

# A COLLECTION OF VARIOUS ARTICLES ON LOCAL HISTORY

## WAR TIME REMINISCENCES FROM ELSIE HAYTON

(article written by Gloria Edwards October 2017)

Next month sees the 90<sup>th</sup> birthday of a Cockermouth lady, Elsie Hayton of Brigham Road. Elsie, like many elderly residents of the town, has witnessed changes to the town since her birth on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1927. Born Elsie McGuffie at Isel Mill, she still has her First Birthday card, sent to her by Nurse Hutton, who delivered her. Elsie's grandfather who came originally from Bewcastle, bought Isel Mill. The family subsequently moved to Ghyll Yeat, and then into Cockermouth, living for a time in Allison's yard, off the Main Street, and then at the Toll Bar house on the Gote for 26 years.

Elsie went to school at Fairfield and well remembers the evacuee children who came to the town during the war years; Doreen Hardy was one who came from Newcastle to lodge with Dr Abraham and his wife, and she and Elsie became very close friends, keeping in touch for many years after Doreen returned home. Another evacuee from Newcastle was Tom Tait, who lodged next door to Elsie on the Goat – he, Elsie and Doreen were all confirmed by the Bishop of Carlisle at Christ Church, followed by a confirmation tea at Dr Abraham's house - Kirkby House, now the Terrace Bar part of the Trout Hotel. Joan Harvey (nee Shorthouse) was sent to live as an evacuee with Miss Peel, the headmistress of Fairfield Girls, where she was extremely happy. She remembers one occasion, sitting opposite a handcuffed Italian prisoner-of-war on a bus to Carlisle, when the POW was told off by his guard for smiling at Joan – she had maybe reminded him of family back home in Italy. Evacuees and Cockermouth children took it in turns to attend school to accommodate the increased numbers, with children alternating between morning and afternoon sessions. All children had to attend school with their gas masks in case of an attack. Elsie still has a Certificate of Merit awarded to her in October 1940 by the UK Band of Hope Union, for 'Excellence in Reporting a Lecture on the Hygiene of Food and Drink', in which the use of the word 'and' was strictly prohibited! Elsie's father was a policeman and she remembers helping him to sell tickets for dances and whist drives then held at the Public Hall (this used to stand on the site of the now-closed Natwest Bank on Station Street).

After school Elsie worked for a time at Josiah Hall, the grocers on Main Street (the present Tarantella restaurant), then moving to be Clerk of Works at Harkness Mill on the Gote. She married Ken Hayton in 1959 and moved into Bridge End Cottage, where they welcomed five children into the world (sadly, losing one). Husband Ken, and his brother Ted, both worked at Miller's for many years.

## THE WORKHOUSE (written by the Heritage Group)

The old Cockermouth workhouse stood on Skinner Street, on the banks of Tom Rudd Beck. It was demolished in the 1970s.

A new workhouse was built in Gallowbarrow in 1840-3.

The average number of inmates during 1846-7 was about 230. The Cockermouth Union was run by a committee which included some of the town's tradesmen and some 'gentry'. They were obliged to account for every penny spent, so conditions in the workhouse were necessarily spartan.



The workhouse gardens were cultivated in an attempt to make the workhouse pay its way. Able-bodied inmates were required to work for up to 12 hours a day. Women inmates were required to carry out all the usual domestic tasks – cooking, scrubbing floors, washing and mending clothes –

some of them were sent to work in local houses. Younger, fit men spent long hours breaking stones to be used in road-making or road repairs.

In 1897 a Mr Murray had been less than impressed by the fact that there were 18 'imbeciles' living in a cage in the workhouse, with little room to exercise in. His suggestion that there should be a separate lunatic asylum was treated with derision. Another suggestion of his, that the inmates should have treacle sauce served with their suet pudding, was not well received either.

Women who gave birth to illegitimate children had a very difficult time and often ended up in the workhouse. Children who were orphaned or otherwise abandoned came under the care of the Guardians. Their care was put out to tender, which meant the danger of exploitation; in return for food and lodging, a carer would have in the child a cheap source of labour.

Some children found themselves working in the weaving sheds of Gallowbarrow, working long hours in harsh conditions. When some of them were discovered scavenging for food in the bins outside the Globe and the Brown Cow this caused great unease in the town and the Guardians were obliged to change the system.

### **CHRISTMAS IN THE WORKHOUSE 1877**

*"The inmates of the workhouse had their customary Christmas dinner of roast beef and plum pudding. Mrs Watson...also treated the old women lodged in the sick wards to a quarter of a pound of tea and a pound of sugar each; and Miss Benson, of St Helen's, sent tea and sugar to all the other old women who are inmates of the house. The Rev W Williams...gave snuff and tobacco to those of the old inmates who use these articles. To the children he also presented oranges, and Mr J B Banks furnished them with a supply of marbles."*

*(West Cumberland Times, 29.12.1877)*

## **UPS AND DOWNS OF A FRATCHING TOWN**

Extract from 'The Hills and Around' by Whiteoak  
'Times and Star'- January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1994.

Cockermouth has had its ups and its downs, which is natural in a town with such a very long history. "A fratching sort of town" was how I heard it described on one pre-war occasion when the town council was locking in dispute over who should have the job – and the £5 a week that went with it – of supervising the placements of hundreds of children evacuated from the North East coast.

Indeed Cockermouth's fratching has made history on occasions: only local history it is true, but history nevertheless. Like the disputes as to where Mayo's statue should be placed, and how the Waugh Memorial Clock would affect Main Street traffic when it was built, and what the difference would be when it was demolished.

When cast iron was popular as an architectural feature, and every town in England had at least one beehived-shaped urinal of this unyielding material (Workington had two), Cockermouth had its own Clochemerle situation over the siting in the middle of Main Street of its proposed cast iron convenience. The town gave up the idea completely when a local humourist drew a cartoon – published in the West Cumberland Times – of the newly established Earl of Mayo descended from his pedestal and on his way to the domed monstrosity to pay his respects to nature.

There was controversy about the memorial to the men of Cockermouth who fell in the 1914-18 war: whether there should be a monument or an extension of the Cottage Hospital. After the Hitler War there were some who favoured a new memorial, but the arguments ended eventually with the Memorial Gardens.

But Cockermouth never had a dispute as lengthy and as heated as that over the replacement for All Saints' Parish Church after the old Church had burned down in 1850.

It wasn't about the site: that had been decided by the builders of the original All Saints' centuries before.

The builders of the recently incinerated edifice had been satisfied with a less than lovely church which had been built in 1711 incorporating the older square and quite unlovely bell tower.

The parishioners determined from the start – and the first meeting was held while the ruins were still smouldering – they would have a truly beautiful church this time round.

Advertisements invited architects to submit plans for the new church and, from a large number, the rebuilding committee chose a short list of six.



Realising that a decision would be difficult to reach within the committee, at least one of whom, William Wood, should have declared an interest because a design had been submitted by his cousin, the choice was left to a York architect who was brought in as a consultant on the scheme.

In doing so the committee threw the choice wide open again because the consultant was shown all the plans which had been submitted, and not, as was originally intended, asked to make his choice from the short list.

There was consternation when the 'independent' chose the design submitted by a Mr Hay, of Liverpool which was not on the committee's short list.

The scene was thus set for a series of rows which tore the town and its people apart to such an extent that, when agreement seemed as far off as it had ever been, the local MP, Mr Edward Waugh, stepped in as arbitrator.

Meetings were held: crowded, noisy meetings which discussed the question in heated arguments out of which it seemed that agreement would never come.

There was actual violence at one meeting when William Smethurst, determined to be seen as well as heard, climbed on to the shoulders of a friend to harangue the meeting.

But Smethurst got so excited that he pitched forward off his lofty stance and fell at the feet of the chairman. Believing that this was a planned physical attack, the stewards retaliated, and the meeting ended in riot.

Because there's something in Cockermouth air which has enabled the town to produce poets at a steady rate ever since Wordsworth demonstrated that a living could be made out of it, a poem was written about the dispute which identifies some of the protagonists in the affair.

William Wood was the Borough Bailiff and an attorney, William Senhouse of The Fitz, and John Steel were also solicitors. Richard Bell was a beer seller and lived at The Goat. George Cape, one of the more vociferous of the disputants - he was later accused by Edward Waugh of brawling in the churchyard – and trying to put in a word for the ordinary parishioners, the Lord of the manor, General Wyndham.

The poem starts gently with the town's determination to have a new church:

*They raised a subscription to build it anew,  
And out of their pockets their money they drew;  
They paid without grudging; they paid without boast  
And all they disputed was who should pay most*

The unknown bard goes on to tell that William Wood would “consent to no church that’s not built by my cousin”, whilst the General says “I’ll have nothing to do with that character Hay”.

William Senhouse attacked John Steel – “a snake in the grass, and a spoke in our wheel, that pestilent fellow” – for supporting Clarke’s plan, whilst Richard Bell, supporting Senhouse said “I’ll spend my last shilling, I’ll pawn my last sark, ere Cockermouth Church shall be built by Joe Clarke.”

George Cape supported the rebuilding of “the old barn”, but eventually:

*“... a poll was demanded – they carried the day,  
Against Mr Clark, and in favour of Hay;  
By bribing and drinking they caus’d such a row,  
Some sneaked off to The Globe, others went to The Cow.”*

That, apparently, was not the end of the matter - the dispute obviously continued because the final decision went in favour of Clarke’s plan.

## THE STORY OF THE CUMBRIAN MUMMY

Gloria Edwards

They say that truth is stranger than fiction, and the story that unfolded of a mummy with Cumbrian connections bears testament to that. One Friday back in 1989 whilst reading the local “Times and Star” my eye was caught by a headline ‘Mummified Remains and a Lady Traveller’. This sounded quite intriguing, and it became even more so by the second paragraph when I realised that the article I was reading concerned a Mrs Aitken, a former occupant of the house now lived in by my family and myself in Cockermouth. I didn’t realise then that this brief article would set me off on a compulsive search to find out more, not only about Mrs Aitken and her mummy, but about other previous occupants of the house – ‘High Moor’ (then known as ‘The Knowe’).

To return to the mummy: the article described Mrs Aitken as being a great traveller who visited many parts of South America and who was especially interested in the Incas. She was, in fact, for many years part of the British community who lived in Lima, Peru, where her two sons were born.

When the boys were older they were sent off to a religious college at Melle in Belgium for their education. The college had its very own museum and Mrs Aitken decided that, to show her gratitude to the college for her sons’ education, she would arrange to have a rather special exhibit delivered to them – the mummy of an Inca princess no less. The British Consul in Tereca very kindly offered her such a mummy for this purpose and it set off on its journey, via England, to Belgium.



All was going well until it reached London, care of the London and North Western Railway, where an inquisitive and unsuspecting porter opened the packing case to investigate the contents. It was the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 1901. Imagine his horror when he discovered what he believed to be a murder victim stuffed in a packing case. His mistake was an easy one to make, unlike Egyptian mummies, South American mummies are mummified in an upright position with their knees drawn up to their chest. Naturally enough, if there had been a murder the police had to be informed and there had to be an inquest: the coroner’s jury returned its verdict ‘that this woman was found dead at the railway station ... and did die at some unknown date in some foreign country, probably South America, from some cause unknown. The jury are satisfied that this body does not show sign of any recent crime, and that the deceased was unknown, and about 25 years of age’. Needless to say, the national press, at home and abroad, had a field day with this story.

The mummy continued on its weary way, repackaged and destined for Belgium. Unfortunately, by the time it reached its destination, because it had been disturbed and exposed to the air, it had started to decompose and no longer smelt quite as pleasant as it had done at the start of its journey. Having arrived at Melle, the order was given by the Belgian authorities for the mummy to be buried in the local churchyard.

I saved the newspaper cutting and put it hopefully into my 'House File' to await further investigation. It so happened that a year or two later my husband and myself had decided on a long weekend break in Bruges, not a million miles away from Melle, and so it came about that a rather reluctant husband found himself scouring every tombstone in the cemetery at Melle for signs of an Inca princess. We weren't having much luck and then I spotted two gardeners tending graves and decided to have a word with them, hoping they would at least get the gist of my quest, 'Je cherche une momie – une princesse des Incas'. This didn't go down too well, evincing much shoulder-shrugging and rolling of eyes. I was led to an office where I repeated the same message to the workmen's boss at the other end of a telephone line. Again, no luck, so we decided to hedge our bets and head for the local library. They too were unable to help us and we were forced to admit defeat. Two weeks after our return to England I was surprised to receive a letter from the library in Melle to say that they had made some investigations and – yes – they could confirm the existence of a mummy and furthermore they thought it rather extraordinary that we had made them discover something they hadn't known about at all!

Enclosed with their letter was a booklet in French, running to 22 pages, detailing the history and the fate of the poor mummy, including the subsequent court case in London when Mrs Aitken sued for damage to her mummy. In its introduction it describes how, 'the beautiful princess Pocaontas II, the last of the Incas, left the sun-drenched country of her dreams and came to be lamentably stranded in the cemetery of Melle village.' Pocaontas was around 500 years old. The booklet details, in an incredulous tone, investigations by the English police and their discussions with their Belgian counterparts and bemused staff at the religious college – the Belgians obviously found the whole episode quite ridiculous, and the English police officers, who travelled to Belgium to interview parties involved, are portrayed as being bureaucratic and pedantic. In short, we were the laughing stock of Europe over this incident.

'The Standard' newspaper described the discovery of the 'body' thus:

'A horrible discovery was made on Monday morning at Broad Street Station. The body of a young woman was found in a chest which was addressed to a museum on the Continent.... The body was so to speak folded in two, but the only trace of violence was a slight wound on its neck. The station detectives were summoned immediately, and all the indications were that an abominable crime had been committed. '

Mrs Aitken back in England received a letter from Monsieur Ernest at the college in Melle informing her of the events;

*'Madame*

*You will be moved by the lamentable end of your poor mummy. She arrived last Saturday. On Sunday, after a visit from the local authorities, I received a letter ordering me to have her buried without delay in the cemetery. One can only suppose that the sea air and atmosphere of England brought about her decomposition. I am deeply upset that your generosity and your kindness should have been thus rendered in vain...'*

Mrs Aitken promptly issued a writ against the railway company and claimed damages with interest from them. The case came before the King's Bench on 9 December 1901. As in the European press, there was intense amusement that an inquest had been opened on a mummy, so much so that the Clerk of the court upset his ink-pot amidst the hilarity in the court room. Mr Kemp, acting on behalf of Mrs Aitken, asserted that she was entitled to claim not only the £45 she had paid in shipping costs, but also an amount for the value of the mummy. A key point of argument in this trial centred around whether a mummy could be owned as a piece of merchandise (and therefore have a value), or whether – as a corpse – anyone could have the right of ownership over it. The Chairman of the Court pointed out that there was no right of ownership over a corpse. This created further puzzling questions – when does a mummy cease to be a corpse? (answer: uncertain) Isn't a corpse always a corpse? (No – but once a corpse has become a mummy, it is always a mummy). The Chairman noted that the Belgian authorities

had treated Pocaontas as a corpse (having buried her in the cemetery), to which the plaintiff's counsel replied: 'People do funny things in Belgium.' The Chairman declared that he would leave this question for the jury to ponder and he hoped that the case would determine statute law henceforth.

Mrs Annie Aitken herself appeared before the Court to give evidence. She is described as being a lady of 'respectable age, with the beautiful grey hair of a marchioness'. She described how the mummy was in a perfect state of preservation when last she saw it in South America. 'I watched over it myself. She was in a sitting position and it made me hope that she would arrive safely in that position'. (much laughter in the court) There was further laughter when Monsieur Ernest's letter was read out – in particular, the sentence: 'I shall never think of the mummy without thinking of you, madame'.

The jury retired to consider its verdict and found in favour of Mrs Aitken. She was granted the sum of £75 damages and interest.

And thus ends the sad story of Pocaontas II and her Cumbrian connections.

## **Cockermouth Bank for Savings**

Jack Storey

February 2018

Number Four Main Street, Cockermouth was built in 1846 and housed Cockermouth Bank for Savings and the Mechanics' Institute. The clock was made by Christopher Tatham of 50, Main Street. The building is now used by a solicitors' office and last year they cleaned out the loft. Amongst other things there were 180 passbooks for the Cockermouth Bank for Savings. They all applied to local residents who had closed their accounts in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

The bank was established on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1818, with a Treasurer, a Secretary, an Auditor, six trustees and 26 directors. The list gives us the great and the good in Cockermouth in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The aim of the bank was to encourage individuals of the Labouring Class in Cockermouth and the Neighbourhood to save. This served to enable the bank to invest in factories, roads and railways, whilst it might enable the saver to avoid the Poor House after they finished with paid work and lost their tied accommodation.

The interest rate was between 2% and 3% and accounts were limited to £150, with an annual limit of £30. The Bank was only open on Saturday Evenings from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m., although Monday 12-1 p.m. was added later. The first pass books were printed by T. Bailey & son, and later by D. Fidler of Main Street, Cockermouth.

The pass books reveal that Special General Meetings were held on 1st December 1846, 15th January 1850, 1st June 1858, 23rd January 1861, 22nd December 1863, 25th June, 1873, 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1875, 23rd December 1879, and the 15th December 1891. At each S.G.M. officials were elected. There were only two treasurers in at least 45 years, the first was Joseph Sanderson followed by Joseph Brown. The secretary was Jonathan Cooper, followed by Elizabeth Cooper and then F. Ashley Cooper. The various auditors were John Steel, Abraham Robinson, Thomas Wilson, Robert Richardson, John S. Hellon and Robert C. Shawyer. The list of trustees contains Robert Benson, William Bragg, Rev. Edward Fawcett, Abraham Robinson, John Steel MP, William Wybergh, Richard Bell, Rev. G.R. Hoskins, John Wybergh, Lieut. Gen. Wyndham MP., Joseph Banks, Edward B. Steel, William Wood, Jonathan Ashley, Joseph Banks, Richard Bell, Rev. H. L. Puxley, Henry Bell, Rev. Canon Hoskins, Richard Senhouse, Rev E. Green, Rev. H. Dodgson, Edward Waugh, Joseph Bowerbank, Rev. W. H. Parker, John Robertson and H. P. Senhouse. The 26 directors changed regularly and there are too many to list in this article.

Amongst the books is a lovely letter, in exemplary writing, from Mary E. Craghill of Pembridge Cottages, Keswick. It was written in June, 1895, and asked for £50 to be moved to the Cumberland Union Bank. There is also a Balance Sheet for the year ending 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1894. This reveals that the majority of the Bank's deposits were with the Commissioners for Reduction of National Debt, a total of £33,667-11s-5d.

## BRIGHAM'S CUCKOO ARCH, AND STRANGE TALES

Gloria Edwards

We had a query recently regarding the demolition of a Cuckoo Arch, since one lady had memories of walking under it when she was courting in the 1930s. She had read that it was demolished in 1932 and so decided she must have been imagining walking underneath it. However, there were **two** Cuckoo arches – one at Workington (demolished in 1932) and one at Brigham, which would have been in existence in the 1930s. This arch was taken down in 1948 to allow taller vehicles to pass underneath, and the road was made wider, following a fatal road accident. The arch was part of a footway from Brigham Hill Mansion to the old quarries, which formed part of the 'wild garden' of the big house. The contract for demolishing the bridge was held by John Wilson, who began work at 9 a.m. and had the road clear again by early afternoon, quite an achievement. Maybe someone out there knows why the Cuckoo arches were so called, and whether there are other such arches in existence elsewhere.

As far as I am aware, there were no ghoulish or spooky goings-on underneath the Cuckoo arch, but I have had a request for any such stories relating to the Cockermouth area. We know the story of the demise of the Carlisle hangman, falling to his death from the old Cocker Bridge, whilst carrying a heavy load, with no-one coming to his assistance. We know that Gallowbarrow is so named because the gallows stood at the top of it, roughly near the junction with Brigham Road. We also know about the infamous murder of poor Ann Sewell at Beckhouse, Embleton for which George Cass was hanged at Carlisle in 1860. There are numerous drownings in the Cocker and Derwent reported in the West Cumberland Times. Once we had a query for information about a house in Challoner Street, where children's voices were sometimes inexplicably heard - the house had been a school in Victorian times. We have also been told about so many subterranean tunnels that Cockermouth would seem to have its very own underworld. One such story claimed that there used to be a tunnel from the Old Hall that stood in Market Place at one time, accessed via steps in a large fireplace, going underground and surfacing in a crypt at All Saints' Church! Can anyone verify this tale, or come up with any other interesting tales? We would love to know about them