

# Cockermouth Post 2010

## Post Article January 2010

We received an interesting email from a gentleman in Belgium called Jozef Simons who is involved with a local history group in Rosmeer. It concerned a wristwatch that belonged to a Cockermouth man (Norman Tolson McMaster), and which was found in the wreckage of a bomber plane on which Norman was a crew member. Sergeant Norman McMaster was an Air Gunner with the RAF Volunteer Reserve during WWII and his plane (a Halifax II) was shot down on 5th October 1942. He was then aged 32 and was buried at Heverlee War Cemetery in Belgium. He was the son of Robert and Esther (nee Harkness) and had three sisters (Jessie, Isobel and Esther). Norman married Kathleen Doran in 1938, and after Norman's death Kathleen remarried and became Kathleen Jones.

The purpose of the email from Belgium was to attempt to reunite the wristwatch, which bears Norman's initials on the back, with a surviving relative. From the inscribed date on the watch (1.10.1931) it appears to have been given to him on his 21st birthday. Jozef describes how the day after the crash German soldiers arrived in trucks at the field where four downed planes were lying. Their intention was to take away the plane engines in the trucks and to this end local men from Rosmeer were press-ganged to dig out the engines. They were, however, embedded too deeply in the ground to retrieve. It was during this operation that a man called Kristiaan Moesen found the watch and was able to hide it in his pocket.

POSTSCRIPT TO THIS ARTICLE: Several local people contacted us about this article. In addition, we were also in correspondence with relatives in Canada. There was a surviving member of the air crew who flew with Norman called Gordon Mellor. Gordon returned to Rosmeer in April 2010 with members of his family for a commemoration service which was filmed by Belgian television. After much debate about who the wristwatch should be returned to, Kristiaan Moesen decided he would prefer to take care of the watch, as he had done for the last sixty years or so.

*Gloria Edwards*

## Post Article February 2010

Following last month's article on the wristwatch found in Belgium that belonged to Cockermouth man Norman McMaster, thank you to everyone who responded to the appeal for information. We have received lots of useful information and photographs, both locally and from overseas, which has all been passed on to the Belgian history group who will decide on the watch's final resting-place. Here I'll just add a reminder for all you WWII history buffs that the story of Cockermouth's War Years is now available at the New Bookshop (and other outlets), price £8.99. Norman, of course, was one of

many Service personnel who left Cockermouth and sadly never returned. A poem written by J B Richardson of Cockermouth is a moving tribute to Norman:

### **TO NORMAN**

*You faced each flight with courage gay, And  
risks you calmly flaunted,  
You viewed it all without dismay,  
With cheerfulness undaunted.*

*Yet through the hell of fire and flak, And  
fighter strength unstated,  
You roamed the deadly dark sky track,  
And never hesitated.*

*But now the danger's cast aside, You've  
joined the mighty band  
Of lads who bravely fought and died  
In manner truly grand.*

*You gave the most that man can give, A  
sacrifice indeed;  
You died that England still may live,  
From War and Terror freed.*

The following extract, written by a C S M Smith and taken from the WCT (22.7.44) describes the war-time experiences of other local men:

*"Cumberland should be told that among those paratroops who dropped several hours before the sea-borne invasion, the old county was well represented. I was there waiting for them. There was a mere handful of us, and experienced the longest 35 minutes of my life. Blindcrake seemed a long way off at the time. At zero hour the planes disgorged their human load and the air was suddenly filled with sky men. The roar of mighty engines, the thunder of the ack-ack and bursting of our bombs on a nearby target made one think the world had gone mad ... In that same parachute battalion were men who had left home as 'Terriers' in 1939. Now they were trained and welded into the finest fighting machine in the world. There was Sgt. Bert Norman (Cockermouth), Sgt. Jack Moffat (Embleton), Sgt. U H Price (Cockermouth) ... and others who had once been in the Borders. Several days later, dirty, begrimed, but victorious, we smoked and talked. There was Lieut. Jan Cooper of Cockermouth, who, with his platoon had been cut off from his battalion yet had won through to safety and looked after his lads like 'an old sweat' ... 'Can't keep good fellows doon, marra!' I said ..."*

Gloria Edwards

## Post Article March 2010

This week's article goes back to the grim days of the Cockermonth Workhouse (which stood on the site of the present-day flats opposite Fairfield Junior School). Flimby Lodge also came under the remit of the Cockermonth Board of Guardians, and Ted Petty relates the sad story of John James Graham.

In 1905 a recently-widowed mother with a family was forced, by circumstance, to enter the Cockermonth Workhouse and place her 12 year-old son John in Flimby Lodge. After a short stay the widow left the Workhouse and moved to Scotland with her eldest daughter. Both found employment in a textile mill and were earning enough money to care for John, if they could be re-united.

At that time the colonies were expanding and required labour. The Cockermonth Board of Guardians had sent orphan boys from Flimby Lodge to Canada, believing they were giving their charges a better chance in life. Such a policy enabled the Guardians to reduce the number of pauper charges in their care and also the cost to local rate-payers.

John James Graham, however, was not an orphan, and his mother had requested her son be returned. The mother's letter was put before the Guardians at the same time as they were discussing matters concerning emigration. At this time John was in Liverpool, awaiting transportation to Canada. The boy's mother pleaded that as she now had a comfortable home, her son would be as well with her as in Canada. During a long argument Board member Mr J Ross made the strongest plea for the boy to be re-united with his mother, in view of her efforts to better her circumstances. Despite this plea, and Mr T Longcake stating that the family had been known to him for a long time and recommending that John James be returned to his mother, the voting was 6 to 3 in favour of emigration.

A few days later John James and other boys left the port of Liverpool. Few boys ever objected, maybe because the prospect of a new life in Canada was seen as preferable to institutional life and poverty here. At the time there were reports of ill-treatment of these youngsters – did fortune smile on John James or was Canada to be another unhappy chapter in his life?

This unhappy tale of a young Cockermonth lad has been extracted from a feature written by the late Frank Carruthers ('Whiteoak') and printed in the W.C.T.

*Gloria Edwards*

## Post Article April 2010

I spoke to Joyce Hartley shortly before she died. She recalled days back in the 1930s, and aspects of farming life long since gone. This was a time when the railway in Cockermonth played a very important part in everyday life. Irish cattle used to be brought

over from Dublin or Belfast to Silloth, from whence they would travel by rail to Cockermouth for auction. From the station they were taken across to pens on the Fairfield awaiting sale. This ground was also used as a drying ground for washing for the houses on South Street. Cattle bought by Joyce's father would be walked the six miles back to the farm at Ullock, grazing on the way. Her father would have taken the train with his dog to Cockermouth to get to the sale. From the farm the cattle were taken to the fields beside Mockerkin Tarn called Hewthwaites (part of Hilltop Farm), where they stayed until fat and then it would be back to the auction to be bought by the butchers. She recalls that, unusually, one cow came with a calf, who was nicknamed Barney (after an Irish trader by the name of Barney Hart). A popular Sunday evening walk for the children during the summer was to visit Barney. On the farm this trade finished in 1939 with the coming of the war, when all the fields the family owned at Hewthwaites and Dean Moor had to be ploughed up for oats and wheat as part of the big push to increase the amount of locally-grown food.

Gloria Edwards

## POST ARTICLE MAY 2010

An Icelandic volcano has been much in the news of late, causing so much disruption to people's travel plans, but a far more disruptive eruption happened in June 1783 when the Icelandic Laki volcano erupted and continued doing so for seven months. 10,000 Icelanders died, and in this country there was an increased incidence of illness, particularly among outdoor workers, and many deaths were attributed to the eruption. The consequences of that eruption across Europe, in this country, and indeed this region, were dramatic. Livestock was lost and harvests affected. Extreme weather, with violent thunderstorms and hailstorms, were widely reported, together with a noxious fog hanging everywhere (caused by sulphur dioxide mixing with water vapour), that only abated in the autumn. It was widely reported that the sun sometimes took on a strange blood-red colour, and sometimes remained pale and ghostly, all of which was attributed to the volcanic haze. July 1783 saw extreme heat, followed by the extremely harsh winter of 1784.

There were other strange phenomena to make people nervous; many must have believed rumours that the end of the world was nigh. The Cumberland Pacquet of 15<sup>th</sup> July 1783 reported an 'almost universal perturbation in nature' with 'All Europe shaken by some uncommon convulsions ...' The dramatic appearance of a meteor around this time (August 1783) was reported by observers the length and breadth of the country. One local observer described what was seen thus:

*"Yesterday se'ennight, in the evening, about a quarter past nine o'clock, a luminous meteor made its appearance here ... it made its first appearance in the North West, previous to which the sky was tinged with streaks of a red colour, something like the East in a morning before sunrise; but only a miniature representation. Its motion was regular and in a direction from North West to South East. It appeared to consist of a beautiful pellucid globe of fire, with a*

*long tail of a red and fiery colour, gradually tapering; and the light it emitted was little inferior to that of the sun. In a few seconds it disappeared under the horizon, leaving a beautiful and splendid train behind and, in about three minutes after, a report was heard like that of two cannons being discharged, supposed to proceed from the bursting of the meteor ..."*

*(Cumberland Pacquet 26.8.1783)*

Three years after that, in August 1786, John Bragg of Whitehaven recorded details in his diary of an earthquake that was clearly felt in Cockermouth and other parts locally.

*"Many ran out into the street in their night clothes in terror. The vibrations were strong enough in Whitehaven to throw three people to the ground ..."*

Maybe we shouldn't complain so much about the weather!

*Gloria Edwards*

## POST ARTICLE – JUNE 2010

Many people have said how much they enjoyed the Georgian Fair recently. I thought it might be interesting to get a flavour of life in Cockermouth in Georgian times. The following are extracts from an excellent little book produced by the Cumbria Family History Society – 'What Happened in Great Grandmama's Time':

1756: *A convicted horse thief was sentenced at Cockermouth to be 'publicly whipped until his body be bloody, at the post in the publick market.'* ('Register and Records of Holm Cultram' – 1929, Grainger & Collingwood)

1757: *When Joseph Wilson, the Carlisle Hangman, died he was buried at Brigham near Cockermouth, and a hangman's noose was depicted on his grave. Many people were upset at this and within three years all trace of the headstone had disappeared. According to tradition, he was said to haunt the Churchyard for many years.*

1760: *For a time during March there was a Dromedary Camel at the Globe Inn, Cockermouth. People could see this strange animal if they could afford to pay the 9d demanded for a view.* ('Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood 1756-81')

1761: *The first improved Turnpike road from Keswick was the one over Dunmail Raise to Ambleside. Many people grumbled about the cost of the new roads, but for the first time goods could be carried in carts and wagons, instead of on packhorses. Before long the Turnpike road was extended to Braithwaite, and over Whinlatter Pass to Cockermouth* ('Cumberland Heritage' – Molly Lefebure)

1777: *A peal of six Bells was placed in Cockermouth Church, and a Clock was put on the outside of the Church* ('Cockermouth – History and Guide'). N.B. This was the old All Saints' Church.

1785: Money raised locally enabled a Dispensary to be opened in Cockermouth. A Physician and three Surgeons were available to provide medical aid (Parson & White, 1829)

1800: R Woods's 'Royal Waxworks' were exhibited at Cockermouth in the 'largest caravan in the Kingdom'. The waxworks included: 'The King and Queen of England', 'Lord Nelson', 'The Unfortunate Royal Family of France', 'Adam and Eve in Paradise', 'The Four Seasons of the Year in their Proper Attitudes', 'A Striking Likeness of Mary Calder', 'A Dwarf, only 32 inches high', and many others. Entrance was: Ladies & Gentlemen -1 shilling, Tradesmen, etc – 6d. ('The Cumberland Pacquet')

Gloria Edwards

## POST ARTICLE – September 2010

*"At Cockermouth a blackamoor named Robinson Crusoe was baptised on 22 January 1773..."*

This intriguing entry can be found in Church records and is set against the backdrop of an era when the slave trade was very much part of British life. Some of our ports owe their wealth and development to this particular period, and Whitehaven was one such port that played a role in the slave trade. It is reported that sixty-five voyages to Africa for slaves were fitted out by Whitehaven merchants, the first in 1710 and the last in 1769. The tobacco trade dominated trade at this time but from the 1770s this involvement began to decline. Key players in Whitehaven were Thomas Lutwidge senior and Thomas Rumball. There is evidence that Whitehaven ships delivered slaves to at least eight markets in Africa between 1750 and 1769, with such activities concentrated on Barbados and Jamaica. These journeys involved ships such as the 'Hope', the 'King George' and the 'Montgomery'. I am indebted for this information to a paper, appearing in the Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society, Vol. XCII (1992), written by David Richardson and M M Schofield. Their article makes fascinating reading. The Rum Story in Whitehaven does, of course, give a very full and interesting account of the slave trade and conditions in which slaves were held.

POSTSCRIPT to this article:

Susan Dench (former senior Archivist at the Carlisle Record Office) delivered this year's Bernard Bradbury Memorial Lecture on 'Black History', tracking Cumberland's links with the slave trade. The lecture (which was a joint venture with the Civic Trust and the Lorton & Derwent Fells Local History Society) was held at the Kirkgate Centre on Friday 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2010.

In September we were thrilled to receive a large collection of photographs that belonged to the late Mrs Marjorie Southgate. Marjorie was a much-loved teacher at Cockermouth Grammar School who left a wonderful legacy in the form of a

photographic history of the school. We hope to make good use of this in future exhibitions.

*Gloria Edwards*

## POST ARTICLE – DECEMBER 2010

As I write this, group member Deborah has just completed the addition to our website of all the headstone inscriptions in the older half of Cockermouth Cemetery, so you can now search for ancestors. Work will get under way, with the onset of warmer weather, on recording the headstones in the remaining half of the cemetery. Also to be added are headstone inscriptions from All Saints' Churchyard, Quaker inscriptions, and Bridekirk Church (courtesy of Cumbria Family History Society, the Society of Friends, and the Vicar of Bridekirk Church respectively). Headstones provide an amazing wealth of information for family historians, and we are indebted to a small group of people who have willingly given up their time, enduring all manner of weather, to produce these transcriptions. If anyone is interested in helping record the remaining headstones, they will be very welcome – please get in touch.

We recently had an interesting email passed on to us from a group in British Columbia, Canada, who have an interest in the Cariboo Goldfields. They have been digging in historic goldmine shafts there that date back to the 1860s. Recently they found a button; so what, you might say. But this particular button (a shirt or fly button) is embossed with the words: JCW DRUMMOND, COCKERMOUTH. Now it seems that JCW Drummond, a tailor and outfitter, had a shop on Station Street somewhere between 1881/91 right up to World War II. The Canadian group wanted to find out more about the shop and were even wondering about the possibility of identifying the button's owner, since a fair number of people from this area went out to work in the mines there. The button came from an area in Grouse Creek in the Cariboo Goldfields. It was first mined in 1864 but the button was found in tunnels dating from the period 1902-5, sunk by the United Company. The company was owned by three Cariboo pioneers, Beech La Salle, Joseph Wendle and John Bowron, but there would have been a large crew working on the project.

This might sound rather like looking for a needle in a haystack, but we're looking at a relatively small customer base for Drummond's shop, so we would like to ask our readers whether they know of any ancestors who went out to mine in British Columbia during that period. The Canadian group have a database of names of miners but not many other details – please get in touch if you can help. For those interested in the goldmines, there is a website link: [www.williamscreekgoldfields.ca/history\\_devlin.html](http://www.williamscreekgoldfields.ca/history_devlin.html), and another link shows a portion of the shafts that the button was retrieved from: [www.devlinbenchmarkminingltd.blogspot.com](http://www.devlinbenchmarkminingltd.blogspot.com)

*Gloria Edwards*