

THE MOURHOLME MAGAZINE OF
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FORTY YEARS ON
Awena Carter, Magazine Editor

This Autumn it will be forty years since **Vol. I. No 1. Autumn 1982, issue 1**, of The Mourholme Magazine of Local History was published. We number the magazine differently now but I hope that the next issue of the magazine, **Autumn 2022 No.2, issue 81** will contain a compilation of reminiscences from our members to form a commemorative article. The contributions need not be very long, 100-200 words would be fine (or longer, if you feel inspired); nor need the contributions necessarily be erudite or complicated. My idea is that people might send in their first, or subsequent, impressions of the Society, and perhaps the following questions will act as spurs to memory:

Why did you start coming?

What talks stand out for you?

What articles in the magazine do you particularly remember?

What research have you undertaken and why?

What keeps you coming to sit on upright chairs on the last Wednesday of the month?

The Mourholme Local History Society was formed in 1980, so that the fortieth anniversary of the Society has regrettably passed uncelebrated. The first magazine was issued two years later and its first editor was Nancy Thomas, who contributed a great deal to the Society. I could do worse than quote from Nancy's introductory editorial:

We hope, of course, that we will be successful and that our members will eagerly look forward to reading

each issue, cover to cover, glad they are members of an active and productive local history society. It goes without saying that this hope remains very much alive.

To begin with, an edition of the magazine was published quarterly. This rate of publication must have been hard to keep up and the magazine lapsed in 1985, to be resumed in 1990 to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Society. After this there was at least one issue, and sometimes two or three, published each year. We now usually have two issues a year, so we welcome news, both of work in progress, and work ready to be written up. My hopes for the magazine echo Nancy's. She continued:

[W]e hope our members will not only read our magazine but also write it. We will be pleased to receive all contributions. Articles may be any reasonable length and on any aspect of the history of our areas. Our goal is a magazine that is interesting, stimulating, readable, and good.

The ball is in your court! Please keep contributions rolling in to make our fortieth anniversary magazine and subsequent ones 'interesting, stimulating, readable, and good.'

**RESEARCHING THE ORIGINS OF THE
SILVERDALE VILLAGE PLAYERS IN THEIR
CENTENARY YEAR.**

Keith Hildrew



In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the residents of Silverdale probably had few opportunities for community entertainment. There was of course no television, and few would have had regular access to radio. It is likely that the majority of the families in the village had few luxuries or money to spend on social occasions, and many would be without the men who had gone to fight in the war. It is therefore not surprising that some enterprising residents started to consider how they could provide entertainment for themselves on a regular basis. It is in these circumstances that the Silverdale Village Players came into existence 100 years ago this year.

On the verge of their Centenary, the current Committee of the Players considered how this remarkable milestone could be

marked and celebrated. A small team set out with the intention of:

- drawing up a full list of productions from the outset
- identifying and arranging to meet with former members who had stories to share
- gathering memorabilia to add to our store
- discovering the identity of unknown actors in photographs in our archive
- producing an exhibition for the 2022 centenary year
- digitally preserving the archive

The main initial aim, however, was to find out what the first ever production was so that we could include it in our centenary programme of events.

The Foundation of the Silverdale Village Players

We know something of the lead up to the formation of the Players from the autobiography of Willie Riley¹, a novelist who lived from 1866 to 1961 and who wrote some 39 books, the most well-known being *Windy Ridge*. He moved to Silverdale in 1919, for some years living in the house he named ‘Windy Ridge’. In 1957 he published his autobiography, ‘*Sunset Reflections*’, and in that book describes how the Players came into existence:

There was one organisation in the village, and one only, that was intrinsically cultural – an “Art and Industrial Society” which had been formed in 1886. For public gatherings only 3 rooms in the village were available – the Day School, which was not very suitable, the Methodist schoolroom, which was not

¹ See the report of a talk about Willie Riley in ‘*Reports of Evening Meetings, in the MLHS magazine, 2016 No 1, Issue 69.*

always available, and the “Church Hall” or [the then] “Parish Room” which was small and its location inconvenient. A more suitable building for meetings was not only desirable but urgently necessary. We formed ourselves into a Committee [in January 1922] to discuss what could be done and I became chairman – an almost solitary male among the large number of enthusiastic women of various ages. It was realised that we must arouse the interest of the young people; but how was this to be accomplished? Some quick-witted member was inspired to suggest the formation of a group of “Village Players”, as a means of quickening interest.

No more satisfactory suggestion – none more likely to secure immediate and even eager acceptance – could have been made. As for players, they were ready and waiting. We had only to look around. This was the way to get our Village Hall, for plays would mean a playhouse. The wheels were set in motion and soon all our hopes were realised; and what was particularly gratifying to the promoters was the enthusiasm of the younger “natives”, who very quickly demonstrated their skill in an art that was strange to them.

The Committee that Willie Riley chaired eventually succeeded in building the Gaskell Hall in Silverdale, which was officially opened in 1931. Willie Riley again:

February 5th, 1931, was a great day for Silverdale. The “Gaskell Hall” was opened by Mrs Herbert Bright, and Mr Dickens presided over a large gathering that included 2 of Mrs Gaskell’s grandchildren. Later in the afternoon the Village

Players produced on the well-equipped stage a short play from Cranford that I had adapted for the occasion. For the Players themselves, and for every member of the Committee it was a triumphant occasion.

The First Production

It was good to have such a clear description of how the Players came into existence, but we also knew that plays had been produced and performed before 1931, so we started to search for evidence of what they were. The first step was to review the records we had, starting with the minutes of the inaugural committee meeting, held in January 1922; old programmes; an incomplete Westmorland Gazette review of a 1923 production; and an earlier history compiled to commemorate a village milestone. However, we soon spotted a mismatch of detail and further investigation revealed an even earlier production in April 1922.

An internet search revealed that the University of Bradford holds the Willie Riley archive within its special collections in the J.B. Priestley Library. This includes hard copies of programmes from 1922-1964. A phone call to the University Library led to the discovery that among the papers in the archive was Mr Riley's own private collection of programmes from the Silverdale Village Players. They had been rather pressed together and the Librarian was not at all sure if she would be able to separate them as some were stuck with old Sellotape and clips. But after a few days, she had found the time and patience to separate them, and was able to digitise the collection of programmes from 1922-1964 for us, at the grand expense of £22. As a result of this fine piece of detective work, we now have the definitive programme of

the very first performance of the Silverdale Village Players on April 21st and 22nd 1922, (Figure 1) presumably held in the Parish Room where, Willie Riley indicated, such events were staged until the Gaskell Hall was built.



Figure 1: The programme for the very first production

The evening began with a prologue written by Gordon Bottomley, the poet and dramatist who had moved to Silverdale in 1914, and who became President of the Players. The prologue began promisingly:

We call ourselves the Village Players
And Acting is our game...

This was followed by no less than three plays, two one-act and one three-act, with some folk songs in between the plays, presumably to give the energetic actors time to change costumes, and possibly the staging, too. There must have

been no shortage of willing Silverdalianians to join the Players, as there were different casts for all three plays on each evening – over 30 actors. It must have been a very long evening, and the audience, as well as those involved with the productions, need commending for their stamina. I thought it would be interesting to try to see if the plays that had been staged were still available somewhere. A quick internet search revealed that two of them were indeed still in print in the Forgotten Books series of Classic Reprints.

‘The Price of Coal’ was a one-act play by Harold Brighthouse, the author of *Hobson’s Choice*, one of a group known as the Manchester Dramatists. It was published in 1911, but according to the introduction, was first performed in November 1909, in Lanarkshire, the original Lancashire dialect of the play having been ‘translated’ into Lanarkshire! According to the introduction:

The whole week was foggy, dense, yellow and stinking, but the audience (whose scantiness, thanks to the fog, was unregarded by the players), enthusiastic outside the Theatre, as they were within, bruited its excellence, and the many and urgent requests for its speedy revival were complied with.

Clearly the play had retained its popularity at least until 1922.

The other one-act play, which was the penultimate item on the programme, was ‘At the Ribbon Counter’, by Gertrude Jennings. She was a prolific playwright, writing 42 plays between 1910 and 1930, most of them one act social comedies, published by Samuel French. This one was published in 1919, featuring two ladies at a sales counter in a ‘third-rate’ shop. A copy of the play was easily obtained from

that well-known modern and popular internet provider of various goods.

The third play proved more problematic. The programme gave the author as Lady Darwin. She turned out to be Florence Henrietta Fisher, a first cousin of Virginia Woolf. In 1913 she married Sir Francis Darwin, a son of the naturalist Charles Darwin. Cecil Sharpe, the musician, composer and collector of folk songs, was a family friend, and in 1921 published a series of 6 plays written by Lady Darwin. Among these plays was the one chosen by the Players for their opening night, 'The Seeds of Love'. It took some time to track this play down, but eventually, through a facility called the Internet Archive, a copy was able to be downloaded. The play opens with one of the characters singing a folk song entitled 'The Seeds of Love', from Folk Songs of Somerset, edited by Cecil Sharpe, so the family connection was no doubt cemented by its inclusion. The play concerns several country characters, and the biographical notes that accompany the script tell of how the author would drive in her pony cart to:

see tenants, to enquire for or feed the sick, to visit the school, to advise and be advised in the many difficulties of human life. With a wonderful memory and power of reproducing that which she had heard, she brought back rare harvest from these expeditions. All through her days she was told more in a week than many people hear in a life-time.

Such material provided many of the characters and plot lines of this play.

The songs performed between the three plays on that first evening were sung by E. Harris and L. Hodgson (no gender

given) and included the old English folk song ‘Sumer is i-cumin in’, as well as ‘Pretty Polly Oliver’, ‘The Oak and the Ash’, and ‘Early One Morning’ – all good traditional folk songs that the audience would be likely to know, and possibly join in with. The evening finished with a no doubt rousing rendition of the National Anthem.

Centenary Celebrations

Discussions are now underway in the current Silverdale Village Players as to how these plays from 100 years ago can be used to mark our Centenary. It is hoped that some excerpts from the plays may feature in a Centenary Celebration this year (more of this below), but I don’t think a modern audience would be able to stand having three plays thrown at them in one evening! Meanwhile we continue to trawl through our archives for copies of photographs, programmes and press cuttings from performances over the last 100 years. If any reader of this article has any further information about the Silverdale Village Players, we would be delighted to receive it. Work is ongoing to provide a sound archive of former members’ memories of their time in the Players and digitising the archive to preserve it for the future.

The Silverdale Village Players continue to entertain the population of Silverdale and its surrounding district – last year’s Pantomime ‘Jack and the Beanstalk’ marked our return from the recent Covid-enforced absence of two years. Then, on the evening of 30th April, followed by a matinee performance on Sunday 1st May 2022, we will be joyfully celebrating our Centenary with ‘One Hundred Years Young’, a performance of celebration, drama and history.

It is good to know that Willie Riley's initial enthusiasm and energetic support led to the establishment of such a vibrant and popular organisation as Silverdale Village Players. It is a remarkable achievement for such Society, in a small village like Silverdale, to have survived 100 years, and to be still flourishing. It is interesting to consider whether there are any other organisations locally that can claim such a heritage. Certainly, the Church: both Anglican and Methodist churches were built in Victorian times, and the Golf Club came into existence in 1906. The Parish Council and the Co-op have also been part of the village for a longer period than the Players. However, the Silverdale Village Players have provided entertainment and, for its members, a vital source of social interaction, which must have had considerable significance for the village throughout the century of its existence.

Photographs of late 20th Century productions.

Please contact the editor if you can identify any of the players in the following two photographs.



'Sailor Beware' 1984

A HISTORY OF THE WAITING ROOM AT SILVERDALE STATION

Bill Robinson



Figure 1: The waiting room at Silverdale Railway Station

The development of Silverdale station

The opening ceremony of the Ulverstone (sic) and Lancaster Railway (U&LR) was held on 26th August 1857. The single line track ran between Carnforth and Ulverston, with stations at Silverdale, Grange, Kents Bank and Cark. Arnside station opened in 1858. The original U&LR buildings on the Barrow platform, which provided the ticket office and other facilities, were designed by Lancaster Architects, Paley and Austin. Much of the building survives and has been converted to residential use.

The line was purchased by the Furness Railway (FR) in 1862 and was dual tracked between 1863-5. A platform was provided at Silverdale for passengers travelling towards Lancaster, but any accommodation would probably have

been of a basic wood construction. The Ordnance Survey Map of 1891 shows the platform devoid of buildings.

In 1892 the Furness Railway allocated the money to build the waiting room and work was completed the following year. Although very much in the style of Paley and Austin, whose partnership ended in 1886, it is thought that the design would have been done in-house by the Furness Railway. It is built to a surprisingly high specification. The timber frame rests upon a masonry base comprised of sandstone quoins and coping, instead of the more readily available limestone. The roof is tiled rather than slated, and the floor is also tiled. There is a ladies' waiting room with toilet and open fire, the main waiting room too has an open fire and there is a separate gents' toilet. The windows were of stained glass bearing the Furness Railway company logo (see Figure 2). Two of the windows rescued from the waiting room are on display in the archive room at the National Railway Museum in York.

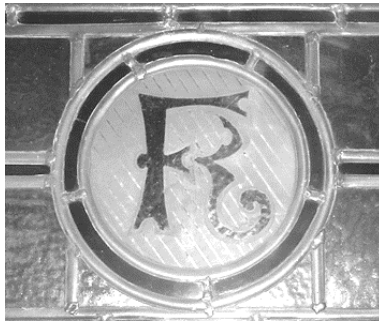


Figure 2: one of the windows from the Silverdale waiting room

The beginnings of Tourism

The waiting room was built at a time when the Furness Railway faced a decline in its freight revenue and was anxiously looking for ways of making up the deficit. It

identified tourism as an opportunity, as the railway opened the Lake District to those benefiting from the growth in family holidays

FURNESS RAILWAY.

TWENTY COACH AND STEAM YACHT TOURS

. . . THROUGH THE . . .

English Lake-Land

Daily during June, July, August and September.

<p>No. 1.—Outer Circular Tour, embracing Windermere Lake, Furness Abbey, and Coniston. Fare from 4/3.</p> <p>No. 2.—Inner Circular Tour, embracing Furness Abbey, Coniston Lake (Gondola), and Crake Valley. Fare from 3/3.</p> <p>No. 3.—Grange and Windermere Circular Tour, embracing Grange, Arncliffe, Kendal, and Windermere Lake. Fare from 2/9.</p> <p>No. 4.—Middle Circular Tour, embracing Windermere Lake, the Crake Valley, and Coniston Lake. Fare from 4/0.</p> <p>No. 5.—Red B., 3 and Grasmere Tour, via Ambleside and Shilkeath Fells, returning via Rydal Water. Fare from 2/9.</p> <p>No. 6.—Thirlmere, Grasmere, and Windermere Tour, via Ambleside, Cappergate, and Red Bank, and round Thirlmere Lake. Fare from 5/.</p> <p>No. 7.—The Four Lakes Circular Tour, via Coniston, Grasmere, Rydal, and Windermere. Fare from 3/9.</p> <p>No. 8.—Coniston to Coniston Tour, via Red Bank, Grasmere, and Ambleside, returning by Coach to Coniston. Fare from 4/6.</p> <p>No. 9.—Tarn Hows Tour, via Ambleside and Coniston, returning by Tiberiswate and Elterwater. Fare from 4/8.</p> <p>No. 10.—Round the Langdales and Dungeon Ghyll Tour, via Ambleside, Colwith Fells, Grasmere, and Rydal. Fare from 3/.</p>	<p>No. 11.—Ullswater Tour, via Ambleside, Kirkstone Pass, and Brothers Water, returning via the Vale of Troutbeck and Lowwood. Fare from 4/8.</p> <p>No. 12.—Derwentwater (Keswick) Tour, via Ambleside, Grasmere, and Thirlmere. Fare from 6/.</p> <p>No. 13.—The Five Lakes Circular Tour, via Windermere, Rydal, Grasmere, Thirlmere, and Derwentwater. Fare from 11/6.</p> <p>No. 14.—Wastwater Tour, via Scaevale and Gowforth. Fare from 4/8.</p> <p>No. 15.—The Six Lakes Circular Tour, via Windermere, Rydal, Grasmere, Thirlmere, Derwentwater, and Ullswater. Fare from 12/.</p> <p>No. 16.—The Duddon Valley Tour, via Broughton-in-Furness, Ulpha, and Seathwaite. Fare from 3/9.</p> <p>No. 17.—The Round of Coniston Lake, &c. Tour. Fare from 3/10.</p> <p>No. 18.—Emerdale Lake and Calder Abbey Tour, via Scaevale, Gowforth, and Cold Fell. Fare from 4/8.</p> <p>No. 19.—Across the Ferry Tour, via Lake Side, Eathwaite Water, Hawkshead, and Storr's Hall. Fare from 3/6.</p> <p>No. 20.—Central Priory and Newby Bridge Tour, via Windermere (Lake Side), Barrow Falls, Holker Park, and Grange. Fare from 3/.</p>
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For further particulars see "Tours through Lakeland." Pamphlets to be had gratis at all Furness Railway Stations; of Mr. F. J. Ramsden, Superintendent of the Line, Barrow-in-Furness; at Messrs. Thom, Cook & Sons' and H. Gaze & Sons' offices; and the Polytechnic Institute, Regent Street W.; or Messrs. W. H. Smith & Son's principal Bookstalls, price 4d.

The New Palette Album, illustrating the above Tours, in colours, can be obtained at the principal Railway Bookstalls, price 5d.

Barrow with Fleetwood for Blackpool, per Paddle Steamer "Lady Evelyn."—During the Summer Months the Furness Railway Company's new Paddle Steamer, "Lady Evelyn," will sail daily between Barrow and Fleetwood for Blackpool. For further particulars as to Sailing and Fares, etc. see announcements. Luncheons, Tea, and Refreshments provided on board.

ALFRED ASLETT,
Secretary and General Manager.

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Figure 3: One of the 1902 posters

The FR had in fact recognised the potential for tourism quite early and had operated steamers on Windermere from 1845, and Coniston from 1860. From 1886 it published extensive holiday guides. However, the opening of the branch line to Windermere Lakeside in 1869, and the subsequent acquisition of the Windermere Steamers, provided the

opportunity to offer circular tours utilising both the railway and also steamers, with horse drawn traps to fill in the gaps. Up to the 1890s only four tours were operated by the company but by 1902 this had grown to twenty, as can be seen from the poster in Figure 3. The FR tours had a great influence on the development of the towns it served, particularly Grange-over-Sands.

Although Silverdale is not mentioned in the tour itineraries, the village is promoted in other advertising material. ‘Cheap Day Tickets Issued Daily to and from All Pleasure Resorts on The Furness Railway’ were offered to encourage visits to golf courses close to stations along the line. The trippers photographed outside the Royal Hotel in Silverdale, figure 4, are being carried in horse-drawn omnibuses typical of those used by the Furness Railway on their tours. From the number being carried, they would, in all probability, have arrived by train.



Figure 4: Trippers to Silverdale outside the Royal Hotel

The policy of increasing passenger growth by promoting the tourist traffic with tours and cheap day return tickets, resulted in a remarkable growth in the number of people travelling by the Furness Railway. From 1895 to the outbreak of war in 1914, passenger numbers doubled to over three million per annum.

War work

Our waiting room was designed to provide comfort and shelter to the tourists and trippers visiting the Silverdale area, and to promote the benefits of travelling by the Furness Railway. The internal walls will have provided space for advertising the company's services. However, the heyday of our waiting room would have been relatively short. The demands of the Great War meant that railways were committed to supporting the war effort, resulting in the end of the tourist trade. The war took a heavy toll on the railway companies, leaving them with old and outdated rolling stock, falling freight revenues and the urgent need for investment. The government decided on a rationalisation of the industry, leading to the Furness Railway being absorbed into the London Midland & Scottish (LMS), the largest of the 'Big Four' railway companies.

With the LMS covering such a vast area, the promotion of our local area as a tourist destination lacked priority, and our waiting room would have been used more by everyday travellers. Its use and maintenance declined over the years, and it attracted its fair share of graffiti. When we moved to Silverdale in 2015 the building had been out of use for several years, and was locked and neglected.

The future of the waiting room

‘The Friends of Silverdale Station’ (FOSS) have taken up the cause of saving the waiting room and have had some success in persuading both Network Rail and Northern Rail to repair the roof and connect an electricity supply. However, there is concern that the fabric of the building is under threat of damage caused by fly-tipping, and the encroaching vegetation on three of the sides. Most of the masonry base has disappeared beneath it. This can only lead to water ingress and the deterioration of the woodwork within. To ensure the building’s future, FOSS is looking at ways of having the waiting room listed by bodies such as Historic England and The Railway Heritage Trust. If you have any information on the waiting room or experience in applying for listing, FOSS would love to hear from you.

The loveliest spot on Morecambe Bay

Finally, does anyone have any information about the origins of the ‘Sunny Silverdale, the Loveliest Spot on Morecambe Bay’ sign that, until recently, was a part of a fence at the station and is now in the custody of FOSS? Is it possible that the sign is a survivor of the Furness Railway’s promotion of the area?



Figure 5: The truest slogan ever written

AN EDWARDIAN ELOPEMENT

Geoff Kerr

We were pleased to receive an approach from Geoff Kerr, an Australian from Brisbane, who, in the course of his family history researches, had uncovered the story of his ancestor from Silverdale. The story is long forgotten now, but at the time was shocking enough to be covered by local and national newspapers. It is a human-interest story, but it earns its place in a local history publication because of the way it illustrates the social mores of the Society of the time.

Emily, Thomas and a local scandal

The two people involved in this Edwardian affair were called Emily Thwaite and Thomas Kerr. Emily **was** born in Silverdale in 1880. She married Henry Thwaite, the publican of the Silverdale Hotel, in 1902; in 1904 a daughter, Doris was born to them. Emily worked hard in the hotel, cooking, cleaning and serving at tables.



Figure 1: Henry and Emily Thwaite with Doris, January, 1906

Thomas Kerr was born in in York in 1880, where, as a young man, he trained and qualified as a Landscape Architect. In 1910, he married; his wife was called Phoebe, and they had a daughter, Daphne, who was born in 1911. They initially lived in Cheshire and moved to Carnforth when Thomas began working in the area between there and Lancaster, Kendal and Ulverston. He began to frequent the Silverdale Hotel, and became aware of Emily, apparently witnessing Henry's frequent verbal abuse of her. Thomas and Emily engaged in conversation, feelings must have developed, and they arranged to meet occasionally away from the hotel. Eventually they decided to run away together, and chose Australia as their remote destination.

A plan was hatched to prepare for their departure: Emily had arranged for Thomas to collect extra clothing from her room in the hotel, under the pretence that it was a gift from Emily to Thomas's wife Phoebe. Emily, saying that she was going to Lancaster to do some shopping, left Silverdale by train. Thomas met her at Lancaster, and they travelled together to Liverpool. They stayed there overnight, before taking the last available cabin on the SS Dorset, which set sail to Australia the next day, 7th September, 1911. Not requiring passports in those days, just a form of identification, Thomas produced his marriage certificate so that Emily must have travelled under the name of Phoebe Kerr.

Leaving family ties behind.

It must have been hard for the unhappy Emily to leave a little seven-year-old daughter behind her, without a word to comfort the child. Her husband Henry would have realised quickly that Emily had actually left him. Both he, and Emily's elderly parents, must have felt some anguish at her

departure without a word of farewell to any of them. Thomas must also have had to mask his feelings about his nine months old daughter Daphne, abandoning her and Phoebe, his wife of only 18 months. Henry Thwaite still had his job as publican of the Silverdale Hotel; but Phoebe Kerr must have been left almost penniless as Thomas had absconded with most of their money. It must have been doubly hard for her to bear this betrayal, especially as what Thomas had taken was the considerable dowry that he had received, on their marriage, from Phoebe's father.

On their voyage to Australia, the secret lovers would have made plans about their new lives together in this distant part of the world. A fresh start, a new beginning, their hopes would have been exciting. But in life, sometimes things do not always go to plan, as we discover with Thomas and Emily.

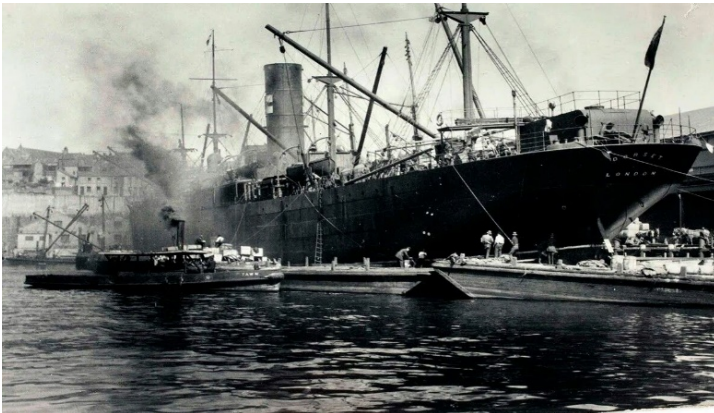


Figure 2: The SS Dorset, at Darling Harbour, Sydney, 29th October 1911

When SS Dorset reached Australia, it docked first at Adelaide, sailed on to Melbourne, then to Sydney, finally

arriving, on the 6th November 1911, at Brisbane which was Thomas and Emily's apparent destination. They might well have been on board the SS Dorset in Sidney Harbour, at the time the photograph in Figure 2 was taken.

In order to put people off their scent, they disembarked in Brisbane. But just a few weeks later they backtracked and sailed to Sydney on the SS Orsova. Sydney was a bustling city, the largest in Australia, with many opportunities for employment. It would be easy to get lost there. Thomas and Emily settled in a hotel near the affluent suburb of Potts Point, Thomas serving as a butler and Emily as a cook for about a year. This was part of a plan to divert initial attention from anyone trying to trace Thomas through his professional field of Landscape Architecture.

It was during this time that Emily, obviously suffering deep regret for her daughter Doris, sent two postcards to her, via her own parents in Silverdale, telling her child that she loved and missed her. When Thomas found out about his, he was furious. Back in Silverdale, Henry soon found out about the postcards. He arranged for an investigative business in Lancaster to make contact with a similar business in Sydney to track Emily and Thomas down. The postmark on the cards became the clue to finding them. When the enquiry agent met with Thomas in Sydney and asked the reason for what he and Emily had done, the response was a classic denial of personal responsibility: 'We were both badly mated in England,' he said.

Henry sought divorce proceedings, which were eventually granted in 1914. The secrecy of Thomas and Emily's affair, their deception at the packing of Emily's clothes at the time

of their flight, the remark when located in Sidney, and the divorce itself, were all sensationalised and widely reported in the English press.

Life in Australia

In 1912, a year after they had left England, Thomas secured the position as chief Landscape Architect with the Sydney Royal Botanic Gardens, on a salary of £388 per year. In early 1913, they purchased a new brick home in Sidney's inner western suburb of Lakemba, thanks to the remaining money that was left from Phoebe's dowry. Thus, a year after they had arrived in Australia, Thomas had a good job, they had a new home, and, not only that, their first baby was on the way.

Edith Emily was born 10th June 1913 and followed by Thomas, born on 8th August 1915.¹ Their third child, Margaret, was born 31st October 1920, but died at birth. Despite this sadness, life appears to have continued as normal for some years. Thomas remained a successful landscape architect. In 1927, he won a prize of a £100, a significant sum of money in those days, for his design of a World War II Memorial Garden.

Then in the early 1930's a dramatic change occurred: a new scandal was about to emerge, which would eventually devastate Thomas' new family. Around 1933 there was a major separation between Thomas and Emily. The reason for this was never publicly recorded, but, after that, Thomas was never spoken of in the family again. All photographs and

¹. Emily Thwaite and Thomas Kerr's son Thomas was Geoff Kerr 's father. Geoff has many memories of his grandmother, Emily, but his grandfather, Thomas, died before Geoff was born.

other references about him were destroyed, and he did not attend his daughter Edith's wedding in 1938.

Thomas' second flight from home

When Thomas left the family home in Lakemba, he went to live in the famous surf beach suburb, Bondi, about sixteen miles from Lakemba. He lived in a nice home atop a rise that gives a splendid view of the whole beach and surrounding bay and cliffs, extending out into the Pacific Ocean.

There are many thoughts about why he left, and why it was such a traumatic experience for Emily that she cut him off completely. Had he become an alcoholic, was domestic violence the cause, was it another woman in his life? Perhaps another reason is worth consideration. Thomas Kerr and George Nicholson lived at the same address in Bondi, and in death share the same grave. They were both single and had left family to live in the Bondi area. Even in the 1940's, Bondi had a reputation as an area where gay men congregated. Today it is known as the gay capital of Australia.

Thomas continued as the Chief Landscape Architect at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney until about 1943. If this assumption about his sexual preference is accurate, then he must have kept it hidden from his work colleagues as, at that time, there was sure to have been discrimination about it. It is tempting to wonder whether Thomas' ambivalent sexuality was the underlying motivation for his escape from England, and the catalyst for the deterioration of the relationship between him and Emily. A study of his life reveals that he was a talented, well respected, landscape architect and provided well for his family. But from the accounts of his

daughter Edith, he was very strict and quick to anger, even volatile at times towards his family.

Thomas' death

Thomas lived at the same address in Bondi until he died, aged 64, from heart complications, on Sunday 6th May 1945. His death certificate states that he was a widower, and that Phoebe had died before him, although she actually died in 1970. He claimed not to have 'any issue with children'. It is painful to realise that he denounced his common law wife Emily, and his children in Australia, Edith, Thomas and Margaret, and also his first child, Daphne, born back in England.

Thomas' Will was mysteriously changed and is dated only the day before he died. He left his estate to Lillian Fifett, who lived with her husband Cecil at the same Bondi address. At the time of Thomas's death, she purchased a grave at Eastern Suburbs Memorial Park [also known as, Botany Cemetery], . George Nicholson was buried in the grave in February 1947.

It has proved hard to find where Thomas was buried and it is sad to think that the location of his grave had apparently remained deliberately hidden from curious and prying eyes. After fruitless searches of many cemeteries, an online search eventually located the grave at Botany Cemetery. It came as a shock to find that there was no headstone, just a plain patch of grass, nestled between two elaborately maintained gravesites.

Thomas was buried on VE Day, the 8th May 1945. As the world celebrated the end of a terrible period of war, Thomas was laid to rest on a windswept hillside, overlooking Botany

Bay, where Captain Cook had first set foot on Australian soil in 1770. Only three people attended his funeral, apart from the undertakers; George Hawkey, a work colleague, and Mr and Mrs Fifett, whom we believe profited well from Thomas's demise, and also from his friend George Nicholson's death. The Wills show that the Fifett's received substantial proceeds from the sale of the two deceased men's estates.

Emily's last days

Edith, has told how her mother, Emily, forbade anyone from the family attending Thomas's funeral, such was the state then of the once remarkable relationship. Edith had only found out about her father's death as she read the Funeral Notices in the Sydney Morning Herald on the morning of the funeral.

Emily lived a long life, though in her last twenty years she never left her home and was dependent upon the company of her daughter Edith for every part of her life. Edith, spoke of her mother's difficulty in accepting that she had left Doris behind in England and could not bring herself to write to her daughter.

Edith had no children but Thomas had three sons. Because Emily could only endure children for a very short time. they only visited on Boxing Day each year, except for Emily's 80th birthday on the 21st February 1960. The memory of her strong Lancashire accent echoes even today: 'Edith, put kettle on!'

Emily died in 1967, aged 87 years. The time of her death and funeral was kept quiet from her grandchildren, with only her

daughter Edith and her son Thomas as family members in attendance. But that was the way of the Kerr family then, always seemingly keeping everything within themselves. Perhaps this was the result of suppressing the many secrets that for so long had affected their lives and their way of thinking.

Emily never went back to England, only communicating with her sister Margaret by letter. Margaret never came to Australia, so Emily never saw anyone from England again after that fateful day in 1911, when she and Thomas sailed away with high hopes of a new life in Australia.²

² If you are interested in further detail about this story, or can provide additional information, please feel free to contact Geoff through The Mourholme Local History Society info@mourholme.co.uk

REPORTS OF EVENING MEETINGS **Clive Holden and Andrew Davies**

29th September 2021: Roads around the Sands

Paul Hindle's talk was the first live talk for 18 months both for the Mourholme Local History Society and for the speaker

Travellers between central Lancashire and Furness (then in Lancashire) and Cumbria, had in the past crossed the sands of the Kent estuary, often followed by crossing Duddon sands as well. JMW Turner is among a number of artists who depicted such crossings, including in their pictures the traditional markers of laurel branches. A guide was essential: crossing the sands was always a hazardous option. However, despite having a guide, crossing the sands was never less than hazardous.

During the eighteenth century, pressure increased to improve the roads. This was done across the country in uncoordinated small-scale local initiatives. However, these initiatives shared a common approach: each first needed their Act of Parliament, usually using the same wording in the opening paragraph, with the details of the proposed work following. After the relevant Act had been passed improvements could be made and a charge levied from road users under the turnpike system.

There had been a few turnpikes earlier but from 1750 to 1770 they became very popular. Locally, an Act was passed in 1751 for a turnpike from Lancaster to Heron Syke and another in 1753 for one from Heron Syke via Kendal and Shap to Eamont Bridge. The latter turnpike crossed the whole of Westmorland, from just south of Burton in Kendal to south of Penrith. These early turnpikes improved existing roads or

packhorse tracks, which often had many twists and turns. A by-product of turnpikes was the introduction of milestones, and these are marked on contemporary detailed maps, such as Jeffrey's 1" maps of 1770.

From 1790 there was a second phase of turnpikes. These differed from the earlier ones as they constructed new roads following new routes. On a larger scale they were more direct and on a smaller scale avoided sharp bends, and steep hills. Locally an Act of 1818 led to the road that is now known as the A6. At Beetham, there is a sweeping bend, replacing stretches of lanes on either side that are now lost. Also, in 1818 there was the Carnforth and Ulverston Turnpike Act. This replaced an earlier turnpike which had gone from Carnforth to Kendal, then via Cartmel, to Duddon Bridge. The new turn turnpike road went via Levens Bridge, Lindale, Backbarrow, Haverthwaite, and Greenodd, later becoming the A590. In recent years considerable stretches of this road have been upgraded or bypassed

Turnpikes were only paved from around 1810 when John Loudon McAdam developed his system for constructing roads. Prior to this, turnpikes provided ditches and bridges and kept their roads clear of undergrowth.

27th October 2021: A Lancashire Garland.

Them wot braved t'elements on a rainy neet wos well rewarded, unless they wos looking for'ard to a talk aboot flowers. A 'garland' in this case were a selecshun of songs, stories and poims in't Lanky dialect sung by **Sid Calderbank**, with appropriet comintry. T'owdest known song were from t'mid-16th century, and it were as well that Sid towd us wot t'plot were, (selling an 'orse), or we'd ha' bin reet stumpd, cos non of us cud unnerstand it. Next come a

leap to 't 18th century, when John Collier, a peripatetic school master an' caricaturist, rote satirical poems in Lanky dialect, with a bit of German thrown in for gud luk.

By t' time Edwin Waugh (1817 – 1890), an apprentice printer, come ontert scen, Stan's rendrins of 't Lanky twang were a bit eesier to git a hod on.. Waugh's famousest song were 'Come whoam to t' childer an' me', about a feller wot went to't pub instead of doin' wot he ort to ha' done. John Trafford Clegg (1861 – 1895) (Th' owd weighver') wrote in Rochdale dialect, and he becum quite famous, but he were only 34 year owd when 'e died. Ammon Wrigley, a cotton mill worker wot died in 1946 had t' cheek to come from Saddleworth in Yorkshire, so 'ow he cum to speak Lanky twang we dont know.

Nearly orl these songriters and poits cum from poor bakgrounze, but one or two of 'em has monuments, an it were a reel pleshure to lissen to Sid Calderbank tellin 'is stories and singin' 'is songs. Ee, 'e were funny! One thing wot I notist were that these dialect fellers all cum fra east Lankisheer, places like Rochdul an' Milnrow an Owdham (an' of corse that interloper fra Yoorksher). Why none fra Yelland or Sliverdaile? Is it cos thayre a bit backard wile we're more cultur'd ?

24th November, 2021: Buffalo Bill in the North West

Dr Brian Jones began his talk on Buffalo Bill in the North West, by explaining that, since his talk was from the culture of nineteenth century North America, he would use contemporary terminology, rather than today's terms.

Buffalo Bill came to Lancaster in 1904. He was born in 1846, growing up when cowboys were in decline. Their traditional

life ended when railways replaced droving, and when barbed wire led to the development of ranches. Buffalo Bill learnt the cowboys' skills but as opportunities to use them declined, he became a guide for prestige visitors who wanted to know more about cowboys. In 1869 he met Ned Buntline. Ned later published many stories based on Bill's adventures, making him famous. He featured in at least 550 'dime dreadfuls' which were very popular.

Bill then developed his shows which toured the USA from 1883, and the UK from 1887. They featured horses, cowboys, Indians, outlaws and buffaloes. High Society attended, including Queen Victoria. His 1904 tour was from April to October and covered 4,114 miles by rail in three trains visiting 132 towns. The whole show moved on daily. There was an early and a late show at each town with seating for up to 10,000. There were no shows on Sundays. The Lancaster show was on September 23rd 1904 on the Giant Axe field. The previous stops had been Whitehaven, Barrow and Kendal, and after Lancaster the tour continued to Blackpool and Preston.

The show included 800 people, 100 Indians, 500 horses and 18 buffaloes. At each stop 2.5 tons of hay and 3 tons of straw had to be locally sourced, just one of the many problems that running the show entailed. There were horse races, shooting demonstrations, roping steers, mock attacks on a stage coach and much more, including side shows. Dr Jones' ended with a ten-minute film shot in 1910 of a similar show in New York.

15th December 2021: North West England and the Atlantic slave trade

In his talk, **Dr Nick Radburn** examined the reasons leading to North West England development into the main centre in Britain for the slave trade.

The top three British slaving ports were Liverpool, London and Bristol with Lancaster and Whitehaven next, though they were on a much smaller scale. At around 1600, Lancashire was a poor area with a population of 120,000 and no large towns. It was remote from London and troubled by border raids by the Scots. By 1700 the Lancashire population had grown modestly to 166,000 but by 1800 it soared to 700,000. Meanwhile Liverpool grew from 5,000 in 1700 to 90,000 in 1800, becoming second only to London.

In 1715 Liverpool built a new dock, later known as the Old Dock. This was an expensive and risky venture but it proved very profitable. By 1775 there was a lot of development of warehouses etc. around the dock. During the eighteenth century, there were more years of war than peace, but as these wars were European, the North and Liverpool were less affected. The area was also able to trade via the Isle of Man or Ireland, saving on duties. In the early eighteenth century, the main commodities traded were tobacco and sugar but later cotton became important, with Manchester expanding in step with Liverpool.

In the early Eighteenth Century, Lancaster joined in the slave trade, becoming prosperous. Because of the shallow River Lune, Lancaster used smaller ships which were then able to penetrate shallow African rivers to obtain slaves where larger ships could not. However later many Lancaster traders moved their operations to Liverpool and larger ships.

In the 1760s, Quakers (or Members of the Society of Friends), tried to improve conditions for slaves. In 1787 a major abolition movement was founded and most of the founders were Quakers. Many Quakers were slave owners but as abolition developed, some were excluded from the Society. Today we look back on slavery with revulsion, but how will future generations regard our mistreatment of the environment?

26th January 2022. Local Connections with Richard III.

Christopher Tinmouth, a guide at Lancaster Castle, took us through the complicated history of events before, and during, the brief reign of Richard III. This was the era of the Wars of the Roses between the Houses of Lancaster and York, so that it is easy to think that the Pennines divided strict allegiances, with Lancashire and Westmorland to the West supporting the House of Lancaster, while the House of York drew all its supporters from Yorkshire. However, this was not the case: Richard, himself from the House of York, found support from families on the western side of the Pennines, such as the Hudlestons of Millom Castle, the Harringtons of Hornby Castle, the Redmans of Levens Hall and Richard de Bethom.

Battles such as those at Towton (1461) and Tewkesbury (1471) gave the Yorkists the ascendancy until 1485 when Richard was killed and replaced by the first Tudor monarch, Henry VII. As for Richard himself, some take the Shakespearean view that he was an out and out scoundrel, while others have a much more reasoned approach, quoting his motto 'Loyaulte me lie' (Loyalty binds me) to suggest that he was faithful to his allies, though not so merciful to his enemies. As for the 'Princes in the Tower', it would seem that the jury is still out on that one.

23rd February 2022. ‘How Lancashire was fed during the Industrial Revolution, c.1780 – 1850.

It almost goes without saying that **Dr Mike Winstanley’s** talk was concerned with the inhabitants of workhouses rather than the more opulent, who could easily ensure that they did not starve.

This was a period of rapid growth in the population, with the high price of wheat in Napoleonic times not helping to feed the poor in the south of England, where wheat bread was very popular. We probably all know what Samuel Johnson had to say about oats¹ but they were as important in the north of England as in Scotland, and could at least provide a hot meal.

There were shifts in popularity from time to time, depending upon availability. In Ireland in the 1840s, potatoes were relied on because they were seen as a versatile crop, so that the population was hit hard by the potato famine. Despite this, Ireland was a great exporter of oats and livestock. Then, when the Corn Laws were repealed, Liverpool was able to take advantage of imports of wheat and other goods from the United States.

Dr Winstanley illustrated his talk with a good many contemporary reports from places such as Lancaster, Garstang, Preston and Bury, and left us feeling that we are considerably better off now than we would have been then.

¹ ‘A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.’

NOTES AND QUERIES

MORE ABOUT THE YEALAND PLAQUE AND THE TWELVE TREES

Andy Denwood

(See 'A Yealand Commemoration', by Sheila Jones, in 'Notes and Queries', MLHS Summer 2021 Magazine, No.1 issue 79)



Figure 1: The Plaque

I understand that the engraved stone by the stile on to Summerhouse Hill in Yealand Conyers was, principally, the work of the late Ken Greaves: ex-serviceman, Quaker, retired Headmaster, Conyers Parish Council Chair and all round Good Egg. He was also husband to Robin Greaves, a former Chair of this Society.

When I moved to Yealand in 1997 I often passed the stone while walking my dog and thought how impressive it was that the Parish Council had erected it and planted the

commemorative trees. Less impressive, perhaps, was the very British, and thoroughly understated duel that developed between me and an anonymous local who was clearly less devoted to Europe than I was. Frequently a “Europe Out!” sticker was pasted on to the inscription and while my labrador waited patiently, I’d devote a moment or two to peeling it off. Within days the sticker would be back and I’d peel it off again. I never discovered the identity of my opponent (though I had my suspicions!) and eventually the stickers stopped appearing. Perhaps the supply ran out. It was a small and fairly hollow victory, given the result of the 2016 referendum. But whatever we think of Europe, I hope we can all agree that Ken Greaves and the Parish Council did a jolly good thing in planting 12 lovely trees on the flank of the hill. They looked wonderful the last time I saw them.



Figure 2: The trees in Yealand Manor Grounds

**MOURHOLME LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY'S
LECTURE PROGRAMME 2022-23**

Meetings are held in Yealand Village Hall at 7.30 p.m.

Our talks generally finish by 9 p.m. followed by tea and coffee

28th September 2022:

Lady Anne Clifford – *Christine Rafaat*

Fighting for the inheritance she was denied by her father's will, Anne Clifford risked everything. She quarrelled in vain with two husbands, many friends and relations, the Archbishop of Canterbury and King James I, whom she (treasonably) defied. Three decades later she inherited the Clifford estates as prophesied by the Shepherd Lord.

26th October 2022:

Horrockses Fashions – *Christine Boydell*

Established in 1946 by Crewdson and Company Ltd, Horrockses Fashions took the post-war clothing market by storm. Known for their quality, reliability, and artistic prints, the designs had great appeal to both housewives and royalty. But how did a cotton manufacturer, formed in 1791, most popular for their cotton sheeting and towelling become a recognised fashion house?

30th November 2022:

Lancashire Archives, Past, Present and Future – *Keri Nicholson*

Join Archivist Keri Nicholson for a look back at over 80 years of record keeping in Lancashire. Celebrate our history, learn more about our new ways of working in the wake of the pandemic, and look forward to the challenges of an increasingly digital age.

14th December 2022:

Arnside Maritime Heritage – *Alasdair Simpson*

Arnside has long played an active part on the Kent Estuary, from Victorian regattas to boat building. Crossfields built Morecambe Bay prawners, and other boats, from the 1840s to 1940s. These notably included Arthur Ransome's "Swallow" and Arnside Sailing Club's very own "Severn".

January 25th 2023:

Roman Roads and the Old Roads through Carnforth – *Brian Jones*

Largely for reasons of topography the road routes northwards from Lancaster pass through Bolton-le-Sands and Carnforth. Although the changes in the style of transport, and the ages of Canal and Railways, led to modifications to the road network, clear traces of the old routes have been left behind.

22nd February 2023:

County Lunatic Asylum for Lancaster – *Pauline Churchill*

The Asylum at Lancaster was the first to be established in Lancashire and was the fourth Asylum to be built in England. In July 1816 the buildings were ready for occupation. We look inside at the inmates, their daily lives and at the key events in this 19th Century institution.

29th March 2023 :

Short Brothers – *Judith Shingler*

This audio-visual Presentation by Ambleside Oral History Group uses extracts from interviews with those who worked at Short's Sunderland Flying Boat factory at Windermere during World War II. Although a huge enterprise employing over 1,500 people, it came and went almost without leaving a mark.

26th April 2023:

Market Street, Carnforth – *Clive Holden*

A potted history of Market Street from its beginnings in the 1880s up to the present time with, it is hoped, input from members of the audience who may know things that the speaker doesn't!

This talk will be preceded by the Mourholme AGM

