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MOURHOLME LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

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THE MOURHOLME MAGAZINE  
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THE POOR LAW NEXT DOOR: Pauperism in Bolton-le-Sands, 1831-2

J. D. Marshall

As is well known, the thirties of the last century brought a vast change in the organisation of poor relief in England and Wales, represented by the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which laid down that groups of parishes should combine into a Poor Law Union, each with its own workhouse. The idea behind the re-grouping was to build a 'deterrent' workhouse, which would make the said building a place of last resort for any person without work.

The famous Act of 1834 was held not to be very useful or helpful in Lancashire, since new jobs and wealth were being created daily, and the most likely occupants of the hated workhouse were likely to be sick or helpless people. Nevertheless, rural parishes in the county did have their problems, and we have some information about this in the midst of a vast survey carried out in 1832, the report of the Poor Law Commission, which sent surveyors (or Assistant Commissioners) all over the country to garner such information. The results of the survey were printed, and they are available on microcard in the library of the University of Lancaster (not, it must be said, reproduced with total clarity), or, better still, at the Central Reference Library, Manchester, where the original volumes - the best being called 'Answers to the Rural Queries' - can be consulted. They are likely to be catalogued under 'Poor Law Commission.'

Sadly, there was no report for Warton, but there is one for Bolton-le-Sands township, and this gives us something of an insight into the lives of our poorer inhabitants of a century and a half ago.

It is always a good idea to read the findings of the Answers to the Rural Queries in conjunction with the details in the 1831 Census, which gives much

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The Society is named after the Manor of Mourholme, the home of the medieval Lords of Warton. Their seat, Mourholme Castle, stood on the site now covered by Dock Acres Quarry.

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Yearly subscription, £2.50, includes evening lectures and field trips (guest admission 40p), and The Mourholme Magazine of Local History (non-member price 30p).

Application for membership should be made to Mrs J. Chatterley, 173A Main St, Warton, Lancs LA5 0QF.

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Contributions of articles, notes, queries, letters, etc, are invited and should be sent to Mrs N. Thomas, The Gables, Silverdale, Lancs LA5 0TX, Tel 701230.

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useful information of a statistical kind. Hence, in 1831, Bolton-le-Sands had 695 people, divided into 142 families, of which 39 were mainly dependent on agriculture, but 48 on trades and manufactures or handicrafts. A glance at Baines's Directory of 1824 suggests that some of the latter occupations were created by the canal traffic - there was a coke burner, and of course a 'Packet Boat' Inn, just as there were lime burners at nearby Nether Kellet. But most of the non-agricultural families were concentrated in Bolton township, a very important point.

No fewer than 50 labourers in Bolton township made their livings in agriculture (1832), and both the census and the survey are in agreement here. There were also 17 farms occupied in the township, and, of these, ten employed labourers, some of whom (it appears from the survey) were farm servants who would be hired at the twice-yearly fairs. There were, in addition, 17 non-agricultural labourers. The general picture suggests that there were various small tradespeople and craftsmen working on their own account, and that the locality had a good many retired people of no occupation at all, including some gentlefolk.

For some reason that is not fully or clearly specified, Bolton-le-Sands township did have something of a pauper problem. The 1832 survey give details of the poor rates paid in 1831, but also in the three preceding census years, and these were well above the Lancashire average (which was low, at about 5s, or 6d a head a year), but, on the other hand, they weren't high by comparison with most of the parishes and counties of England. Bolton-le-Sands was not a refuge of idleness, in other words, but it did have some very poor people. In 1832, the township - as reported by Thomas Birkett, the overseer, and his assistant, one Nelson - had 31 persons in receipt of some form of relief at the time of the survey, and a further six who were kept in a workhouse elsewhere. Of the 31 persons, it was remarked that some of them were 'with large families.'

This gives the key to at least some of the pauperism. Wages were low, and much depended upon whether a couple with a large family could find employment for the children. It is known, thanks to the same 1832 survey, that some families found their way to Galgate, where the children could sometimes find work in the silk mills there. But there were no such easy outlets on the coast near Bolton. When the 1832 Commission asked 'what employment is there for women and children?', the reply came, 'gathering cockles on the sand'. It was also revealed that women and older children might earn some money at harvest time, as much as 1s or 1s 3d a day. The overseers even went on to say that 'a man with a family makes a good living with fishing and catching cockles'. But when the next question asked bluntly, 'can it, (the family) lay by anything?', the equally blunt answer was 'no'. In other words, you couldn't save for your old age.

The Commission sought details of wage payments, but, although it touched on earnings, which are not the same thing at all, it did not really disentangle the two. Hence, we are told that wages were 2s 6d a day in summer, that is on the farms, and 2s a day in winter. But, unless you were a farm servant, and paid by the six-monthly period with your keep deducted, you did not necessarily receive an average of 12s to 15s a week all the year round. Many of the local correspondents for Lancashire settled for 10s to 12s as being the most likely average, and the north of England was a high-wage area because of the competition from industry!

A number of other interesting facts emerge from the survey. Cottage rents were £3 to £5 a year, and they could, accordingly, take as much as one-fifth to one-quarter of a family's income. It appears, too, that a good many of the better-off local people were rentiers - they made a living by house and cottage renting speculations. But, although cottages might be let, land for allotments or potato patches evidently was not, so the poor man couldn't ease his lot

markedly in the way of food-growing for his family. It was pointed out that some of the cottages had gardens, but that, again, would presumably affect the rent. What is more, all the cottages were liable to carry a poor rate charge, very much as we pay general rates today.

The Bolton overseers observed that there was very little unemployment in the township - it occurred 'seldom' - and it is interesting to observe that even where there were conditions for competition, with work available, wage rates remained low. It is fair to add that many or most of the farmers in the locality were small farmers, without much capital, and they could not pay high wages or provide decent accommodation.

It is often complained today that families on public assistance can obtain more in such relief than they would earn when in normal employment. Very nearly the same could happen in Bolton-le-Sands in 1832. A 'deserving' man with a family would be given relief at the rate of 2s a head of his family, and would perhaps obtain a total of 10s in this way. Not for nothing has an eminent writer on the Poor Law, Mark Blaug, claimed that this former or pre-1834 system was 'a welfare state in miniature', but if we could look more closely at what happened in those days, we should find, as Blaug pointed out, that people were simply kept alive at a low rate of subsistence or nutrition.

It is also interesting to note, from the survey, that according to the Bolton overseers, local labourers did not become less industrious because there was a basic concern for their welfare - nor did they change their employment more frequently. When out of work, they were not supplied to farmers as subsidised labour (this happened in some southern counties, but rarely in the north), and family allowances were kept for 'deserving' cases, as we have seen, but not according to any scale based on the price of bread or flour. This arrangement was said to be a scourge of parishes throughout England, but the argument that it did much harm is now regarded with great scepticism.

Since most readers will readily agree that the study of the poor is just as important as the study of the better-off, and one must study the whole of local society to make sense of it, then the 'Answers to Rural Queries' is a valuable source of information. The next local places, and the nearest, to be dealt with apart from Bolton-le-Sands are Burton-in-Kendal and Ellel (including Galgate), and, after that, and travelling north, Dalton, Church Coniston and Hawkshead. Lancaster is dealt with in a separate volume called 'Answers to Town Queries'.

The background to the Poor Law in this period is dealt with in three very useful handbooks:

Anne Digby, The Poor Law in Nineteenth Century England and Wales (Historical Association, General Series, 104, 1982).

J.D. Marshall, The Old Poor Law, 1795-1834 (Studies in Economic and Social History, new edition, 1985, Macmillan, £1.95).

Michael E. Rose, The Relief of Poverty, 1834-1914 (same series and publisher as above).

My own survey, for what it is worth, has sold 20,000 copies and has just been totally overhauled.

Every parish has its peculiarities, and Warton records will show plenty of these; but one cannot study local material without background, a point to bear in mind. That is why we are glad to do our bit towards training local historians at the nearby university.

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## THE PLACE OF LITERACY

B. Clarke

"I see no point in reading" (Louis XIV, 1638-1715)

There has been some interest in local levels of literacy in the 17th to 19th centuries (J.D.Marshall at the Mourholme Society in 1982; N.Thomas and J.Chatterley in the Mourholme Magazine). Dr Marshall thought that literacy in the north-west was high from the 17th century on and that this showed the value placed on education in northern England. Mrs Thomas, using the limited measure of the percentages of men and women who signed their names at marriage, found Warton men well up to the standard of Dr Marshall's sample of north Lancashire parishes, and the women above the average of their sex. In Silverdale in the 18th century a similar percentage could sign. The significant rise in the figures there since the late 17th century could be related to the activities of an exceptional man, James Atkinson, curate and schoolmaster, and to the educational endowments ('to teach boys and girls to read and write') which carried on the work after his death in 1727.

At Warton there had apparently been some teaching in the 15th century at the school held in the chantry chapel of the church, presumably by the priest. (Cartmel Fell church still retains a partitioned-off school area.) Near the end of the 16th century a Free Grammar School was founded at Warton, presumably for boys, and other schools appeared in the area in the next century or so, including the Friends' school in Yealand Redmayne parish (Briggs, 1983).

Lupton, a few miles north-east and then a chapelry of Kirkby Lonsdale parish, had a schoolmaster among its 150 inhabitants in the 17th century, though there was no school; perhaps he taught in his own house, like a contemporary at Killington. From the

mid-16th to the early 18th century, half the men of Lupton signed their wills; only one of ten women initialled hers, the rest using marks. Twenty-six of 146 Lupton inventories mentioned books, but only one, from an early Quaker family in 1679, named any - Book of Martyrs, Eusebius, Bible, Josephus (Macfarlane, 1978). But the range of available general reading matter was very restricted for rural populations and often confined to almanacks and popular pamphlets hawked at fairs or by bagmen. Their contents would tend to be read by only a few and disseminated orally. Universal reading ability was still not an urgent social need, and for a majority there were few occasions when it mattered to be able to write.

The authors of an 18th century history of Cumbria remarked that 'it is a rare thing in this county, to find any person who cannot both read and write tolerably well.' This begs the question of how representative were the persons they met, of course. More widely - we mostly take historical evidence of literacy for granted as a progressive social sign, but we can wonder how important it was in life for a large majority of people in rural (and indeed urban) communities. History is said to give a perspective on the present, but the present can sometimes provide a perspective on the past, as here with an individual case.

It is difficult, researchers find, to elicit people's memories of their education. They will talk of friends and games and anything but the process of being taught: it involved constraints and too many moments of felt inadequacy or humiliation to be recalled comfortably. But one farmer in the Lupton area, an open man, does remember a good deal about an education in the early 1950's which turned him out in the end below average in fluency of reading and writing despite plenty of intelligence. 'John' (to give him a name for the present purpose) was the only child of a farmer, middle-aged at marriage. He went to the village school, which had about 18 pupils and one teacher. The building was adequate, with two

fires and a central stove; meals were delivered from Kirkby Lonsdale at first. The teacher was strict, not a very clear explainer or patient, and was quick to punish with slaps or (later) 'lines'. John found he forgot the letters and numbers he had picked up before school, and became diffident in class. He was left to find his own pace and, when doing reasonably for him, was only told he had a long way to go. His parents left him to the school and did not visit the teacher. At home his pastimes were practical, not reading. (A Commons Select Committee has just been told of the importance of parental interest in hearing a child's reading; even if the parent is illiterate, the sense of what is read can be monitored.)

Later, an assistant teacher was appointed and the classroom divided. John, with the junior group, now had to work and made some progress, which his parents noticed. The school also had a canteen built, and meals were cooked there with the help of local women. They thus had a contact with the teacher, who could take an extra interest in their children. John has had a touch of class-resentment over this, though in fact the village's social gradient is not steep, and he also believes he would have had more attention if his mother had pushed. (There is, by the way, no reason to think him dyslexic.) In lessons he felt 'vulnerable as teacher's target' and 'timid' under her strictness. The pupils divided into three groups - those who got 'high-light attention', those who 'got by' and 'the struggling end' (John's group) who were not encouraged.

John did not take the eleven-plus examination, but spent his last years at a Kirkby Lonsdale school and came on more rapidly. On leaving he was told that he would have caught up in another half-year. He regrets not having gone on to night school but at the time was glad to leave: school had been 'heavy going and not anything to be desired'. Apart from reading he was still unsure with numbers and knew little of geography; he could not take in history at all because of weakness in reading. On the other hand, he could

always cope with machines from an early age; he has an unusually strong spatial sense and is quick at working with manuals and diagrams on major dismantling or repair. He is only diffident in formal matters. (He now has a charitable view of his teacher, despite her strictness then.)

Reading has improved over the years, though he doesn't think he has read a book in his life. He can cope with a lot of words but reading unseen is difficult. He is still weak on numbers and sometimes likes help in checking change; but so do many in a period of altering coinage. He takes a couple of farming papers, but is very selective in what he reads in them. He has for long been much involved with an evangelical chapel and has spoken, sung and recited and can take a meeting, with an extempore sermon. Limited literacy has held him back here, for he would have wished to become a qualified preacher.

At work the pressure is less. Official forms are inescapable, but his wife takes charge of those and of most letters. In day to day work the literacy standards required are not high, in fact. Kendal market is well organised, so that sales call for little writing - an address card, farm number, numbers of animals in sale. In paying out, John just pushes his cheque-book across for the payee to fill it in, and has practically never been refused.

But that last is not an individual quirk or inadequacy. It is a common custom in the area (and is other areas also), and perhaps a sign of social cohesion, at least among farmers. This and John's experience suggest that even in an age of forward technology and a large amount of print basic rural functioning doesn't depend on high literacy. An historical implication is that one needs to be cautious about facilely taking low literacy in the past to be an indication of incompetence, lack of sense or a limited grasp of the world. This often seems to be an assumption made in general historical writing; conversely, the significance of the growth of literacy in the past can be overestimated. Current

excavations of iron-age forts in southern Britain are disclosing a network of communities with a structured society and a developed economy stable for up to half a millennium until shortly before the Romans came. The people seem to have been illiterate at all levels - for there was no writing.

## NOTES

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Nicholson, J. & Burn, R., The History...of Westmorland and Cumberland (1777).

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SILVERDALE IN 1563

N. Thomas

The earliest survey of the Manor of Silverdale that I have so far discovered was made in 1563. It is also the most detailed survey and of very great interest in what it tells us about Silverdale. The entire document, called 'A Summary of Silverdale Tenants in Queen Elizabeth dayes with the Rents, boons and hens paid,'\* is reprinted below with some very brief notes which I hope will help readers to better understand it.

The first point to note is that the Manor is called the 'Moiety of the Manor of Silverdale'. At the end of the 12th century Henry de Redmayne gave half of his lands of Silverdale to Cartmel Priory. There are a few 15th and 16th century rentals showing that Cartmel did indeed hold and collect rents from Silverdale. At the dissolution of the monestaries, Cartmel's lands in Silverdale passed into the hands of the Crown, and from the beginning of the 17th century they were turned over to various fee farmers, ie. men who bought the right to receive the income from the tenancies. The other half or moiety of de Redmayne's Silverdale lands at some time became the Manor of Silverdale, held by a Lord of the Manor. It is the "Customary Tenants and Tenements" of this Manor that the document describes. It is obviously important to realize that it describes only half of Silverdale.

Because the survey tells us what each tenement consisted of, not only in acreage but in enclosed fields as well as 'pieces' or strips in the 'Common fields', it gives us an idea of how much of Silverdale's common arable acreage was enclosed by 1563. Some clumps of tenements, you will notice, consisted entirely of enclosed fields, with no Common field pieces.

And of course it give us a fine insight into the customs of the place, and its problems.

What it does not do is to tell us explicitly where these tenements were, but it tempts us with clues. Cove Hill is identified, as are three Waterslack holdings, and there are two 'Boodhams' tenements which are probably today's 'Bottoms' [though could Beetham be the derivation?].

The Tithe Map of 1846 and the Manor Court records together, however, add enough further information to enable us to see that the survey does have an order, and that it does in fact go around the Manor tenement by tenement clockwise starting at 'Boodhams'. Those two tenements were roughly where Bottoms is now and probably represent a division of what had once been a single large tenement. John Burrow's tenement was definitely Bank Farm. A deed exists which shows that a John Burrow sold the tenement in 1597 to John Bisbrowne in whose family it remained for the next 300 (minus a few) years. Between Bottoms and Burrow's come 'Stamhawe' and Crosers. Stamhawe must have been at the Green and probably encompassed about half of what was then the Green. It was very soon to be divided into four smaller holdings. Crosers was probably at Emesgate. After John Burrow's, the next three holdings were at the Cove. They present a bit of a problem since only two Cove Customary Tenements are clearly identifiable in the later Court records. The next holding was William Browne's at Oak House [now Oak Cottage] at Elmslack. The next six tenements were all located at Elmslack and eastward along the side of the hill between the Chapel and the 'Common Pasture' (now Eaves Wood). Two of these survive as 'housesteads', Elmslack Cottage and Gillian House (with the datestone I.B. 1744), but the others were swallowed up in the next two centuries by the estate first called Hill House and later Woodlands. Townson, Browne and Kenny all held tenements at the Row, and the last three, we are told, were at Waterslack.

Several prominent Silverdale places are obviously omitted from the survey: Challan Hall, the dwellings at Red Bridge, Cray Green at the Green, and Bradshaw

Gate. A tenement at the Cove, one at the Row, and another at Waterslack are less obvious omissions. The simplest answer is that these were part of Cartmel's moiety of Silverdale, and without doubt most of them were just that, but there are a few complications to that theory which will have to await a fuller examination at another time. It is interesting to note, however, that the division of Silverdale which took place in the 12th century seems to have been not so much a 'partition' as a selective allocation of holdings in certain of Silverdale's settled places.

The Moiety of the Manner of Silverdale in Warton in the County of Lancaster:

The view thereof taken the 10th day of August in the fifth yeare of the reigne of Quiene Elizabeth by Thomas Golding servant to Thomas Kitson Esqr by the Tenants of the said Thomas Kitson there.

Mabell Saul, widow of Thomas Saul

One Tenement 1A & 1R of arrable land lying in a Close called Boodhams Close

One Close lying at the North end of the said Tenement=1A

Close called Slackwood=2A

2A of arrable lying in 7 pieces in the Common feild

Rent 11s Boons & Hennes 2/1

Robert Hawden

One Tenement called Boodhams, late Robert Hodgsons with one Orchard and Hemp garth together=1R

1 arrable Close lying at the South end of the house of  $\frac{1}{2}$ A

Moiety of one Close called Boodhams Close=1A & 1R

Close called the Lapott Close= $\frac{1}{2}$ A

$2\frac{1}{2}$ A lying in the Common feild in 7 pieces

Rent 10s Boons & Hennes 2/1

## Robert Taylor

One Tenement called Stanhawe, late Nicholas  
Turners with a yard and a Hemp garth adjoining= $\frac{1}{2}$ A

One Close lying at the Northend of the same yard  
and Hempgarth= $\frac{1}{2}$ A

One arrable Close lying at the North end of the  
same Tenement=1R

$2\frac{1}{2}$ A lying in 8 pieces in the Common feild

Rent 8s Boons & Hennes 2/1

## John Croser

One Tenement, late Nicholas Croser

One arrable Close lying on the North West syde of  
said Tenement=2A

2A &  $1\frac{1}{2}$ R lying in 4 pieces in the Commonfeild

Rent 7s Boons & Hennes 2/1

## John Borrow

One Tenement, sometye John Borrow his fathers  
with two severall arrable closes adjoyning=3A

1A in the Common feild in 2 pieces

Rent 7s Boons & Hennes 2/1

## John Wilson alias Baccus

One Tenement sometye Leonard Hawden with one  
Hemp garth adjoyning

2 arrable closes together 2A

a butt upon the Highway towards the North

Rent 3s Boons & Hennes  $9\frac{1}{2}$ d

## Regnald Jackson

One Tenement sometye Peter Jackson with 4  
arrable Closes environing the said house=7A

Rent 6/8 Boons & Hennes 2/1

## Thomas Jackson

One Tenement called Cove Hill with one Hemp garth  
adjoyning to the North end of the same

3 arrable Closes on the West syde of the sayd

Tenement=3A

Rent 3/4 Boons & Hennes 11d

## William Browne

One Tenement sometye William Brownes with one  
arrable Close lying at the West end= $1\frac{1}{2}$ A

$\frac{1}{2}$ A lying in the Common feild in 3 peices

Rent 3/8 Boons & Hennes 2/1

## Ellin Jackson, widow John Jackson the elder

One Tenement

2A arrable land thereunto belonging lying in 5  
peices in the Common feilds

Rent 3/4 Boons & Hennes 11d

## Margaret Jackson, widow John Jackson the younger

One Tenement

2A arrable land thereunto belonging lying in 5  
peices in the Common feilds

Rent 3/4 Boons & Hennes  $12\frac{1}{2}$ d

## John Jackson

One Tenement late Humfrey Jackson with an arrable  
Close lying on the North part=1R

4A lying in 9 peeces in the Common feild

Rent 7s Boons & Hennes 2/1

## Thomas Johnson

One cottage with  $\frac{1}{2}$ R arrable land lying at the  
north east end of the same

4A arrable land at the South west end of the same

Rent 2s Boones 8d

## John Birkett

One Cottage with  $\frac{1}{2}$ R of arrable land lying at the  
Northeast end of the same

Rent 2s Boons 4d

## John Birkett

One other Cottage with  $\frac{1}{2}$ r of arrable land lying  
at the Northeast end

Rent 2s Boons 4d

William Towenson

One Tenement, late Robert Crosers, with one Orchard at the North end

2A arrable land lying in the Commonfeild

Rent 4s Boones & Hens 2/1

Alice Browne, widow of Robert Browne

One Tenement with an orchard lying on the Northeast part of the said Tenement

2A lying in 2 peices in the Common feilds

Rent 4s Boones & Hens 2/1

Ellen Kenny

One Tenement late William Kenney with 1½R arrable land on the Northwest syde of same

4A arrable land lying in 10 peices in the Common feilds

Rent 8s Boones & Hens 2/1

William Willson alias Bacchus

One Tenement in Waterslacke with one Hempland lying at the Southeast end of the same

1 arrable close lying at the Southeast end of the same Hempland=½A

Rent 2s

John Clarkeson

One Cottage in Waterslacke sometyne Regnald Jacksons and late Margaret Jacksons

With one arrable Close therunto adjoyning the northwest syde of the said Tenement=1A

Rent 3s

John Hawden

One Cottage in Waterslacke late Thomas Hawdens with one arrable Close lying on the Northwest syde of the same=1A

One other peice of arrable land called an

incroachment=1R

Rent 3s

The moytie of the rent of aweswater mosse within Sylverdale which is a kinde of Marsh ground whereon the Tenants there usually dry their Turffe which is their Common and onely Fewell and lyeth within Sylverdale amounteth to

Rent 3s payed at Pentecost onely

The Summe totall of the rentes in Sylverdale

£6.18.0½

Moss Rent 11s 15½d

Tenements £6.06.7

We the Tennants of Sylverdale confesse that every sevynth yeare they double the rent to the Lord which they call their Towne terme and they further confesse that the said seventh yeare wherein the same was due ended at Martinmas last 1562.

Item that the Henne Sylver and Worke Sylver due for boones as aforesayd is yearly paid at Martinmas and all the other rents are due at Pentecost and Martinmas by equall portions.

Item that Tennants aforesaid in Sylverdale have liberty of Common for there Stirkes and Sheepe upon a certaine waste ground lying within the Mannour of Sylverdale together with the Queens Tennants the which waste ground is a very barren ground and very full of stones and he that hath most Cattell therupon keepeth not above two stirkes and sixe ewes the which Ewes they mylke.

Item the said Tennants have further libertie of Common for their steers onely in a certain ground sometyne planted with trees called Sylverdale wood containing by estimation 20A which they reserve for the foode of their said steers in the tyme of their tillage onely, the moiety of the which wood was felled by Richard Washington a little before his sale thereof to Sir Thomas Kytson and the other

moiety by the Queens Tennants and ever since the Spring therof hath been so eaten and kept down with their Cattell that the same is in effect destroyed and they say they have had their Common there tyme out of memory and that they [ ] not have kept their steer upon their other Common sufficiently to maintain their tillage.

A true copy taken out of an ancient Surve y booke which survey was taken in the 5th year of Queene Elizabeth by Thomas Goldinge and the Tenants of Sylverdale.

Witnesses hereof

William Bradley

Peter Bowker

George Bennison Minister of Beethom neare Sylverdale

\* Cumbria Record Office (Kendal) WD/D (AG)

\* \* \*