

Cockermouth Post 2015

POST ARTICLE - JANUARY 2015

Many people will have seen the film 'Mr Turner', but I wonder how many people realise that this famous artist had a connection with Cockermouth. The then Lord Egremont became Turner's patron, and Turner frequently stayed at the ancestral home, Petworth House in West Sussex, which today houses a large collection of Turner's paintings. Turner also visited Cockermouth Castle and the picture shows his painting of the castle (1810), now held by the Tate Gallery in London.

Joseph Mallord William Turner was born in 1775; William Wordsworth, then living in Wordsworth House on Main Street, was five years old. Turner was born in London, the son of a barber, and brought up by an uncle. He had some schooling but was largely illiterate. However, as the world would discover, he had an immense artistic talent and at the age of 14 entered the Royal Academy, exhibiting a year later. Turner's focus in his paintings, of course, was the effect of light on the landscape, and colour.

George, Lord Egremont, Turner's patron, is described as being a shy man, preferring the 'company of artists and agriculturalists to that of grandees' (in 'Wyndham and Children First'), as written by John Wyndham, private secretary to prime minister Harold MacMillan (another visitor to Cockermouth Castle), and married to the late Pamela, Lady Egremont. Petworth in George's time sounds rather chaotic:

"Under him [George] Petworth House was like a huge inn with visitors coming and going as they pleased ... Guests found themselves confronted with nurses and babies, girls exercising the pianoforte, boys exercising ponies ... There were artists all over the place, some doing original works, others copying Vandycks ..."

Turner arrived at Petworth in 1809 where he was given a room to work in. Apparently, he kept the door locked, allowing no-one in except George, Lord Egremont. Turner could be quite sharp in his dealings with people; John Wyndham mentions an occasion when a visitor said to Turner, 'I never see sunsets as you paint them', to which Turner retorted, 'No, but wouldn't you like to!'. Nevertheless, he was a man of remarkable talent.

Just time to mention a website with a couple of film clips of Cockermouth – one from 1940 and the other from 1960 – www.huntleyarchives.com. If you look on YouTube and type in Cockermouth, you will find other interesting film clips too relating to Cockermouth.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE MARCH 2015

Many people travelling to and from Carlisle will have noticed the demolition work being carried out on the site of the former Moota motel, and we await with interest the future development of that site. Much is now known about Moota's past as a prisoner-of-war camp and later as a camp for Displaced Persons. Now seems like a good time to think about Moota's more recent history from the 1960s onwards, up until the closure of the Motel in 2004.

We know that Isaac (Eik) Eilbeck bought the site in 1957 and developed a turkey farm there, followed by the building of a petrol filling station. 1963 saw the opening of the Moota Restaurant, and in 1965 the Moota Motel opened. In those days it would have cost 27s. 6d per person per night, or 50s. for a double room, in those pre-decimal days. There was even a catchy little tune composed to celebrate the charms of the Moota Restaurant (sung to the tune of 'South of the Border' for those old enough to remember it!):

***South of the Border
Down Cumberland way,
Moota's the place to dine,
With food and wine,
To make you gay.
The Restaurant at Moota
Will brighten your stay,
South of the Border
Down Cumberland way.***

***Breakfast or luncheon
You'll tackle with zest
Dinner or Supper too
We'll see that you
Will have the best
And so down to Moota
In future you'll stray
South of the Border
Down Cumberland way.***

The Moota Motel became the focus for many social events – dances and dinners, society meetings, sales and fairs, as well as accommodating visitors to the area. On a personal level, many memorable New Year's Eve dinners have been celebrated in style at Moota, and in the 1980s I was one of many people to stock up from the butchery business there. In addition to the Motel and Restaurant, several businesses have operated (some still there) in the abandoned barrack huts that once housed POWs and Displaced Persons. What the museum group is looking for now, as the final part in the Moota puzzle, are all your memories/photographs of Moota from the 1960s up to the present day. It may not seem like history to you, because you lived through it and remember it clearly, but we are all part of history, and those memories need to be recorded whilst they are fresh in people's minds - please do get in touch.

POST ARTICLE – APRIL 2015

Many people will have heard of the exciting plans to create a heritage hub at the Kirkgate Centre, with the help of Heritage Lottery funding. Our group has sought for many years a greater recognition of the importance of celebrating the rich history of Cockermouth and surrounding area. Whilst many towns nearby have some presence, however small, where local heritage can be celebrated, the town of Cockermouth has been sadly lacking in that respect. We do, of course, have the excellent Wordsworth House, celebrating the life and times of William Wordsworth, but there has been nowhere to act as a base for the history of the town.

Just a few days ago the Kirkgate Centre was successful in the first stage of its application for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which will allow a start to be made on turning this dream into reality. As part of this process the Museum Group now gets a new name, the Cockermouth Heritage Group, and in due course will be looking to expand its pool of volunteers significantly. Stage 1 of the plans includes the appointment of a Heritage Engagement Officer to work with volunteers in the Heritage Group and also with a newly appointed Heritage Project Assistant. Significantly, these exciting plans coincide with the 20th birthday celebrations of the Kirkgate Centre, and there will be an event, probably in June, which will celebrate the history of the building. We hope many people in the town will want to support this. For those of you who attended the old All Saints' School, we would value your memories of those days.

The Kirkgate Centre started life as a National School in 1869, closing in 1972. It was a temporary base for the Derwent Athletics Club, and it was later saved from demolition by members of the Cockermouth Civic Trust. Peter and Barbara Colley, amongst others, played an important role in the rescue of the building, and subsequent fund-raising. It was reinvented in 1995 as the Kirkgate Centre, providing a base for theatre performances and a variety of arts activities. The intention was always there to incorporate a heritage provision, but this never materialised because of the need to rent out potential museum space to other groups. The Heritage Group had to content itself with staging occasional exhibitions, whilst amassing a growing archive of photographs, ephemera, objects and research related to Cockermouth's past. With the advent of our website we found ourselves answering regular queries, both locally, nationally and internationally. Our collections of artefacts have also been popular, being loaned to schools and residential homes for discussion purposes. The proposed plans for the Centre mean that new and inventive approaches to making use of that local history collection can be planned. Hopefully, we can soon look forward to a new chapter, when the heritage of Cockermouth and the surrounding area can take centre stage. Watch this space!

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – MAY 2015

As well as preparing for our summer exhibition in August, the Heritage Group is planning a day in June when people can relive their Cockermouth school-days. We plan to have a large photographic display relating to schools in Cockermouth, including the old All Saints'

School (now the Kirkgate Centre), Fairfield School, Cockermouth Grammar School, Derwent School, St Joseph's School, and possibly others, space permitting. The display from Cockermouth Grammar School will include framed sports team photographs, rescued at the time of the school's closure, and many photographic albums compiled by the late and much-loved Marjorie Southgate, a teacher (along with her husband Jock) at the Grammar School for many years. The purpose of this special day is to bring people together in a community event, during which we hope that many people will be willing to share memories of their schooldays, whether this be via jottings on 'post-it' notes, naming friends on photographs, writing down accounts, or perhaps agreeing to talk to a member of the group at a later date in their own homes about their schooldays.

The date for this event, 'Schooldays Revisited', will be at the Kirkgate Centre on Saturday, 13th June and will run from 10 – 4 (no admission charge). Refreshments will be provided in the form of tea and coffee, as well as biscuits and cake, so people can reminisce to their hearts' content. Please tell all your friends about this event and encourage them to come along.

This year also marks the 20th birthday of the opening of the Kirkgate Centre, and our summer exhibition will celebrate this by featuring All Saints' School in more detail, alongside our planned WWI display and other topics. We discovered that All Saints' School had a distinguished former pupil who made her mark during the WWI period in a rather special way. Florence Williams, born in 1897 and living in Herbert's Court (a courtyard to the west of the Allerdale Court Hotel), attended All Saints' School, where her headmaster was Mr Postgate. Florence's father Robert, a sergeant in the Border Regiment, was posted to Dublin, meaning a move for the whole family to Ireland. April 1916 saw the Easter Rising, when Irish rebels fought against soldiers. With great presence of mind Florence, under constant fire, managed to rescue several soldiers and drag them into her parents' home. Additionally, she worked throughout the rebellion, bringing bread, medical supplies and bandages for the wounded men from the Adelaide Hospital, despite being shot at. For her bravery she was awarded the Military Medal, one of only two civilians ever to have received this award. She collected her medal from Buckingham Palace on 3rd March 1917.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – AUGUST 2015

This year sees many national commemorations: 200 years since the Battle of Waterloo, 100 years since the founding of the Women's Institute, 100 years since the appointment of the first female police officer, 100 years since the sinking of the Lusitania, to mention but a few. Here in Cockermouth it is 150 years since the opening of Christ Church and the opening of Mitchell's Agricultural Hall on Station Street. 160 years ago five acres of land, was bought from General Wyndham of the Castle to create the Cemetery. Charles Eaglesfield was the architect who designed the two imposing Cemetery Chapels – Dissenters' Chapel on the left and Churchmen's Chapel on the right. Today, what must

have been a rather featureless piece of land, is now a place of great beauty and an oasis of calm.

Here are buried the great and the good; probably the largest memorial in the cemetery is that of George Freeman Biddall, a travelling showman and friend of Buffalo Bill. George often visited the town, putting on performances on the Fairfield, delighting folk with his Ghost Illusion Show. When he died in 1909 (in a caravan on the Fairfield) his passing was marked with huge crowds, lining the streets, as his coffin was carried to the Cemetery. There it was buried within sight of the Industrial School at Strawberry How, according to his wishes; George had entertained the boys at the School on many occasions, and he had supported many deserving causes in the town.

Here in the Cemetery you will find Robinson Mitchell (founder of the Auction Company), members of the Wyndham family of Cockermouth Castle, John Steel (MP for Cockermouth in the early 19th century), shipbuilder Thomas Williamson (of Oakhurst), to mention but a few. Here too you can find the stories of many ordinary people reflected in the inscriptions; young men who died fighting in other lands, babies and young children (sometimes from the same family and dying within days or weeks of each other), people described in terms of their occupations (churn-maker, saddler, waller, missionary, woollen manufacturer).

Inscriptions tell stories that are invaluable for family and local historians; they often include several generations and provide clues for further research. We now need volunteers to help us with the second part of a headstone recording project at Cockermouth Cemetery. If you think you might be interested in helping with this worthwhile project (the results of which will be added to our website), please get in touch. Full instructions will be given but it is very easy to do and can be carried out whenever suits you.

Gloria Edwards

POST ARTICLE – SEPTEMBER 2015

Thanks to everyone who made our recent exhibition at the Kirkgate Centre such a success. It was very well-received with lots of positive comments, and now many queries/requests to follow up. If you have asked for copies of photos or information, we will be working our way through those in the next couple of weeks or so.

One of the requests for information we received was concerning Little Mill, situated next to Tom Rudd Beck, off Skinner Street. The picture here is of Little Mill taken in 1975. We are looking for any information or photographs of Little Mill that we might be able to copy. The original mill was probably a corn mill, dating back to the 13th century, and a fulling mill in the 15th century. It seems to have had several uses over the centuries - Bernard Bradbury tells us that in 1578 it was the 'corn mill on the Lord's waste', near Long Croft (now Windmill Lane). It was leased to a tanner in 1763, and was also used by millers and flour merchants in the 19th century. It also seems to have been used as a saw mill in the 20th century. If you can supply any extra detail, then we would love to hear from you.

We also need information on Cockermouth clogmakers; there was Bigrigg's on Main Street, and another clogger that we know of at the bottom end of Kirkgate. In Kelly's 1929 Directory I found four: Thomas Holmes and John Huddleston on Main Street, Harry Montcrieff in Market Place, and John Henry Wood at 5 Kirkgate, which suggests that wearing clogs was still popular. Are there any photographs of these premises, or any other details that you know of, and when did this business come to an end in Cockermouth? More queries from our Visitors' Book: when did the Conservative Club on Main Street come into existence?; information / photos required on the former Butts Fold down St Helen's Street (roughly opposite where the Bowling Green Inn used to stand); how did Horsman Street get its name? - an easy one this: Edward Horsman was one of the two MPs for Cockermouth in the earlier half of the 19th century, when Cockermouth was still a separate constituency. Edward Waugh was the last one in 1880, and a clock tower, affectionately known as 'Neddy', was erected in his honour on Main Street, near the junction with Station Street. Unfortunately, it was judged to be a traffic hazard and was removed in 1932.

Gloria Edward

POST ARTICLE – DECEMBER 2015

Here we are at the end of another year, about to celebrate Christmas. Not so very long ago Christmas was a much simpler affair for most people because there was not much money about. Back in the early 1900s:

"People didn't have Christmas trees then; they had a Kissing Bush which hung from the ceiling in the living-room. It was made of holly and had all sorts of little toys on it and was kept up until New Year when the children got the toys. We always had full stockings on Christmas Day, with a sixpenny piece, sweets and small things like that. Then we went to church ... someone stayed at home to make the dinner. This was usually chicken and Christmas pudding, which I didn't like ..." (Annie Robinson of Maryport, in June Thistlethwaite's 'Cumbrian Women Remember', 1995)

Or how about Adela Wright's Christmas in the 1930s:

"We didn't have much money but we always managed to fill their pillow cases. In those days Woolworth's was a 3d and a 6d store, nothing cost more than 6d and they had all the games, dolls, toys cars and trinkets which were always appreciated ... In the bottom of the Christmas stocking would be some pennies, nuts, sweets and fruit. Roast goose seemed popular for Christmas dinner and a jar of goose grease was kept as an old remedy for rubbing the chest when you had a bad cold. I can still remember the smell. Whether it did any good I don't know." (from 'Yance Ower' – 'Once Upon a Time', by Clifton Oral History Group, editor Michael Gregson, n.d.)

A very different view of Christmas can be found in 'The Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood' back in the 18th century. Isaac was a lawyer and a Quaker, living in the Mosser area. He kept a diary (1756-1781), which gives a unique view of everyday, local

life. Quakers did not celebrate Christmas, and Isaac seems to have had a dim view of the festivities:

December 1775

Mon 25th – “This being Christmas Day, idleness, gaming and luxury much abound in these parts amongst most ranks of people, to the great scandal of themselves and the religious principles they pretend to profess ...” (from ‘The Diary of Isaac Fletcher of Underwood, Cumberland 1756-1781, ed. Angus Winchester, 1994)

Whichever way you choose to celebrate your Christmas, we hope you enjoy it!

Gloria Edwards