

Cockermouth Post 2011

POST ARTICLE – JANUARY 2011

A well-known family name in the town is that of Chicken. Thomas Henry Chicken, who died in 1960 aged 90 years, known as Old Tom, was awarded the MBE for services to the town. Mr Chicken, of Victoria Road, served for 34 years on the West Cumberland War Pensions Committee, of which he was Chairman for the last ten years. According to the newspaper report (Times and Star, 15.6.55) his record of never having been absent from local or regional meetings was believed to be a record unequalled in the country.

Thomas's family gave distinguished military service too. Three of his five sons were members of the Territorial Army and were mobilised in July 1914. Sadly, one of those sons (Percy) was killed at the age of 18 after six months' active service abroad. Joseph Glaister and Arnold were in action in France until the end of the war. Arnold, who was Chairman of the Cockermouth Urban District Council, also served in the second World War as a Lieutenant-Colonel. Next time you visit Memorial Gardens look at the plaque on one of the gate-posts and you will find Thomas's name there, as he officially opened the Gardens on 11th August, 1956 as a war memorial. Thomas's other two sons were Nelson and Henry. He also had four daughters, Sarah, Elizabeth, Margaret and Anne.

The newspaper report credits Thomas Henry Chicken (also an Urban District Councillor for six years until 1927) with founding the Cockermouth Carnival, along with Councillor John Huddleston. Cockermouth Carnival actually had its origins back in the late 19th century as Cousin Charley's Day, but maybe in Councillor Chicken's time it became what we now know as Cockermouth Carnival, and it was certainly down to the support of Thomas and John that this proud tradition has thrived.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – FEBRUARY 2011

Summer might seem a long way off but we're thinking ahead to our summer exhibition at the Kirkgate Centre in July and August, which will focus on the Market Place area. This part of town has seen many changes and the disappearance of landmark buildings such as the Old Hall (famous for having given shelter to Mary Queen of Scots back in 1568), and the Moot Hall (a 'moot or assembly place where meetings and courts were held' according to Bernard Bradbury). The area had a large number of inns, including the Sun Inn (now 1761), the George & Dragon, the Ship (now the Castle Bar), the Red Lion, the Joiner's Arms, and many more. Some people will remember Luchini's shop and café (demolished in 1973). We have quite a large collection of old photographs relating to this area but there are relatively few for the years 1920s onwards up to the 1960s.

If any of our readers have photographs that we could scan and return, we would be pleased to hear from you. Do you have particular memories of that part of town that you'd like to share? – maybe you were one of the families who lived in part of the Old Hall? Please get in touch and pass on any information.



Our picture (circa 1950s) shows Bonnington's photographers and Linton Tweeds, located in Red House (now Carlin's and Bamboo Restaurant). To the left was Moffat's fruit and vegetable shop (now the Allerdale Court Hotel), and to the right are the petrol pumps of John and Harry Dickson's garage (later to be the Keswick Motor Co.). Note the gas lamp to the right of the picture.

Remember to keep looking at our website, where we're adding new articles and resources from time to time. We hope to add a 'rolling programme' of old school photographs shortly relating to the former Cockermouth Grammar School.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – MARCH 2011

We were contacted recently by Maureen Fisher of Lamplugh & District Heritage Society. Maureen is one of a group of former nurses who used to work at Dovenby Hall Hospital, which closed in 1997 as a hospital for the mentally handicapped. Maureen and her colleagues are writing a history of the hospital, which will focus on the people who worked and lived there. As someone who has worked there myself in the past, I can vouch for the unique place that it was, the closure of which was keenly felt by many. A moving, candle-lit Service of Thanksgiving was held outside the Main Hall on Saturday, 1st February 1997 – one candle for each of the sixty-five years of the Hospital's existence. Dovenby Hall subsequently took on a new lease of life as the headquarters for Malcolm Wilson's M-Sport organization. Part of the Hall's interior was converted to office accommodation, and a new 5,500 sq. metre car workshop was created, plus a new access road and lake. Prince Charles attended the official opening in 2001.

Prior to its hospital days, Dovenby Hall was once the principal residence of Dovenby village, situated in an estate of 115 acres (mainly woodland and parkland). The site passed down from the Dolphin family in the 12th century, via the Lucys and the Lamplughs, to the Ballantine Dykes family, who took over in 1791.

The Hall itself dates from 1154 and was built in three stages. The Norman pele tower, with its four feet thick walls, is the oldest part and is said to have been built with stones taken from the Roman road, which ran from Maryport to Papcastle through Dovenby village. In the 16th century a north and south lodge were added, and then in the 17th century further extensions were made to the rear of the hall, including the creation of a kitchen, staff quarters and additional living rooms for the owners. The estate even had its own railway station, which was used for transporting coal from the nearby Alice Pit to Maryport and Workington. The Hall was a private residence for most of its life (1154 - 1930), until its purchase by the Joint Committee for Carlisle, Cumberland, Westmorland and Carlisle Joint Committee for the Mentally Defective. Over the years the hospital slowly expanded and eventually had accommodation for 400 patients.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – APRIL 2011

The Globe Hotel has played a central part in Cockermouth life for around 300 years now. It would have been a busy hostelry in its heyday, with stagecoaches stopping there, and passengers arriving from the station (then at Low Road). The 1861 Directory mentions a stagecoach delivering mail and picking up passengers for Keswick (2.15 p.m. each afternoon, plus 9.15 a.m. on a Saturday, returning the same day). The Globe also played host to Robert Louis Stevenson when he visited Cockermouth in 1871. If you wanted a good night out in 1859 you could visit the Assembly Room at the Globe Hotel and see Wallis's panorama, which was a collection of 'dissolving' views, 'delineating travels by Railroad, Steam Boat, etc., through England, Scotland and Wales'. Views on offer depicted 'Lady in a Storm on Skiddaw, the Cumberland Cobbler, Truant Schoolboy, and the Barber and the Cook. It's a little vague as to what 'dissolving views' were, but Mr Wallis was charging one shilling for the privilege for front seats, and 6d for other seats – quite a large outlay for an evening's entertainment in 1859. He promised 'fun and laughter for the mirthful, and all classes, old or young, rich or poor, cannot fail to pronounce this Exhibition well worthy of a visit.'

Another interesting snippet regarding The Globe for 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.

(from Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood 1756-1781, ed. A Winchester)



Camels on Main Street from a slightly later era

We may be rather blasé nowadays about seeing a camel, with modern communications and ease of travel, but back then it would have been a source of great curiosity for many people. We look forward to seeing The Globe back in operation (with or without camels!).

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – MAY 2011

There was a commemoration in 1950 of the anniversary of William Wordsworth's death on a rainy day - 23rd April 1850. Schoolchildren walked through the town, carrying bunches of daffodils, to the Wordsworth Fountain (now relocated opposite Wordsworth House) in Harris Park, where there was a ceremony that naturally included the recitation of Wordsworth's 'Daffodils', by Annette Hodge from Cockermouth School. Twenty years later, on 7th April, 1970 there was a celebration of the birth of Wordsworth in 1770, which saw the unveiling of the Wordsworth bust opposite Wordsworth House by the poet's great-great-grandson, Lt. Col. J. G. Wordsworth. Schoolchildren again walked up to the park to lay daffodils at the Wordsworth Fountain.

I hadn't realised that it was in 1970 that there was a mass planting around the approaches to the town of around 27,000 daffodils. We can thank everyone involved in that programme, including people of the town who responded generously to an appeal for money to buy the bulbs, for the wonderful appearance of the town each year, when masses of daffodils announce that spring has arrived. Apparently, the Post Office produced a commemorative stamp, but rather disappointingly it carried a picture of Grasmere!

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE– JUNE 2011

Our exhibition for 2011 focuses on one of the oldest parts of town, Market Place and some of the surrounding areas. We'll be taking a look at the history of the Town Hall, which was the hub of the war effort during the years of World War II. Prior to its being brought into service as a Town Hall in 1932, it was the Methodist Church, with seating for 850 people. In those days it had a gallery around the four sides, and the front portion of the building contained the choir and organ. Bernard Bradbury tells us that the gallery was removed and an upper floor installed when it became the Town Hall. There was also a schoolroom beneath the church.

Just around the corner by the river was the site of a large hat manufactory belonging to Thomas Wilson, an employer greatly respected by his workforce. He was a Cockermouth man, born in 1791, and greatly expanded a business started by his father before him. He brought a large number of workers from the Lancashire hat trade to Cockermouth, and at one point nearly 4,000 hats were being manufactured in the town. Many people in Cockermouth were employed in the hat-making trade. Sadly, it has been impossible to track down even one of these hats from the early to mid 19th century (unless anyone out there knows otherwise). It was Thomas Wilson who had Grecian Villa built as his home (now the Manor Court Hotel). He was also closely involved in the rebuilding of All Saints' Church after the fire in 1850. A plaque in the church commemorates him:

"In memory of Thomas Wilson, hat manufacturer, of this town, who, left to his own resources in early life, by a steady course of diligence, integrity and enterprise, largely extended the trade and industrial employment of the town, and raised himself to an affluent and honourable position in society. Died January 28th 1857, aged 65 years..."

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE JULY 2011

Readers may remember that back in the January 2010 issue of the Cockermouth Post we told the story of Norman McMaster, a member of the crew of a Halifax II bomber aircraft shot down over Belgium in October 1942, and whose wristwatch had been found in the wreckage of the aeroplane. We had several phone calls as a result of that article from various people related in some way to Norman, and we were hopeful of reuniting the wristwatch with Norman's closest relatives. As it happened, the gentleman who had found the wristwatch decided he would like to keep it safely in Belgium. Jozef Simons, of the Belgian history group in Rosmeer, Belgium, subsequently sent us a report of the incident in which Norman had tragically lost his life under fire from German guns. Of the 8 crew, 5 survived, including Gordon Mellor, the navigator, who landed in an orchard when the plane crashed. He spent the next few days hiding by day and travelling under cover of darkness, living off raw carrots and potatoes in the fields. After making contact with a

local priest he eventually found his way to Gibraltar and then on to England. Now in his 90s, Gordon returned to Rosmeer in April 2010 where he met up with another surviving member of the crew, Douglas Giddens, and the two of them visited the war graves of their fellow crewmen at the Heverlee cemetery. The whole event was filmed by Belgian television and covered by the newspapers.

A couple of weeks ago I had the pleasure of meeting up with some of Norman's relatives – Linda Jordan and sister Carol from Canada, and Alan Harkness Jackson and wife Diane from Dallas, Texas, together with local man Frank Harkness. They were on their way back from Belgium, where they had been welcomed by the Belgian history group. They visited the cemetery where Norman is buried, and had also been able to visit the gentleman looking after Norman's watch. I think they were particularly struck by how the Belgian group value the history that they are preserving and, indeed, by how deeply involved they still are in all aspects of research into what happened there during the war years.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – AUGUST 2011

Were you ever a pupil at St Helen's School, a private school in the large mansion building in the Wyndham Holiday and Caravan Park near Cockermouth School? This was a private preparatory school, catering for boarders, and with a kindergarten. The headmaster on the information sheet we have gives Mr R Chatterton as headmaster, but the date is unclear. Bernard Bradbury tells us that St Helen's School was originally Harford School, housed in what is now the Terrace Bar of the Trout Hotel. It then moved to Norham House, and later to St Helen's. Girls who attended the school might be spotted around town walking in formation in their brown uniforms.

During the years of World War II the boys of Belmont School (the junior school of Mill Hill School in London) were evacuated to St Helen's School, whilst the older boys of Mill Hill School were accommodated at St Bee's School. We recently had a query from someone researching Belmont School's history, looking for information for an anniversary booklet. In our files we had a photograph of a group of boys, taken at St Helen's School in 1943, which was sent to the researcher. Amazingly, this turned out to be a group photo of all 57 evacuated Belmont boys, taken in 1943. We were told it had to be the summer term, since the boys were wearing their blue aertex shirts. In the middle of the photograph is the headmaster of Belmont School since 1937, Arthur Edward Rooker Roberts (who had succeeded his father in that post). The photo also shows the Head's secretary (Harold Alston), and a woman in uniform who must surely be Matron.

It is always a great pleasure when we can provide answers to such queries. At the same time it also solved a puzzle for us as to the identity of the people in the photograph.

Looking at the eager faces, one wonders what they went on to do with their lives, and how many of them are still alive.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE - SEPTEMBER 2011

The Rev Daniel Harrison lived at Dunthwaite House, Setmurthy. His is an interesting story; born in 1862, he became a student at Caius College, Cambridge where he was Cox of the University boat team. During his time there his successes were recorded on the cups awarded to him: 1881 Boat Race Trial Eights, 1882 Consolation Race winner, and in 1883 winner of the 180 yards Handicap, in a time of 1 minute, 19 ½ seconds. The cups that he received show all the rowers' names and their weights. When Daniel came back to Cumbria, it was to become vicar of Setmurthy Church, until his death in 1940, when he was buried in the Churchyard there.

The Harrison family had lived at Dunthwaite since 1696 and rebuilt the house in 1785. Daniel did not marry and the house passed to the National Trust upon his death. Incidentally, the house is currently being offered for rental by the National Trust. Two sisters, Mary Ann Wilson and Jane Mudie were housekeepers for Rev. Harrison, and the trophies were passed on to them as a token of appreciation for their many years of service at the house. Jane Mudie's husband was a local postman, travelling from Cockermouth on a bicycle around the outlying farms and houses. He also did service as the gardener at Dunthwaite House.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – OCTOBER 2011

As we move into Autumn, the season of coughs and colds and assorted ailments is upon us. Back in 1897, Dr John Robertson, the town's Medical Officer of Health, noted in his annual report the large number of cases of scarlet fever amongst children in Cockermouth, as well as cases of diphtheria and various respiratory complaints. People had to pay for the services of a doctor and, where people could not afford this, folk cures were tried instead. Frank Carruthers ('Whiteoak') has described some of these treatments for whooping cough:

"Take the child to a tannery and hold it over a tanning pit as the hides are being turned over, or take it to some coke ovens and allow it to inhale some of the fumes ..."

Another treatment involved shaving the child's head and hanging the hair in a bush or tree; if the hair was taken away by birds, then the infection would go too. Many Cumbrian

families kept a cake, baked on Good Friday, hanging in their kitchens to dry. If a child got whooping cough, then a piece of the cake would be ground up into a powder and given in a warm drink.

Back in the 17th century Cockermonth was affected by plague, and in 1647 191 burials were recorded at All Saints', attributed to the Visitation of plague. Since the population of the town at that time was around 1,500, this was a sizeable proportion. Cholera (a water-borne disease) was a problem in the mid 19th century, with at least 50 people in the town dying from it in 1849.

In November 1900 a strange epidemic, which came to be known as Foot and Hand disease, appeared in Cumberland. Symptoms included swelling and hardening of the thick parts of the soles of the feet, with pain in the leg muscles, and the peeling of skin from both feet and hands. Eventually, after much head-scratching, it was discovered that the cause was arsenic poisoning. Dr McKerrow of Workington went down to Manchester to see the extent of the problem for himself. The source of the arsenic was discovered in samples of sugar used to brew beer in Manchester, and with the delivery of that beer to Cumberland and its consumption, the symptoms soon began to manifest themselves. Needless to say, people became very wary of where their beer came from, and Jennings's brewery in Cockermonth, whose beer was unaffected, took full advantage of the situation to boost their sales.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – NOVEMBER 2011

Most people will be aware that the Kirkgate Centre was the former All Saints' School. We have recently been told about a pupil of the school, who was honoured for her bravery as a young woman, receiving the Military Medal from King George V at Buckingham Palace on March 3rd 1917.

Florence Williams was born in February 1897 to Annie (nee Greenhow) and Robert Williams at Herbert's Court in Market Place (a courtyard to the left of the present Allerdale Court Hotel). She attended All Saints' School, where her headmaster would have been Mr Postgate. An entry from the School Log Book for the year Florence would have started her education reads as follows:

"There are fresh cases of Mumps reported this morning; the attendance is very poor – 177 with 206 on the books. Miss White (teacher) is absent from School with a sore throat" (27th Oct. 1902).

Three days later Mr Postgate reports that the mumps epidemic is spreading, and maybe Florence too would have been affected.

Then their father Robert, a sergeant in the Border Regiment, was posted to Dublin. 1916 saw the Irish Rebellion and, on the first day of fighting (16th April) Florence watched as rebels waited to ambush the soldiers. She was unable to warn them but, under constant fire, managed to rescue several soldiers. For her bravery she was awarded the Military Medal, one of only two civilians ever to have received this award. Her Citation reads as follows:

"For service rendered to wounded soldiers in Dublin whom she assisted from the street to her mother's house, being repeatedly under fire. She also rendered valuable assistance throughout the rebellion (14-29 April 1916) by bringing bread, medical supplies, bandages, etc. for these wounded men from the Adelaide Hospital, on every occasion being under fire from rebels."

Florence, just 18 years old, described her experiences:

"Outside the Castle gates Pte W Walsh was lying bleeding, helpless, and shot through the lungs ... shots were pattering around, one striking the wall within a few feet of me. I dragged him along, and managed to get him into our house ... then I went out again and found Lce Corpl. Cox lying wounded in a hallway with a bullet through his right eye and all covered with blood. I helped him to our house and the people in the lower rooms attended him. My mother went out and found Pte Thompson. He was shot through the heart and dying ... we gave him a drink of water and did what we could for him. My mother and I assisted 4 more wounded soldiers..."

Her former headmaster, Mr Postgate, would undoubtedly have been very proud of his former pupil.

Gloria Edwards