tebay.²⁷⁴ The church is dedicated to SS Robert and Alice – saints chosen in honour of Robert Stephenson and his wife.

Stephenson's support was timely in sustaining local Catholicism because it came when the Leyburne funds that had supported the Westmorland circuit were failing. Although Dodding

²⁶⁵ There are lists for 1623, 1626, 1628, 1629, 1632, 1640, 1641, 1650, 1657, 1674, 1675, 1678, 1679, 1691, 1696, 1699, 1715, 1717, 1722 and 1767.

²⁶⁶ The small neighbouring township of Patton was often included with Skelsmergh for taxation purposes.

²⁶⁷ Lance Thwaytes, 'Catholics of the Seventeenth Century in the Barony of Kendal', in Marie B. Rowlands, *Catholics of Parish and Town 1558-78* (CRS 1999), pp. 194-205.

²⁶⁸ Sister Agnes, *Skelsmergh*, 38.

²⁶⁹ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R474C/10; Will Anthony Stephenson, 1665.

²⁷⁰ J. A. Hilton et al, *Bishop Leyburn's Confirmation Register of 1687*, North West Catholic History Society (Wigan 1997).

²⁷¹ His register as a travelling priest ends in this year.

²⁷² LRO (Preston), RCLA acc.6361 Register.

²⁷³ Above, Charities.

²⁷⁴ 1919 Map in Stephenson Trust boxes at Lancaster Diocese.

Green came to be used mainly for elderly Catholic priests of some intellectual reputation in partial retirement, it also played an important role in the development of Westmorland Catholicism. When, at the opening of the Kirkby Lonsdale church in 1948, the bishop declared ‘once more from Dodding Green, Catholicism reaches out deep into the country’ he was referring to the role of priests at Dodding Green in contributing to the establishment of the Kendal, Ambleside,²⁷⁵ Kirkby Lonsdale and Windermere²⁷⁶ churches.

Even in its early days, this was an unusual mission: in a rural area, relatively well-endowed - in 1840 John Lingard described Dodding Green as ‘the best living in the north’²⁷⁷ - but with a small chapel and a smaller and declining number of Catholic parishioners. The first known priest at Dodding, Thomas Roydon, had a wider role, serving a number of house chapels and becoming vicar-general in the Northern District and a member of the English Chapter.²⁷⁸ In 1741, he was succeeded by his nephew, also called Thomas Roydon. Robert Johnson (1764-1799) had been headmaster of the Douai preparatory school and built the new chapel at Dodding²⁷⁹ as well as premises at Kendal. Robert Banister (1803-12) had briefly been vice-president at Douai and was regarded as influential in Catholic ecclesiastical circles. He was succeeded in 1834 by his nephew and protégé, Henry Rutter, the author of a number of religious books.²⁸⁰

In the early nineteenth century there were periods without a resident incumbent when Thomas Wilkinson, the Kendal priest, also served Dodding. A long-running dispute over the right of presentation and use of the trust funds, between the hereditary trustees, the Riddells of Cheeseburn Grange²⁸¹ and successive vicars apostolic became the subject of wider controversy and lawsuits.²⁸² Charles Brigham was placed in Dodding by Edward Riddell in 1839 but he was refused faculties by the bishop of the Northern District because of the dispute and his unsuitability as a priest²⁸³ although he was not ejected until 1858. He was followed by Robert

²⁷⁵ 1879 Canon Curry of Dodding Green rented a room in Church St. Ambleside for holding mass: Lancaster Directory 1939 (diocesan), Historical Sketches, 125

²⁷⁶ Bernard Kelly, *English Catholic Missions* (London, 1907), 438.

²⁷⁷ Ushaw, Lingard correspondence, Lingard to Husenbeth, 145.

²⁷⁸ Lancaster Directory 1939 (diocesan), Historical Sketches, 122.

²⁷⁹ Chapel licensed 1791; *Rec. Kend.* III, 139.

²⁸⁰ Their letters were published in: L. Gooch, *The Revival of English Catholicism: The Banister-Rutter Correspondence 1777-1807*, North West Catholic History Society (Wigan, 1995).

²⁸¹ By descent from the Thornburghs, who had been appointed Receivers by Stephenson.

²⁸² *A Letter to the Right Rev. Francis Mostyn on the Rights of Nomination in the Incumbency of Dodding Green*, (London, 1842) and *A Statement of the Dodding Green Dispute*, (London, 1846). Both pamphlets published anonymously by the Catholic priest Francis Trappes.

²⁸³ Talbot Library, DG Letterbook 2.

Hogarth,²⁸⁴ brother to William Hogarth the first bishop of Newcastle - both born at Dodding, where their father had been the tenant farmer on the estate. Ralph Platt, the incumbent from 1868 to 1874 had been prefect of studies at Ushaw and Vicar General.²⁸⁵ Canon Joseph Bamber, priest at Dodding from 1947-83 wrote, 'at one stage we were down to one family attending and even today there are more martyrs from the past in the parish than parishioners'.²⁸⁶ This historical significance ensured that Dodding Green retained interest as a 'martyr shrine and place of pilgrimage'²⁸⁷ containing, in Bamber's time, a penal times museum and martyrs' relics collected by him. The last resident priest was Canon William Jackson (1984-90) who also celebrated mass at Sedbergh and Sizergh Castle and was diocesan treasurer.²⁸⁸ On his retirement it ceased to be a separate parish and from 2004, the house, chapel and gardens were occupied and renovated by residents from the Cenacolo Community, the English branch of a charity for rehabilitating addicts, founded in Italy in 1983. In 2012 the Community contained around twenty people living a semi-monastic lifestyle of work and prayer. The community was supported by legacies, donations and standing orders from a group of supporters.²⁸⁹

Dodding Green is a seventeenth-century building and an example of a Catholic chapel built as part of a private house and retaining some features from penal times including several places of concealment. It was arranged on an H-shaped plan and on the north end there is rainwater head and pipe with the inscription RSA 1682 (Robert and Alice Stephenson). The original chapel was an attic room and the surviving one, built on the end and with an external stairway, probably dates from 1791. The 1840 Brigham extensions and alterations included a Jacobean-style ceiling and decorative external woodwork by Websters of Kendal but most of these features were lost in the 1940²⁹⁰ and 1968 renovations together with the wall sundial and the statue on the front of the house.²⁹¹

Church of England

²⁸⁴ Assembler and copier of the Dodding Green Letterbooks.

²⁸⁵ Northern Catholic Calendar 1874/5, 41-3.

²⁸⁶ *The Universe*, Dec 12 1969, In the heart of Westmorland-a unique martyr's shrine by Fr Joseph Bamber.

²⁸⁷ *Universe*, Dec 12 1969, Bamber.

²⁸⁸ *Skelsmergh, Selside & Longsleddale Church News*, 'A Long Life in Ministry,' by Joanna Wates, Sep 1989.

²⁸⁹ Cenacolo Newsletter - late Summer 2012.

²⁹⁰ Wallplate inscribed: 'Haec domus renovate est, MCMXL RJGK' (incumbent priest Richard Kershaw).

²⁹¹ Hyde & Pevsner, *Cumbria*, 624.

From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, members of the established church worshipped at Kendal, Burneside or Selside.²⁹² Only in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was an Anglican presence re-established. In 1869 Archdeacon Cooper of Kendal proposed forming the three townships of Skelsmergh, Scalthwaiterigg and Patton into a new ecclesiastical district with a new church. It was constructed in an elevated position on Helme Bank, to the design of Joseph Bintley and consecrated in 1871.²⁹³ Like its early modern predecessor, it was dedicated to St John the Baptist. Many local people subscribed to the building fund but much of the £1,378 required came from outside.²⁹⁴ Trinity College Cambridge gave £250 towards the endowment. Another £1,000, as well as the site for the vicarage, came from the estate of Hannah Braithwaite.²⁹⁵ The living was worth £190 in 1895 and £343 in 1925 and was in the gift of the vicar of Kendal.²⁹⁶

The building was constructed with a bell turret on the west end above the doorway. An organ chamber was added in 1884 and in the same year stained glass was inserted in the big three-light east window as a memorial to the Morton family. In 1888 the chancel was extended by twelve feet and stone finial crosses added to the roofs. The lych gate was constructed as a war memorial and originally included a wooden cross that is now inside the church.²⁹⁷ The centenary of the church in 1971 was marked by the addition of an illuminated neon cross to the tower. In 1974 a new door was constructed on the south side and the exposed west opening blocked. The original church had 207 settings but this was expanded to 232 by later alterations.²⁹⁸

The adjacent vicarage was completed in 1875 by the same architect. The first incumbent was G.E.P. Reade (1872 to 1895), who was commemorated in the name of the additional graveyard that was created on land donated by one of his daughters in 1950 - the Canon Reade Memorial Churchyard.²⁹⁹ The new Anglican church and parish with a resident vicar sparked off a more active religious life in the area in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Reade and his

²⁹² Entries relating to inhabitants of Skelsmergh occur frequently in the registers of Selside (120 events, 1753-1812); Burneside (100 baptisms 1717-60) and Kendal (numerous entries, 1558-1825): CAS (K), WPR 30/1; WPR 54/1/1; WPR 38/1.

²⁹³ *Westmorland Gazette*, Nov 4 1871.

²⁹⁴ Below - Social History.

²⁹⁵ This was a contested will and the case attracted much interest see J. S. Campbell, *The Braithwaite Will Cause and History of the Black Drop* (Kendal, 1872).

²⁹⁶ Kelly, *Dir. Westmd.* 1934.

²⁹⁷ The cross is referred to in 1921 and was removed from the gate in the 1950s.

²⁹⁸ Kelly, *Dir. Westmd.* 1897.

²⁹⁹ CRO (K) WPR 87/1/4/22 & 23.

parishioners created a church choir, Sunday school, branch of the Church of England Temperance Society, Girls' Friendly Society and Parochial Library.³⁰⁰

His successor, Samuel Livesey, was the incumbent for forty-three years. The last burst of Victorian religious energy in the township was the building of the parish room opposite the church in 1897.³⁰¹ Twentieth-century retrenchment saw amalgamation with Selside to form a united benefice in 1954.³⁰² In 1960 the ecclesiastical parish boundaries were redrawn so that Skelsmergh no longer included part of what had become north-east Kendal.³⁰³ In 1973 the united benefice of Skelsmergh, Selside and Longsleddale was created.³⁰⁴ After 1940 there were eight vicars who served for relatively short periods. Of these, Lawrence (Lawrie) Peat (1979-86) made a particularly strong impact as a parish priest motivated by an inclusive idea of community and founded the Church News for the three parishes. Most of the vicarage was sold in 1988 and a new smaller building constructed alongside it. The last resident (and part-time) vicar for the parish, Robert (Bob) Dew left in 2006 and was the longest serving of the post-war vicars.³⁰⁵ Skelsmergh parish then became part of the Beacon Group of six local churches.³⁰⁶

Nonconformity

Although there were a few Quakers and later Unitarians in the township³⁰⁷ the most significant nonconformist presence was provided by the Christian Brethren. By 1882 were using a small mission room in Garth Row.³⁰⁸ This was a daughter church of the Sand Area meeting in Kendal. It was supported by families from Garth Row and some of the surrounding farms. In 1940 both Sunday School and gospel services had an average attendance of forty.³⁰⁹ However, the mission closed in 1955 when numbers became too small.³¹⁰ It was then converted into a small house. In 2006 the Kendal congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses built a new Kingdom Hall in Giltwhaiterigg Lane in the part of Skelsmergh transferred to Kendal.

³⁰⁰ G Reade, 'Church Work in Skelsmergh', *Skelsmergh Church Magazine*, July 1895.

³⁰¹ Below, Local Government

³⁰² London Gazette 40215, 25 June 1954.

³⁰³ CRO (K), WPR 87/1/4/26.

³⁰⁴ London Gazette 45928, 13 March 1973

³⁰⁵ 1991-2006.

³⁰⁶ <http://www.thebeacongroup.org.uk/> © 2005-6 The Beacon Group of Parishes & Tullnet Internet Services.

³⁰⁷ Rowland Scales and his son Daniel left legacies to the Unitarians - F Nicholson & E Axon, *The Older Nonconformity in Kendal* (Kendal 1915), 303.

³⁰⁸ Although the building is shown on Ordnance Survey 6-inch map, 1st ed, surveyed 1858.

³⁰⁹ CAS (K), WDFCPB.

³¹⁰ Informant: A. Hayes, retired farmer of Red Bank and a former preacher at this mission.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Manorial Government

The Bellinghams and their successors, kept a Skelsmergh court baron for their holdings in the township and in Longsleddale. Records for this court survive from between 1637 and 1726.³¹¹ It met at St John's Chapel,³¹² which was still in use as a place to make payments in 1673.³¹³ In the same year James Bellingham appointed John Braban to collect rents³¹⁴ and, from this date, there are intermittent references to the use of the Braban house (Otter Bank) as a site for juries to meet or payments to be made,³¹⁵ until the early nineteenth century when the Stocks inn was used.³¹⁶ The court seems to have met only once or twice a year and references to anything except admittances of new tenants are rare. Presentments for agrarian offences were recorded in 1639 and there were three records of fines for non-appearance. In 1697 some of the customary tenants purchased the rights of boon hens and capons from James Grahme.³¹⁷ After the early eighteenth century, records are sparse but there were admittances to tenements in Longsleddale and Strickland Roger in the Skelsmergh court down to 1846.³¹⁸

Township Government

Skelsmergh and Patton formed a joint constablewick until the mid-nineteenth century. These neighbouring townships were separately assessed for taxation in 1332³¹⁹ but linked for the Hearth Tax and other seventeenth-century subsidies. In the eighteenth century assessments for poor relief were always made separately but arrangements for Window and Land Tax varied.³²⁰

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century wills there are references to churchwardens and overseers of the poor for Skelsmergh³²¹ but the only detailed records are from the meetings of the select vestry for the poor in 1820-32.³²² There were two overseers and the vestry met

³¹¹ CAS (K), Levens Hall MSS, Box 16/33. Skelsmergh Manor Court Rolls.

³¹² CAS (C), D&C, Machell MSS, ii, 120.

³¹³ CAS (K), WD/D/SK/1; sale of Harry-bank 1673.

³¹⁴ Levens Hall MSS, 16/34, notice signed by James Bellingham.

³¹⁵ Levens Hall MSS, 18M/2, 1680 general fine.

³¹⁶ CAS (K), WD/K 1-10, 1846 admittance to Stockdale

³¹⁷ Levens Hall MSS, 16/33, Jan 26 1697 Memorandum.

³¹⁸ CAS (K), WD/K Stockdale.

³¹⁹ *Rec. Kend. I*, 252.

³²⁰ CAS (K), WQ/RLT/Kendal/40.

³²¹ LRO (Preston), W/RW/K/R410C/12, Christopher Braban 1670 & W/RW/K/R477B/20, William Stephenson 1723.

³²² CAS (K), WPC2/V1 & V2.

fortnightly at the Stocks inn to consider requests for relief. Pensions, individual payments, rents and items of clothing were paid to the old, widowed, infirm or orphaned but also to a number of working men whose employment was erratic or wages insufficient to support their families.

There were nearly twenty cases of illegitimacy that were usually handled by auctioning for the confinement or placing the mother in a house rented by the township. The only exception to this system of out-relief was in 1823 when Elizabeth Goose/Gorse was committed to the House of Correction in Kendal after having a second illegitimate child.

After Skelsmergh became part of the Kendal Poor Law Union in 1836, vestry meetings usually occurred only twice a year. Business included distributing the dole money from Redman Tenement and Oakbank,³²³ letting the parish allotment and herbage of the quarries, employing a mole catcher and nominating poor scholars to Burneside and Selside schools.³²⁴ Township government at this time required around a dozen active officers selected from fewer than thirty ratepayers, including a churchwarden, guardian for the poor, assistant overseer, clerk and treasurer. Road maintenance was a township responsibility until 1893 so there was also a surveyor of the highways. Constables were still appointed by the vestry in 1859.³²⁵

After 1894 Skelsmergh became part of South Westmorland Rural District. The first parish meeting for the election of councillors met on 4 December 1894 in the parish room in the Vicarage. Nineteen landowners or occupiers were present and they selected an unopposed group chaired by the vicar and including four local farmers.³²⁶ The second vicar was also a councillor from 1885-1918 and farmers constituted a majority for most of the twentieth century. The first woman was elected in 2007. Agenda items mainly concerned the parish allotment, road and footpath issues and planning applications. In 2006 the parish council combined with its neighbour to become the Skelsmergh and Scalthwaiterigg Parish Council and produced a joint Community Plan in 2009.

³²³ Above, Charities.

³²⁴ Above, Charities, Harling Charity.

³²⁵ CAS (K), WPC 2/V2.

³²⁶ CAS (K), WPC 2/V2 & WPC/2 Minute Books.