

A short history of

*Ireleth &
Askam-in-Furness*

BY MARK MACLEAN

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Preface

The following is a short history of Ireleth and Askam-in-Furness. Apart from the first chapter, the information has been arranged in themes rather than chronologically. This has been done to avoid long lists of dates and events, and to allow the focus to remain on one particular piece of the area's history at a time.

Because I've focused on our area alone you'll see that it's a history with gaps. There often aren't any references to Ireleth and Askam at crucial points in British or local history, either because there was no-one there to make the records, because the records have been lost or destroyed or because I haven't found them. So don't expect to find much about the Black Death, the English Civil Wars or Queen Victoria's coronation. Such things would obviously have affected Ireleth's residents, but no records that I know of exist and so I've left them out.

There is already an excellent history of the Furness peninsula, called *Barrow And District*, written by F. Barnes, and a history of Dalton-in-Furness by James Walton. These cover the area in great detail, but what I've aimed to do is to draw together the references to Ireleth and Askam from these and other books and articles into one publication. I've also drawn on sources from the Cumbria Records Office (CRO) and the public library in Barrow and some private sources.

This book first appeared as a draft in 1997, with a few copies being circulated to friends and the local schools and a copy lodged with the CRO. This edition contains corrections and amendments which have been pointed out to me since then. However, I think of this as a work in progress and I'd like to hear from people who have any comments on how it might be improved, things I've got wrong, things I've missed out, sources I should consult and the like.

I'm also very keen to include more photographs or reproductions of interesting historical documents, whether they be old maps,

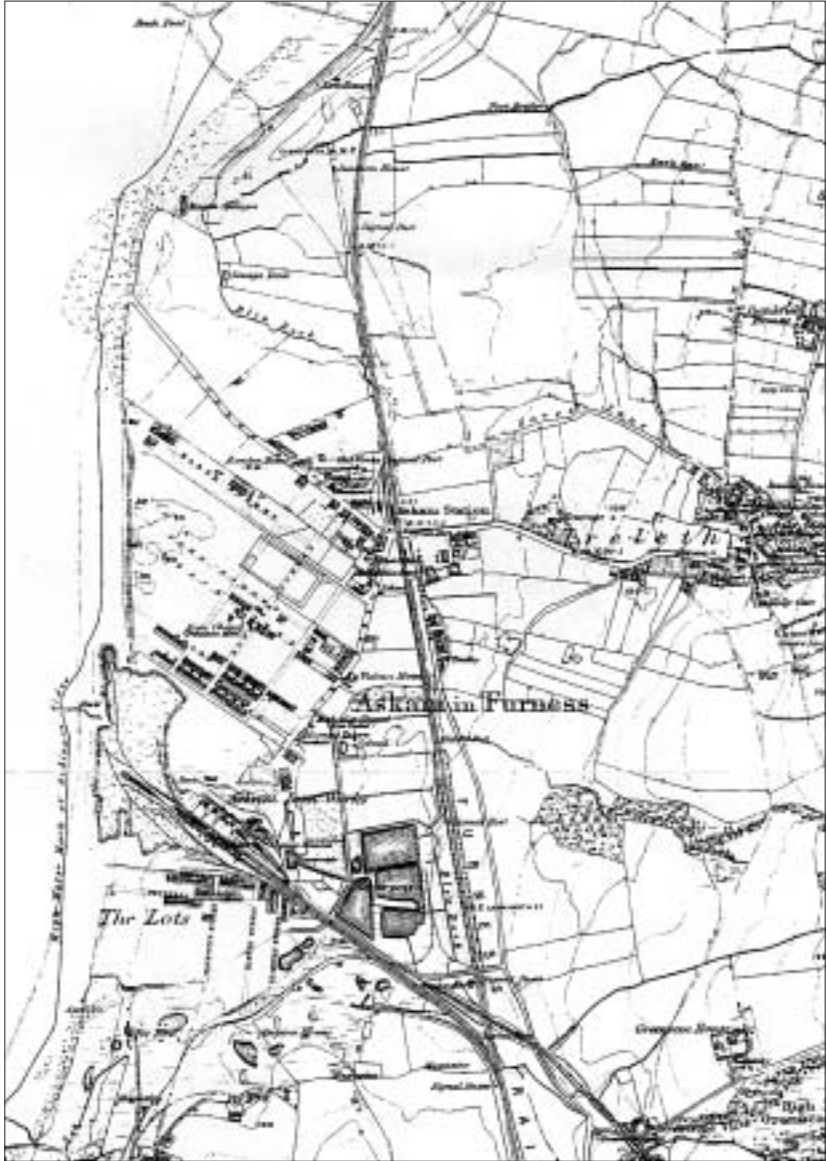
auction notices or entry tickets to Duddon Show. Please send the best quality copies of photographs (not originals) with captions, source and return address. If you would like to send an image electronically, please contact me by email first to confirm specifications.

I hope you enjoy reading this book, but more that you get fired up enough to want to send a contribution to the next edition.

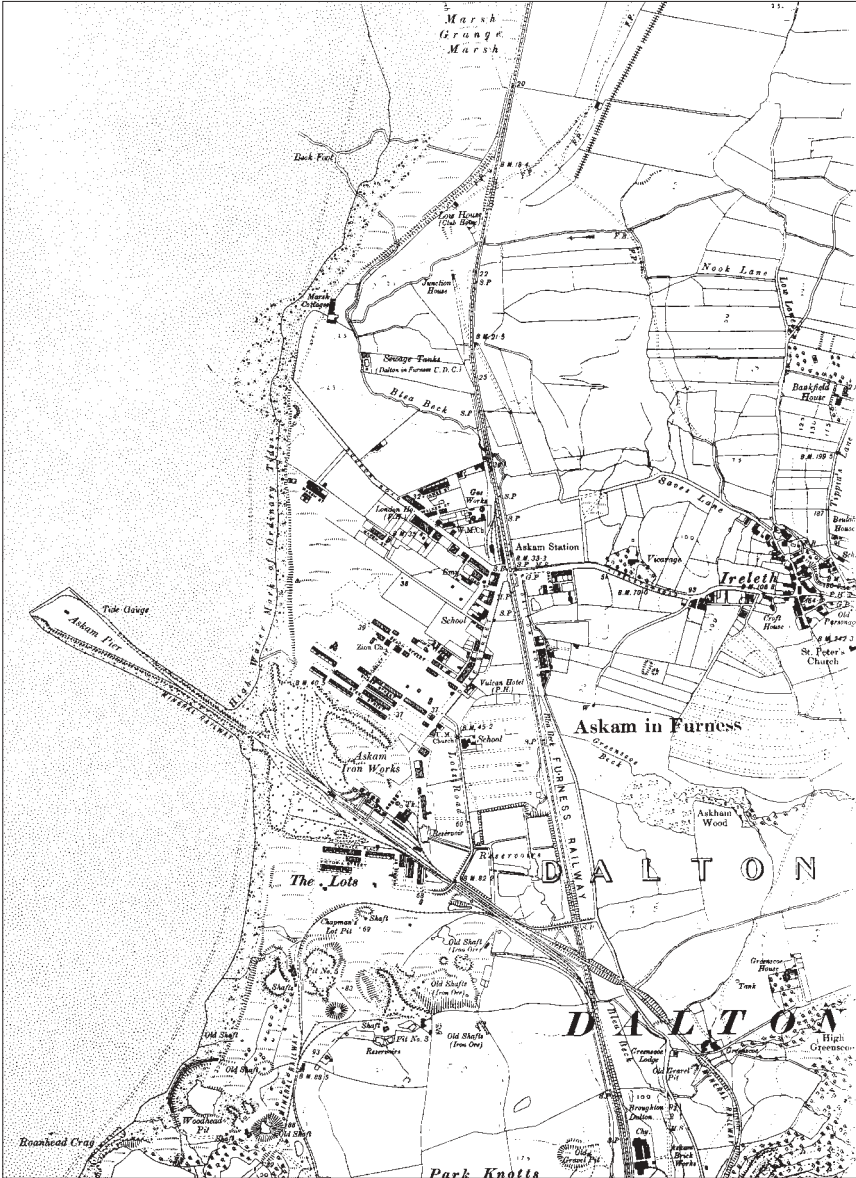
MDM June 2000



Ireleth, 1856. The area which became Askam is marked as Ireleth Marsh, that which became the Lots is a Rabbit Warren. Duddon Road is called Marsh Lane, and Dalton Road has yet to appear along side the new Furness Railway line.



Ireth, Askam and the Lots, 1892. By now Askam is well established, and most of the features of the modern town are in place. Note the iron works, reservoirs to service the furnaces, and rail system to Greenscoe quarry and beyond.



Ireleth and Askam, 1919. The most noticeable new feature is Askam pier, made from the slag from years of steel making. Strip development is beginning to join the two villages along Ireleth Road and Saves Lane.



Ireleth and Askam, 1956. The iron works has been demolished, creating a gap between the Lots and the rest of Askam. Ireleth's core is still relatively unchanged.

chapter one

Background and prehistory

The villages of Ireleth and Askam-in-Furness are on the Duddon Estuary, on the west coast of Cumbria, in that part of Furness known as Low or Plain Furness. I say villages, but in fact (following post-war housing developments along the A595 and Saves Lane) the two have grown together into one quite large town. The populations of Ireleth and Askam are roughly 900 and 1,800 people respectively, making a total population of about 2,700 people.¹

Geologically speaking, Ireleth and Askam lie on different types of rocks and soils. Ireleth lies on a fold of Ordovician volcanic and limestone rocks. These rocks extend in a line from Broughton through Coniston to Ambleside and are formed from 'old lavas and ashes poured out from volcanic vents, over which a layer of impure limestone was deposited about 400 million years ago'.² Most of what is now Askam, however, lies on more recent Carboniferous limestone and alluvium, richer soil and smaller rocks deposited at the end of the last Ice Age, about 10,000 years ago.

There's no evidence of ancient man at Ireleth, in fact there's very little evidence of Paleolithic (Old Stone Age) man in Britain at all, apart from some bone carvings in Derbyshire and the grave of a young man in Dyfed, Wales.³ It was the Mesolithic period (Middle Stone Age, 8,300–3,500 BC) before the ice-sheets which covered Britain melted, the British mainland became separated from Europe and Ireland by the rising seas, and Furness was fully uncovered from its layers of ice. There are traces of seasonal Mesolithic visitors in the middens (piles of shells and rubbish) on the northern end of Walney, and 'stone axes, adzes and hammers in various stages of completion'⁴ have been found at High Haume. Opinion is divided over whether these artefacts were made here or the finished articles were brought from the Langdales.⁵ Walney's North End also has traces of bucket-shaped pottery used for cooking shellfish and arrowheads from Neolithic and Bronze Age people.

As I say, there are no records of these peoples in Ireleth and Askam, though many ancient burial sites were discovered by nineteenth century miners in the Furness area. Very few of these were properly recorded, but Walton and Barnes describe the discovery of two battle axes at the Hagg, near Dalton, some time prior to 1805, and two bronze age burial sites at Butts Beck and Goldmire in 1874.⁶



'Bronze spearhead and sword found at Butts Beck in 1874 . . . Both these weapons are now in the Lancaster Museum.' (Walton, p. 4)

As Barnes describes in *Barrow and District*, there were no great invasions of stone, bronze and then iron age peoples. Rather, as people with newer more advanced technologies moved north, the older civilisations were pushed onto the higher country and the more marginal tracts of land, often co-existing with the newer arrivals for some time.⁷

This situation of mixed cultures is what the Romans would have found when they arrived in Britain in AD43, had they ever made it to Furness. The tribes of southern Britain were relatively sophisticated, having traded with the European mainland for many years. In Furness, however, Bronze Age people survived amongst the peasant Iron Age cultures. Although they never visited the area these peoples were known to the Romans, who named the inhabitants of Lonsdale and Furness the Setantii, a tribe subject to the more important Brigantes who ruled the north of England from Northumbria to Lancashire.⁸

As the Romans were such good road builders, their main road north to Hadrian's Wall went via Ambleside, Wrynose and

Hardknott passes to Ravenglass. Thus, the oversands route was not strategically important, and so Furness remained quiet during the almost 500 years of Roman occupation.

The next half millenium, however, was not so peaceful. The waves of invaders from Scotland, north-west Europe, Scandinavia and Ireland all left their marks on the area — particularly in the place names. The number of Anglian place names in Furness indicates the strength of their presence here, but Saxons and Jutes never penetrated this far. Barnes analysed these place names to indicate how the Britons and Angles probably lived together relatively peacefully; the Angles (with their heavier ploughs and ability to turn the heavier lowland soils) taking the better, lower land, and the Celts (with their lighter ploughs) unable to turn the heavier soil working the higher, poorer ground.⁹

The next wave of invaders were the Norsemen. Barnes and Walton believe that the Norsemen who came to Furness were not the coastal raiders so famous in history books, but came from the Isle of Man. A group of Norsemen had settled there and attempted to establish a breakaway kingdom, independent of King Harald of Norway, in 895. Harald sent out a punitive party to bring them back into line, but many of the Manx Norsemen fled to the Furness coast. This theory is supported by the mix of Anglian and Norse names in Furness which, as in earlier times, implies a gradual absorption of a new culture, rather than invasion and imposition of a new language and culture.¹⁰

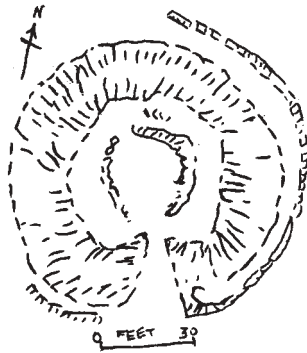
It is this group which may have given Ireleth its name. Arthur Evans, writing in the *Evening Mail*, put his theory thus:

‘Ire’ is considered to be a personal name of a Norseman who came over to Furness from Ireland during the time of the Norse or Viking invasion of this part of the country.

His craft would come up the Duddon Estuary and he would land in the marsh. Very soon he would make his way further inland on the side of the hill, where he would make his home. ‘Leth’ is Norse for a ‘Slope’ and as his home was on the slope of the hill, it was called ‘Ireleth’.¹¹

The name Ireleth, in anything like its present form, does not appear in any records until 1190.¹² Askam's name is also open to interpretation. The modern town is named after Askam Woods, which still cover a fairly large area of land to the east of Dalton Road, but which extended almost to the sands as late as the 1850s. Melville and Hobbs proposed two possible origins for the name thus: 'Ekwall — by the ash trees; or personal name Aski (Old Norse). Second element either "ham", enclosure, or "holmr", here meaning low land liable to inundation by flooding.'¹³

Ireleth's recorded history begins in 1086 with the Domesday Book when it was referred to as Gerleuorde, part of the manor of what had been known in pre-invasion times as the manor of Hougun — the ancient capital of Furness. Although it is not known for certain, Hougun was very likely at High Haume; there is evidence of an ancient settlement and a beacon there (the stone axes mentioned above).



Plan of ancient dwellings at High Haume, by Melville and Hobbs.

The Hougun Manor had belonged to the Earls of Northumbria since the time of King Canute, and at 1060 was in the possession of Earl Tostig. Barnes says, 'Under Tostig three thanes held each six carucates¹⁴ in Furness — Duvan at Kirkby Ireleth, Turulf at Ulverston and Ernulf at Aldingham. In 1065 Earl Tostig was expelled for bad government, being replaced by Morcar, in 1066 Tostig returned to fall with Harold Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge'.¹⁵ After

William the Conqueror's victory, Hougoun was forfeited to the Crown along with the rest of Tostig's lands until 1092, when William Rufus (the Conqueror's son) granted it to Roger Poictou. However, Roger took part in a rebellion in 1102 and he in turn was stripped of his lands, so once again Hougoun returned to the Crown.

This period of uncertainty and change was reflected in the whole of the north of England for the twenty years following 1066. William ruthlessly put down the northern rebellions which occurred after Hastings. His scorched earth policy, known as the Harrying of the North, resulted in famine and death on a huge scale. It's estimated that 60% of the land in Furness went out of production during this time. Many of the ancient places, such as Hougoun, disappeared altogether as actual places, surviving only as field or place names.¹⁶

The Domesday survey is known to everyone, though interpreting the information in Domesday should be done carefully. A place called Gerleuuorde, lying between the moor and the marshes to the north-west of Hougoun, has been identified as Ireleth. However, this Gerleuuorde would have been nothing like our remotest imaginings of an ancient village. Villages were small, often no more than a few family groups, and were regularly abandoned after a few generations once the land around had been exhausted. It was only after the Norman Conquest that modern English villages became more permanent and took on their recognisable forms. So, yes, Ireleth is in Domesday, but a village called Ireleth? Probably not.

From Domesday onwards good records are available for Furness, often because of the administration of the area by the monks of Furness Abbey. The Abbey was established in 1127 during the reign of King Stephen, and was dedicated to St Mary (there was a 'cult' of St Mary the medieval period).

The Abbey has its own complex history, which is well recorded in other local histories. In brief, the abbey was originally created under the Benedictine order after King Stephen (a Norman) granted a block of land at Tulketh, near Preston, to the Abbey of Savigny in

Normandy. These lands were exchanged in 1127 for land in Furness, and the Abbey of St Mary was founded.

In 1148 the Abbot of Savigny changed from the Benedictine to the Cistercian order, and commanded Furness to follow suit. Peter of York, the fourth Abbot of Furness, refused, and the dispute was referred by the Pope to a commission. Peter lost the dispute, and the monks were ordered to join the Cistercian Order or be excommunicated.

This episode in the Abbey's history is not told as an ancient religious dispute; the change from the Benedictine to the Cistercian Order was to have great implications for Furness in general, and villages such as Ireleth in particular. While the Benedictines were known for their teaching and academic traits, the Cistercians were a more industrious order; most of the records which survive relate to their agricultural, mercantile and industrial efforts.

Like the Benedictines, though, the Cistercians sought tranquility and separation from the world, which is one of the reasons why isolated Furness was so attractive to them. At other Cistercian abbeys, such as Fountains, they even went so far as to clear entire villages from the area around the abbey site to ensure their peace and to avoid disturbance from the rest of the world. As I mentioned, though, they were great agriculturalists and merchants, and under their hand large areas of Furness became very productive (see chapter four).

As well as owning large areas of land the monks created or took over new farms which were worked by a lower order of monk known as 'converts'. These farms were called granges, and the earliest mentions of Ireleth in Abbey records (in a Bull of Clement III in 1190) is as a grange. This implies that the loose group of huts which comprised Gerleuorde had already consolidated into the beginnings of Ireleth village.

But now Ireleth's recorded history has begun, and now it is time to move to different aspects of Ireleth and Askam's history. The first subject chapter discusses a topic which is touched on above — the development of house and home in Ireleth and Askam.

Endnotes

- 1 These figures probably don't accurately reflect the number of people now living in the developments on the Lots and Duddon Road.
- 2 Barnes, F., *Barrow and District*, p.2
- 3 Daniell, Christopher, *A Traveller's History of England*, p.5
- 4 Walton, J., *A history of Dalton-in-Furness*, p.1
- 5 ibid
- 6 Walton p.3
- 7 Barnes, p.7
- 8 Walton, p.11
- 9 Barnes, p.13
- 10 Barnes, p.16, Walton, p.6
- 11 Evans, *Evening Mail*, July 6 1973. Evans probably based this on notes by Melville and Hobbs.
- 12 Evans, 6/7/73. Other recorded spellings include: Gerleuuorde (1086), Irelyth (1190), Irlythe (1336), Yerleythe (no date) and Yerleth (1509).
- 13 Melville & Hobbs, Brief notes on Ireleth, p.3
- 14 Barnes defines a 'carucate' as being 'as much arable [land] as could be managed by one plough and team in one year, plus meadow pasture and houses for men and beasts; in area anything from 60 to 120 acres', p.18
- 15 Barnes, pp.18–19
- 16 Barnes, p. 22

chapter two

House and home

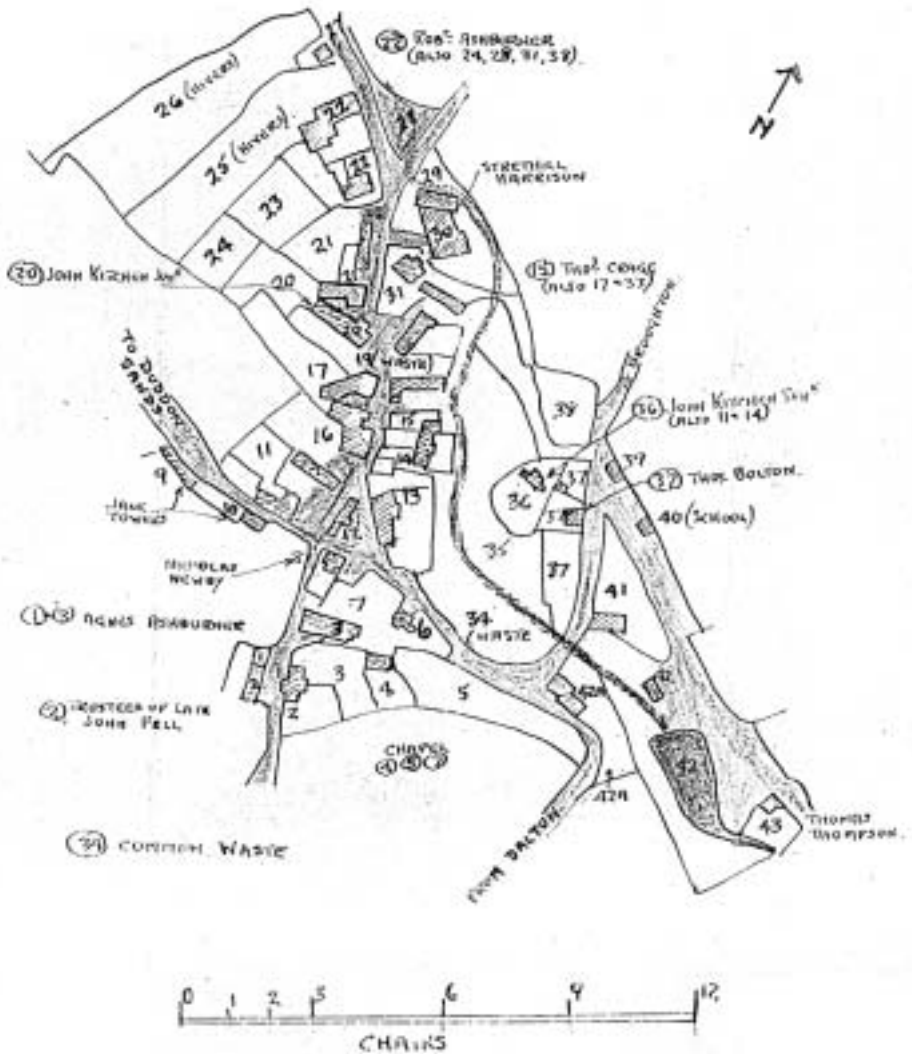
This is the first of the thematic chapters, in which the subject is housing and home life. The first part deals with the development of housing in the two villages, and in the second part home life for one early eighteenth century resident is described.

Housing

As mentioned in chapter one, apart from the old fortifications at High Haume there are no known remains of early housing (i.e. earlier than the sixteenth century) in Ireleth or Askam. The earliest dwellings would have been wattle and daub, built close to the dales to the north and south of Ireleth where people worked the old three-field system of agriculture, and would have left little trace as they were built on or over.

Date stones on the older houses in Ireleth indicate that housing development followed Saves Lane, the main road as it then was, which zig-zagged down Ireleth hill. Few carts or carriages would have had sufficient braking or horse power to tackle the straight descent and ascent of modern Ireleth Road. A rough copy of the Parish of Dalton Tithe Commutation map of 1842 (opposite) shows the layout of the major farmhouses and buildings of Ireleth at the time, the majority of which are on what is now Saves Lane. Low Lane, which is now barely more than a footpath, was at least as well frequented as the lower end of Saves Lane itself.

Date stones are sometimes inaccurate as a means of placing exact dates on buildings, as they can refer to dates of restoration or other activities (some have been known to have been taken from older buildings and used as a feature in newer ones), but the architectural styles of most of the dated houses on Saves Lane appear to fit with their date stones. Most record the period from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth centuries, a time of gradually increasing prosperity and the development of architectural features which



A copy made by Melville and Hobbs of the tithe map for Ireleth, held in the offices of Kendall and Fisher, Dalton-in-Furness. Saves Lane is the main thoroughfare, with the majority of houses clustered between the junctions of Saves Lane with Ireleth Road at the south and Low Lane at the north. Held in the Cumbria Records Office.

are commonly associated with modern housing. Among these features are private rooms, with doors leading into corridors, rather than the simple open-plan design of ancient houses, and the high semi-circular headed stair window of Brook Lea.

Most of the buildings up until the end of the eighteenth century were farm houses and their associated buildings, but from this time on more permanent domestic dwellings, service buildings (such as the old mill behind the Bay Horse Inn) and shops appear. Arthur Evans estimated that the mill dated from 'the [Napoleonic] Wars with France about 1795' when there was a heavy demand for locally grown and milled flour.¹ Ordnance Survey maps from the 1850s onwards give some idea of how housing has developed in the village; a series of copies of these are reproduced at the start of this book. These give an approximate idea of when the terrace on Hollowgate Road appeared, and the gradual movement of housing down Ireleth Road, which by this time had become the main thoroughfare to the bustling new town of Askam.

Askam's housing development is, of course, radically different to that of Ireleth. Unlike the old stone-built housing in Ireleth, the majority of Askam's older housing is brick-built and terraced, created for the influx of iron workers, and dates from the 1860s to the late nineteenth century. The mine owners and operators didn't live in Askam itself, but built their grand residences on the surrounding hills at Greenscoe and along the Broughton Road, with commanding views of their mines, steel works and the Duddon estuary (examples of this include Beulah House, Bankfield and Greenscoe House).

The census return for 1851 shows that there were already numerous houses scattered around the outskirts of Ireleth, most of which were farms, but many of which were occupied by iron workers. Although the Park deposit had yet to be discovered, enough ore was being worked to provide a living for a small but thriving community of iron workers. The population was approximately 200 people in Ireleth, with a further 100 in the outlying areas.² With the discovery of the ore at Park, things changed rapidly and dramatically.

Rather than ship ore for processing, as had happened in the past

(see chapter four), a steelworks was built on site on an area just to the south of the present day Furness Tavern. Accommodation was needed quickly for the miners and support workers, and building of miners' cottages began as early as 1865. The *Barrow Herald* optimistically reported that Ireleth Marsh (as that area of land was known at the time) would soon become a 'flourishing place'. By July 1866, a *Herald* correspondent reported 'beautiful houses and streets' on the Marsh, and estimated the buildings under construction there already outnumbered those in Ireleth.³

As Askam grew, more organised development took place, and within a very few years ambitious plans were laid out for a large town. This planned development took place in the Lots area, which explains both the regularity of the Lots' layout, as well as its half-finished appearance (all development ceased when the ore ran out).

The Ireleth Marsh/Askam/Lots area (at this time its name hadn't been decided, and all three were in use) was originally planned to have 'a church, a school, a market hall, an imposing square and, to complete the town, a public park facing the Duddon estuary'.⁴ This land was owned by a Mr E.T. Wakefield, and he and his partners — Mr Harris and Mr Shapter — were to be honoured in street names in the new township. Although Wakefield and Harris were duly honoured, Askam's ore ran out before Shapter's street was built.

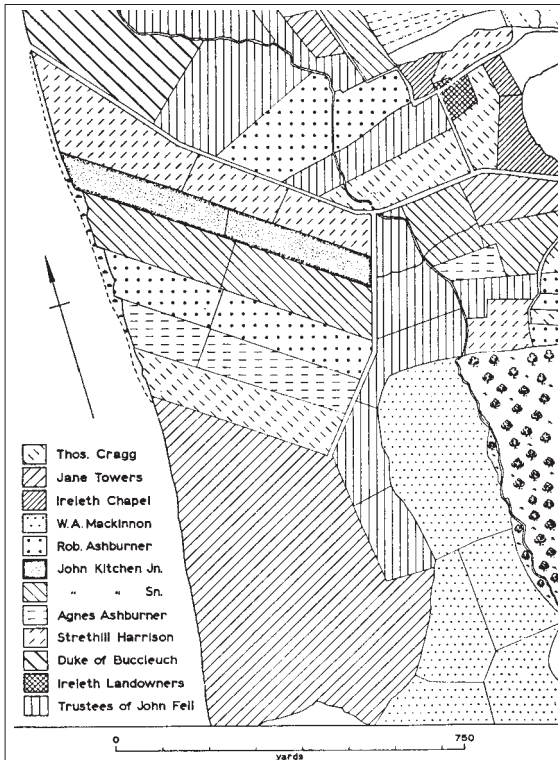
Land was obviously at a premium on Ireleth Marsh/Askam, and as early as the summer of 1865 notices appeared in the *Barrow Herald* offering land for sale on the northern side of the works. It seems that Ireleth land owners were more than happy to see the area developed, and held no sentimental views about the environment. In true Victorian pro-development style, one writer in the *Herald* described Ireleth as being 'on the side of a vast and barren valley', with the coastal strip itself considered to be a 'barren waste'.⁵

In spite of the grand plans, development of the new town proceeded in a more piecemeal fashion north of the iron works around two important sites: the proposed Duddon railway viaduct (see chapter three for more on this) and the Ireleth Railway Station. The station was opened in 1868, but although the viaduct was 'confidently

expected⁶ to go ahead at the time it never eventuated. Regardless of this, the proposed creation of the viaduct was used as a selling point for land in the area.

The result of this was to create two distinct areas of Askam: a southern half, including the ironworks and the laid out terraced streets (the Lots); and a smaller group of buildings clustered around the railway station forming a link between the Lots and Ireleth. The two parts of Askam were joined by the thoroughfare known variously as Drain Road, Sandy Lane and, finally after improvements, Duke Street.

The development of the northern half of Askam was strongly influenced the by the earlier rural landscape and old ownership patterns (see map below). The fields in the Dalton titre map show



The Ireleth coastlands about 1840, showing the ownership of land. The owners shown include: Thos Cragg, Jane Towers, Ireleth Chapel, W. A. Mackinnon, Rob. Ashburner, John Kitchen Jnr, John Kitchen Snr, Agnes Ashburner, Strethill Harrison, Duke of Buccleuch, Ireleth landowners and Trustees of John Fell. (Redrawn from the Tithe map of Dalton-in-Furness, 1842). Harris, p. 390.

blocks of ownership side by side, running parallel with the old cross-sands route to Salthouse (Millom). The new east/west-running streets of northern Askam (Steel, Sharp, Beach etc) were only developed as these blocks were sold off, and so these streets follow this older pattern of field ownership. Thus the older terraced houses are at the southern end of town (Sharp and Steel streets), getting bigger and newer as one moves northward towards Duddon Road.

In spite of the optimistic reports mentioned above, housing conditions in the new boom town were often terrible. The *Barrow, Furness & North-Western Daily Times* of 21 July 1871 reported that 'Many houses are fearfully overcrowded and one yard connected with three houses has to serve for thirty-five people'.⁷

Although conditions improved throughout the 1870s, sanitary conditions in parts of Askam were rudimentary at best. There were no sewerage facilities, with house drains discharging into the open parts of the Marsh. When sewers were laid in 1872 they were easily choked by sand, and the very shallow gradient to the shore resulted in further blockages. Only now did the developers come to realise why Ireleth was where it was; on a good slope, out of the flood zone and away from the sand.

Sand was a way of life in early Askam. As well as blocking the sewers it clogged the domestic water supply, which for most people came from stand pipes in the street. Drifts from the shore often covered the roads, and dunes as high as three and four feet formed in the main streets.⁸ As the ore and the optimism began to run low, the unfinished, partly developed look of the place drew adverse comments, such as those from a writer in the *Ulverston Mirror* in 1873: 'Askam presents the usual appearance of a new place . . . recently erected houses, unfinished streets, and so on. Paving and flagging are luxuries which have not yet been introduced'. The writer decided that Askam was 'not at first sight a very desirable spot to live in'.⁹ Even as late as 1894 Askam was described as 'little better than a penal settlement, dreaded by everybody, and hated by its inhabitants if only because of the sand nuisance'.¹⁰

Unfortunately for those early Askam pioneers most of the major



'Duke Street, Askam, in the early years of the present century. The photograph, which was probably taken in 1903, shows the principal shopping centre of Askam and part of the ironworks.' Harris, p.392.

improvements coincided with the demise of the steel industry, and ironically living conditions improved as the work ran out. There was to be no grand market hall or park for the Lots, although some fine shops were built along Duke Street, particularly at the station end.

This was the end of major building activity in the area until the immediate post-WWII period, when High Duddon Close was built. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries private developers built along the strips of Ireleth Road, Dalton Road, Duddon Road and Duke Street. Apart from individual houses, Ireleth Court Road was developed in the early 1960s, and Foxfield, Kirkby and Broughton Closes in the 1970s.

Early in 1981, Barrow Borough Council's attempt to make part of Ireleth a conservation zone was opposed by County Planning Officer Windsor Biggs. Mr Biggs did not consider Ireleth to be worthy of conservation status, saying:



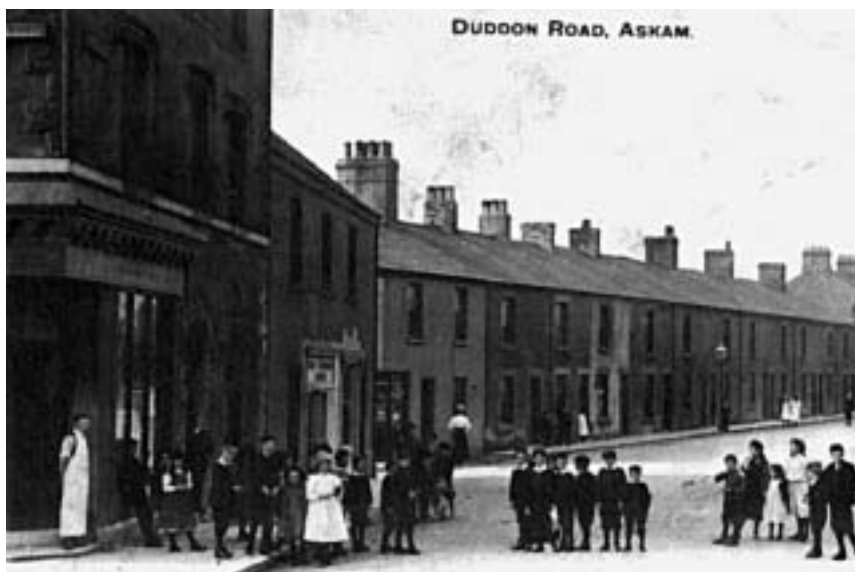
A painting of Ireleth, some time around 1951, from an article in the *Evening Mail*.

Although the older part of the village has long been established it comprises only a loose collection of buildings with little sense of unity. Neither the way the buildings are grouped together nor the way they are related to the landscape gives the village any special character, while the individual value of most of the buildings in the village has been reduced by the poor standard of recent conversions.¹¹

This is essentially true. Ireleth has no focal point, such as Lindal's green or Urswick's tarn. Askam's growth resulted in Ireleth Road cutting a line down the hill, and many of the older buildings which huddled the old road were demolished as the road's expansion and then private strip development took place. (This is graphically illustrated in the painting of Ireleth around 1951, above, which accompanied the news article.) The growth of Ireleth Road as the main thoroughfare has, however, allowed parts of Saves Lane to remain intact.

Home

Ireleth is lucky to have a historical record of early nineteenth century home life in the diary of Margaret Ashburner. Margaret was the daughter of Hannah and the Rev. Robert Ashburner, curate of Ireleth



'Two street scenes in Askam, c. 1908. The [top] scene shows Dalton Road facing the Furness Railway line. Occupants of the road at the time included William Charles Walker, miner and property owner, at No. 31 and William Longstaff, the joiner, at No. 13. The [bottom] picture shows the junction of Duke Street and Duddon Road, where William Stelfox Jervis ran his grocers shop in 1910.' Garbutt & Marsh, p154.

Chapel, and kept her diary (fairly sporadically) between 11 June 1814 and 1 June 1819. She had one sister, Hannah Bellman, and a brother, Robert William. She married Thomas Todd of the Guards, Kirkby, and their son John is the John Todd who gave the land for the 'new' church at Ireleth, St Peter's.¹²

Hannah Ashburner snr was the daughter of Captain Porter of Ireleth Old Hall, which was said to be 'originally surrounded by tall and beautiful trees, and adorned in the interior with excellent wood-work'. The Hall passed to Hannah's son, Robert William [Hannah jnr's brother]; and, when he parted with it, the new owner sold the lead from the roof for £200. According to T.E. Casson, who originally transcribed Margaret's diary, village tradition states that the door of the cellar was of spacious size, to admit the Captain's kegs of rum.¹³

Most of the entries in Margaret's diary are very brief (a short extract is reproduced below to give the reader some idea), but added together they provide a picture of what it was like to be a curate's daughter in Ireleth almost two hundred years ago. The spelling is noticeably irregular for a curate's daughter, a person who would have had a relatively good education.

January, 1819

1. Josop Turner left us. Rosted goos to dinner. Mr Fell and Mr Douglass to Tea. I soeed.
2. John Long came with a bad hand. Milk to dinner. I Clened.
3. Gibelet pye to dinner. John Long with his hand. sunday. Stade at home.
4. Gibelet pye to dinner. John Long M. Kitchen A. Postlet B. Thompson.
5. Milk to dinner. Ann Long to Tea.
6. Stud Mutton to dinner. mended. A man from Hame with a bad foot. Dalton Assembly. we did not go to it. I houseaffarse. Betty William Butler coled.¹⁴

As can be seen from this short extract, Margaret's diary life focused on four main areas: what she ate; what she did; where she and her

family went; and who they met with. Rather than list more of the entries (which are available in Casson's article in Barrow Library) I have condensed some of the information into the four groups mentioned above in order to provide some insight into Ireleth home life.

The first category is food. It's worth remembering that, in spite of improved agricultural methods and the introduction of foods from the New World, most people's diet was still very plain by modern standards. Added to this is the fact that Margaret was writing during and at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. During this time Napoleon effected a blockade of the European ports, causing great hardship and food shortages for many Britons. Self-sufficiency, a way of life for most people in rural Britain, became an absolute necessity at this time.¹⁵

I've been cautious and avoided making general statements, for many reasons. For example, the diary entries are incomplete and so the entries made might reflect seasonal trends, rather than true annual consumption patterns of the different foods. Also, what Margaret chose to mention might actually be untypical of what she normally ate. Did she write 'milk to dinner' because times were hard and that was all there was (and if so, what was the rest of Ireleth eating?), or because it was a treat to have milk with a meal, which perhaps consisted mainly of vegetables? (Vegetables — apart from the potato — rarely get mentioned, which could mean they were so commonplace they didn't deserve a mention, or exactly the opposite — because they featured rarely in her diet.) Another reason is that I don't know what some of the foods Margaret refers to actually are! For instance, does anyone still know what lobescouse is? Is it a distant relative of the Liverpoolian scouse? I guess that podash might be what I know as potato, or taty, hash, and so I've included it with potato meals. Fegg (or figg) sue defeated me, as did crrrow pye and batty pye. However, these more unusual sounding foods weren't mentioned too often and so won't affect the numbers too much.

The most commonly mentioned protein meal is beef, either cold or roasted (mentioned 36 times). I found this surprising given the



'Ireleth mill with part of the steeply sloping beck diverted along a race to the overshot wheel, on a card posted in 1906. The miller, covered in flour, is standing by the door.' The mill was probably built during the Napoleonic Wars. Garbutt & Marsh, p.155.

importance of sheep in the area, and had expected more mutton and estuary fish (such as fluke and, in season, salmon). However, mutton was mentioned only six times, fluke four times and salmon eight times. Possibly the beef was salted or preserved beef brought along the turnpike road from Kendal, as the most common fish dish was herring, another food which may have been bought preserved.

Potatoes, either roasted or in different forms such as podish, pies and puddings, were mentioned 56 times, making it by far the most common type of food. Few other vegetables were mentioned, the only others being 'greens', cabbage and turnips.

The overall picture which emerges is of a plain diet, possibly not well balanced by modern standards (unless vegetables which were being consumed weren't mentioned). The mainstay was potatoes and beef, spiced by the occasional herring, bacon, salmon and veal. Food preservation was limited, and so those foods which were eaten

once tended to be eaten for the next two or three days until everything was finished. Food was seasonal. Some foods were brought from outside the village, probably on her father's trips to Ulverston (though Margaret herself records a trip to Pennington for eggs).

Appendix 1 at the back of the book shows all the foods mentioned in the diary, with frequency of mention.

The second category, tasks, shows a quiet life, punctuated by moments of excitement. The most common tasks, in order of frequency of mention, were cleaning, washing, mending, house affairs, knitting, baking, making clothing, gardening, sewing and mangling and starching. Other activities mentioned included getting the rent (perhaps tithe rent due the parish), going nutting, brewing and (believe it or not) cleaning the parrot!

Articles of clothing made include an apron, four shifts, three sets of stockings, a plaited bonnet for her mother, a bedgown and a nightcape.

Her gardening activities aren't closely described, but it sounds as though the house was self-sufficient in some vegetables (she mentions sowing potatoes) and hives were kept for honey.

The third category is places. I recorded all the places mentioned, though not all of them were places which Margaret herself went to. She tended to record her father's visits to Ulverston (by far the most commonly visited place) and Urswick, most likely on church business, and her parents' trips to relatives at Moorside for tea.

The most commonly visited place which Margaret mentions is the chapel, which she went to every Sunday. She also mentions visits to Ulverston, Dalton, Lancaster, Marton, Pennington, Marsh Grange, Roanhead and 'the sea shore' — probably Askam shore, which was then known as Ireleth Marsh. Other places are mentioned which I'm not sure about, these include: Wana (Walney?), Greensea (Greenscoe? not much there then), Pertree and Ouldpark (this could be Old Park Farm, Near or Far). Her sister Hannah also went to Park, which is probably Park farm at Askam.

Other more social events include two recorded trips to Dalton, for balls and Easter celebrations, for which she and Hannah stayed

overnight with relatives. This must have been a huge event in Margaret's life! She also records visits to five funerals, and two visits to the Dalton Assembly. Her brother Robert was lucky enough to go to dance school at Dalton in February 1819, and in January of that same year Margaret herself went to a dance at John Postlet's (Postlethwaite's?) house on the day prior to a christening. She also records a visit to 'Mr Lishman's Publik day', whatever that was.

In the fourth and final category, people, a large number of different people are recorded. Many appear to have been travellers stopping over on their travels elsewhere (remember that in spite of the turnpike road it still took four days to get from Cumberland to Lancaster). Other visitors include what amounted to the local gentry, or that level of the local gentry who mingled with the curate. Another group of visitors were those with injuries, as it appears that the Rev Ashburner (or some members the household) administered medical aid to the local population.

A full list of the people mentioned is in appendix 4. Beware the original spellings.

Endnotes

- 1 Evans, July 20 1973.
- 2 Harris, p.385
- 3 Harris, p.392
- 4 Harris p.392
- 5 Harris, footnote 6,7 p.383
- 6 Harris, p.395
- 7 Cited in Harris p.398
- 8 Cited in Harris p.402
- 9 Cited in Harris p.403
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 Evening Mail, [date], p.2
- 12 Casson, p.56
- 13 *ibid.*, p.55
- 14 A full transcript of the diary was made by T.E. Casson and reproduced in the Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian and

Archaeological Society (new series, CW2, vol. 43, pp.55–69). A copy of this is available in the Furness Collection of Barrow Library.

15 It's during this period that Evans believes the mill on Blea Beck was constructed.

chapter three

Road and rail

As mentioned in chapter one, Ireleth and Askam lie on the ancient oversands route from Lancashire and Cheshire to Cumberland and the north-west. People from the very early Mesolithic times, through the Bronze and Iron Ages, would have travelled this route, as evidenced by the corduroy roads found near Dalton. Barnes describes this route thus:

A very ancient road across Furness was used from time immemorial; it links up with the oversands route from Cartmel at Conishead at the only place along the coast where peat-mosses or steep cliffs could be avoided; until the mosses were drained this was the only practical route up from the sands. From Conishead the track winds round the shoulders of the hills across Furness to Ireleth, always crossing the valleys at the narrowest point; it goes by way of Urswick to Dalton, across the Goldmire Valley to Ireleth, where it links with the oversands route across the Duddon estuary to Millom. Across the marshy valleys the track was carried on logs, e.g., in the Goldmire Valley, and here appears as the typical Bronze Age 'corduroy road.' It was not until monastic times that proper metalled road was constructed along the line of the prehistoric road, the monks of Furness and Conishead making great use of it in their commercial ventures.¹

Few carts or carriages would have had sufficient power to tackle the modern Ireleth Road. The old route — coming from Dalton — would probably have been: down past the Bay Horse pub, then either onwards to Kirkby or left down Sun Street, right down Hollowgate Road and onwards down the much safer gradient of Saves Lane to Ireleth Marsh/Askam (and then across the sands if you were journeying to Cumberland).

Apart from the roads built during the Roman occupation, most



Cumbrian turnpikes, from *Roads and Trackways of the Lake District*, Brian Paul Hindle, p. 142.

roads in Britain were terrible up until the middle of the eighteenth century. Prior to the 1730s road maintenance was the responsibility of the parishes through which the roads passed, and so in less wealthy parishes the roads were often poorly maintained. Early eighteenth century roads in Furness were 'sketchy' at best, and there was only a pack horse track between Ulverston and Kendal.² With the introduction of turnpike trusts, privately raised money was used to repair and maintain roads, with a series of graduated tolls to recover costs (and make a profit for the investors).³ Cumbria saw something of a 'turnpike mania' between 1753 and 1767, when several turnpike Acts were passed and trusts established.⁴

One of these trusts was the 'Kirkby Kendall to Kirkby Ireleth Trust', established in 1763, which created a turnpike road from

Kendal over Cartmel Fell to Newby Bridge, then through Greenodd, Arrad, Ulverston and Lindal to Ireleth, for the crossing to Salthouse (now Millom).⁵ However, there must have been the beginnings of a turnpike prior to the Kendal to Ireleth trust, as the estate map of Tytup Hall (held in the Cumbria Records Office) dated 1752 shows a turnpike gate next to where the Black Dog Inn is now.

As with the Furness Railway, passengers would not have been the most important things to be moved on Furness's roads. Agricultural produce, such as wool and beef, would be taken from Cumberland to Kendal. Also, because Furness had been virtually deforested by the middle of the eighteenth century due to local iron ore production, iron ore was taken by pack horse and cart to the coast, where it was dumped on the shore to be collected for delivery to the High Furness bloomeries (see chapter four for more on this). The Crossgates mines shipped their ore from Ireleth Marsh up the Duddon to furnaces at Duddon Bridge. A Reverend Stebbing



A view on Saves Lane, looking east, from *The News*, Friday, December 29, 1972. The caption reads, 'Even Mr Melville had no idea where this photograph was taken over sixty years ago, until he spotted the house on the skyline to the left. This gave him the clue.'

Shaw, on a visit to Furness Abbey in 1787, remarked on this road traffic:

. . . nothing curious or entertaining attracts the notice of the traveller, except an abundance of small, unwieldy carriages passing and repassing with the produce of the neighbouring iron mines to the shipping at Barrow, about three miles beyond the Abbey. I enquired into the reason of this heavy construction of their carts and found it necessary that they should be strong to bear the uncommon burden of this ore, but it is inexcusable in the common business of the country and only ignorance or prejudice that can be the cause of uncumbering one horse with wheels that are scarce moveable, so low and massy in their uncouth form . . . I was struck with the simplicity of northern manners, where every native that passes by salutes you with a good morrow.⁶

One of these ore and charcoal roads is the road which goes from Oregrave Bank (a mine which was located on what is now Mouzell farm), past Tytup Hall, through Marton and on up to Horrace and beyond.⁷

Hollowgate Road and Sun Street were paved with concrete in 1922⁸, and these days most of the roads and streets in Askam and Ireleth are sealed. However, there is still a stretch of Saves Lane which is worse than a cobbled street. Interestingly, a photo of around 1910 (opposite) shows Saves Lane as being in much better condition, probably because in pre-car days it was still in use as a thoroughfare having equal importance as Ireleth Road.

The origins of most of the street and road names in Ireleth and Askam are either self-explanatory, or easy enough to work out, though a few need some explanation. Here's a short list of street names and their origins, starting at the top of the hill and working down.

Moor Road: Leads from Ireleth to the moors of Kirkby, Lindal, Pennington etc.

Broughton Road: This road is known as Broughton Road from its starting point in Dalton, though it is known by other names at different parts, such as Tippin's Lane from Moor Side to Mere Beck.

Sun Street: Because it runs in an east-west direction, it probably derives its name from the path of the sun, or because the sun would always shine on it (as opposed to Hollowgate, which is often in shade).

Hollowgate Road: This is marked on older maps as Holly Gate; Hollowgate is probably a corruption or altered spelling of the original Holly Gate. The gate referred to in the name is probably the gate at the entrance to the top dales (now a public footpath).

Ireleth Road: On older maps Ireleth Road is the road across the sands from Salthouse (Millom), which makes more sense — roads are usually named for the places they're going to than for the places they're at. Since the development of road and rail around the estuary and the disuse of the oversands route, Ireleth Road has come to be known as the stretch from the railway crossing to Ireleth Brow.

Saves Lane: Saves is possibly a corruption or different spelling of Seaves; there is a 'Seaves' field mentioned in the 1842 Parish of Dalton Tithe Commutation list. This Seaves field is listed next to Hivers, one of the fields serviced by Low Lane, the lane which runs off Saves Lane next to Lower Brookside.

Dale Terrace: Possibly older than other streets and roads in the east Askam area, it leads to the south-western set of dales near Askam Woods.

Dalton Road: The road to Dalton, this is a relatively new road. As can be seen from the maps at the start of the book, this road came into being well after the arrival of the Furness Railway track, which path it followed.

Duke Street: Probably named after the Duke of Buccleuch who owns much land in the area, and who financed the building of St Peter's church and school in Ireleth. This was originally known as Drain Road (at least as far back as 1831) as it ran parallel to a drainage ditch which drained Ireleth Marsh. In Askam's early days it became known as Sandy Lane, though by the mid-1870s it had settled into the more dignified Duke Street.



'Snow scenes in 1940. The [top picture] shows the Kirkby road at Askam. The group clearing the road includes William Robertson, Bobby Vickers, Bobby Robinson, W. Brown, M. Todd with, on the far left, Betty Moore from the post office. The lower picture shows the huge drift on Ireleth hill. During this hard winter, funerals were conducted on horse-drawn sledges and food was in short supply in Askam due to the rail line being blocked. Cinema-goers travelling from Askam to Dalton walked over a snow-covered double-decker bus on a hill near to Greenscoe quarries.' Garbutt & Marsh, p. 158.

Duddon Road: Older maps show this as Marsh Street, with the modern Marsh Street moving south in later editions. This stretch would be very old, as part of the oversands crossing to Cumberland.

John Street: not known

Marsh Street: Refers to the old Ireleth Marsh, which became known as Askam.

Lord Street: not known

School Street: A short street running next to the northern side of Askam School.

Beach Street: Obviously leads to the beach, but then so do most of the others!

Sharp Street: After Joseph Sharp(e), an Ireleth landowner who became involved in the early iron industry (see chapter four). He owned those parts of the reclaimed land on Ireleth Marsh on which Sharp and Steel Streets were built.

Steel Street: From the steel on which Askam was built.

Crossley Street: After William Crossley, an investor in the early iron ore industry.

Lots Road: There are various fields in the area which, in times past, have been known as 'lots', or 'the Lots'. Although I could find no evidence to confirm that the modern area known as the Lots is built on fields of that name, it seems likely that this is the case.

Park Street: From the Park iron ore mine, on the land of the ancient Park Farm.

Furnace Place: After the blast furnaces of the steel works.

Wakefield Street: After Edward Thomas Wakefield, a Middlesex barrister who, with John Shapter and John Harris, founded the Furness Iron and Steel Co.

Rail

No history of Furness would be complete without reference to the impact of railways on the economy and the environment. As with the scars and marks left by iron ore mining, Furness is riddled with the remains of old rail tracks created for the delivery of ore, coke and limestone to the furnaces.



'A southbound departure from Askam leaves behind a Class 5. A short siding to the north of the station held banking engines for the climb to Lindal.'
Kirkman & van Zeller, p. 54.

Ireleth and Askam would have looked even more different, however, if an 1836/7 plan by young steam engineer and entrepreneur George Stephenson had gone ahead. Stephenson was, at that time, engineer for the Maryport & Carlisle Railway. He envisaged a level rail route to Scotland — the Grand Caledonian Junction Railway — running from Glasgow to Preston along the Cumberland coast.⁹ The route would go 'sweeping from Lancaster to Humphrey Head, Chapel Island, through Lindal Moor by tunnel to Ireleth, across the Duddon from Dunnerholme and then north along the coast to Carlisle'.¹⁰ Stephenson's concept becomes even more ambitious when he describes an embankment over the Morecambe Bay crossing, which would reclaim 'a new small county of England' in order to offset costs.¹¹

In the event, Stephenson's plan didn't go ahead. The railway along the Cumbrian coast was completed over many years by small local groups such as the Furness Railway. Most of these companies maintained their independence rather than cooperating with other companies, until the act known as the Grouping forced them togeth-

er. In the end money ran out before the proposed Duddon viaduct from Askam to Millom could be made, and so the project was abandoned. Instead, a shorter route skirting closer inland from Foxfield was pursued, saving £37,000.¹²

Following the drawing up of plans in 1843 sections of the Furness Railway were built. The section through Askam from Millwood Junction to Kirkby Slate Wharf forms part of the original Furness Railway line, which was officially opened on 3 June 1846. A passenger service began operating on 24 August.¹³ The line was extended from Kirkby to Broughton in April 1848 and crossed the Duddon by a wooden viaduct at Foxfield in 1850.¹⁴

There was a stop at the junction of the railway and the oversands road shortly after the railway went through, but this ended in 1859.¹⁵ However, the rapid growth of the new town of Askam justified a full station, and a high quality one at that. An attractive chalet-style station had been commissioned by Paley and Austin for Millom station, but it actually ended up being built at Askam, where



'Askam station on the Furness Railway, c. 1910. The road continues over the crossing in a straight line from Ireleth to the iron-red sand dunes of the Duddon Estuary, from which you could once see the flames of the Millom iron works.' Garbutt & Marsh, p. 155.

it was opened on 1 April 1868.¹⁶ Siding sheds were also built next to the new Askam station to stable a banking locomotive, which was used to assist trains over sixteen wagons with the steepening climb of Lindal Summit.

Apart from the main line the Furness Railway had dozens of smaller lines leading to and from virtually every mine, quarry, furnace and factory in the area.¹⁷ Apart from carrying ore, rails came from the Porphyry (Greenscoe) Quarry, bringing limestone for use as flux in the steel works. The remains of this track can be seen in the ruins of a bridge over the A595 near White Bridge, and on the Lots Road just after the White Bridge turn off. The Furness Brickworks also used its own 2ft gauge line to bring clay for the bricks, this worked until 1968.¹⁸

Endnotes

- 1 Barnes, p.11
- 2 *ibid*, p.79
- 3 Morgan, pp.374–5
- 4 Hindle, Brian Paul, *Roads and Trackways of the Lake District*, 1984, p140
- 5 Barnes, p.80
- 6 Barnes, p.81
- 7 Walton pp.12–13
- 8 George Jones, *pers comm*
- 9 Kirkman and van Zeller, p.3
- 10 Barnes, p.88
- 11 Kirkman and van Zeller, p.3
- 12 Kirkman and van Zeller p.3
- 13 Susan Benson letter
- 14 Barnes, pp.88–90
- 15 Kirkman and van Zeller, p.49
- 16 Kirkman and van Zeller, p.49, and Susan Benson letter.
- 17 *ibid*, p.4
- 18 Kirkman & van Zeller. p.53

chapter four

Industry

Agriculture

The dales to the north and south of Ireleth Road fall on those patches of land between the thinner high soils and the flood-prone low-lying soils of Askam. Most of these dales would have been used under the three field system, which Abbey records show was in operation by the fourteenth century.¹ The early period of King Edward the Third's reign (1327–77) was a period of prosperity for Furness; the population then (prior to the Black Death) was probably as high as it was in the time of George the Third (1760–1820).²

As described in chapter one, the monks of Furness Abbey were great merchants and industrialists. Originally established as a Benedictine Order, a twelfth century change by the Abbot of Savigny resulted in the abbey's being devoted to the Cistercian Order. This was to have an important effect on Furness in many ways; the Benedictine Order's chief interest was in teaching and scholarly works, whereas the Cistercians had a strong interest in architecture and agriculture.³

The Furness monks brought great husbandry skills with them, and brought large areas of land into cultivation (either for the first time, or reviving lands laid waste after the period of anarchy following the Norman conquest). Many of these reclaimed plots of land were farmed by an inferior class of monks known as 'converts', who acted as labourers under the supervision of the Abbey monks. Some of these plots, or granges, are first mentioned in a Bull of Pope Clement III in 1190, which lists 'Roos, Newton, Killerwick (later Elliscales), Irelyth, and Barrai, and all the Island of Walney'.⁴ The process of land reclamation and letting out to converts continued as long as the Abbey was in operation. Other granges mentioned in 1336 include Marsh Grange and Howehom (High Haume). By the time of the Dissolution in the mid sixteenth century:

. . . the only lands held by the monks themselves and worked by their own servants were Hallbeck, Park Farm, Manor Farm, Sowerby, Greenscow and Haume, all arable farms; and Sandscale, Thwaite Flat, Greenhaume, Mousel, Stewnorcote, and Ireleth Cote as sheep farms; the rest of the Manor was let to customary tenants.⁵

The monks of Furness Abbey cannot actually claim responsibility for creating the farm of Marsh Grange. This farm, known as Stephengarth at the time, is first mentioned in 1252 when it was owned by Alexander of Kirkby.⁶ Alexander was in constant dispute with the Abbot of Furness, to whom he was bound to do service. Their arguments continued throughout Alexander's lifetime, but on his deathbed he thought better of things and, in order to ensure a smooth passage to paradise, bequeathed Stephengarth to the Abbey, after which the monks made it a grange and renamed it Marsh Grange.⁷

In 1338 the Abbot of Furness Abbey received permission to impark the woods of Rampside, Sowerby, Roanhead, Greenscow, Hagg and Millwood, and eventually these parks were made into farms. Some of these new farms are still known by the name Park Farm (Park Farm below Greenscoe, Near and Old Park Farms on the top road).⁸

Life under the influence of the abbey wasn't all progress and development. Although answerable to the king, the abbots effectively ran daily life within the confines of their manors, and Furness was no exception. These monks were also businessmen, and some abbots were more ruthless than others. State papers contain many entries which make it clear that the abbots often engaged in smuggling (such as corn from Ireland, wool to Flanders and, in 1276, food to Welsh rebels⁹), and some abbots rode roughshod over their tenants.

Possibly the most notorious was Abbot Alexander Bankes, a local man who was 'headstrong and reckless, who seems to have embroiled himself in one mess after another'.¹⁰ Typical of Bankes's attitude to the treatment of tenants was the creation of New Park, a large deer park which involved the reclamation of huge areas of

IRELETH near DALTON-IN-FURNESS.

**Plan, Particulars, and Conditions of
SALE BY AUCTION,**

OF

A VALUABLE FARM

Known as "Ireleth Farm,"

AND CONSISTING OF A

FARM HOUSE, FARM BUILDINGS, and about 56 ACRES of
FIRST CLASS LAND, AND BUILDING GROUND,

BY

MESSRS. LOWDEN & POSTLETHWAITE

AT THE

Railway Inn, Askam-in-Furness,

On TUESDAY, the 9th day of APRIL, 1907,

AT 5-30 FOR 4 O'CLOCK OF THE EVENING,

And in the neighbourhood of such other Lots as may be offered upon the same day.

The Property being offered in Lots to suit purchasers seeking Building ground or Parcel or Accommodation Lands, and as several of the Lots are very adaptable for Building purposes and all are of the highest agricultural value, and within easy distance of the towns of Barrow, Dalton, and Ulverston, and of the Askam Railway Station, this Sale offers unusual opportunities to Builders, Capitalists, Farmers, and others.

To view apply to Mr. Ernest Mann, Jun., of Askam Grange, or to Mr. John Jackson, of Dalton, and for further particulars apply to the Auctioneers, Messrs. Lowden & Postlethwaite, Dalton-in-Furness.

W. BUTLER & SONS,
Solicitors, Dalton-in-Furness.

W. Butler, Printer, Dalton-in-Furness.

Auction notice for Ireleth Farm. The notice goes on to say, 'The Property is being offered in Lots to suit purchasers seeking Building ground or Parcel or Accommodation Lands, and as several of the Lots are very adaptable for Building purposes and all are of the highest agricultural value, and within easy distance of the towns of Barrow, Dalton and Ulverston, and of the Askam Railway Station, this Sale offers unusual opportunities to Builders, Capitalists, Farmers, Cow-keepers, and others.'



Map which accompanied the auction notice, previous page.

arable land and the eviction of villagers from their homes. The residents were evicted to their 'utter undoing'. As far as Ireleth is concerned, Bankes was in dispute with Sir John Pennington over grazing rights on Pennington and Mean Moors, hardly a huge historical drama in itself but indicative of the power the abbot held over village residents.¹¹

In more recent times, there has been a gradual pushing out of farm buildings to the outskirts of Ireleth, with all the former farm buildings being converted to residential properties. An example of this appears in the reproduction of a farm auction notice for Ireleth Farm on pages 35–36. From the attached plan, this appears to be Brookside. Many old farm buildings, barns and shuppens in the village have similarly been demolished or converted into homes, as a stroll down Saves Lane will show.

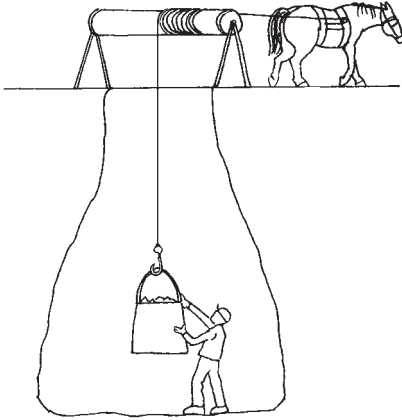
Agricultural land was also lost to mining interests and housing development, gradually eroding Ireleth's traditional role as a farming community. Many of the old dales are still visible, particularly those on the south side of the village close to Askam woods. Those on the north side running off Low Lane have all but disappeared as dales, though many of the old field boundaries remain.

Iron

Of the many iron-bearing minerals, the richest ores are magnetite and hematite. It is this latter ore which is found in Furness. The mining of this ore and the production of iron and steel had a huge impact on the Furness landscape, even over the many centuries prior to Schneider's discovery of the huge and rich deposit at the Park Mines. Barnes states that

'Oregrave', mentioned in Domesday Book and meaning 'ore diggings', proves pre-Conquest mining; while the Coucher Book of Furness Abbey bears witness that the monks extracted ore at Oregrave (presumably near Tytup Hall), Elliscales and Marton. These mines are referred to as the 'ditch of the iron mine', and 'the trench where the iron is dug', proving that surface deposits were exploited by open-cast working.¹²

In medieval times the ore was dug from open cut trenches and processed in crude bloomeries. Once the surface ore had been exhausted 'bell' pits were used to excavate the deeper seams. A bell pit was about five feet wide at the top, twelve feet wide at the bot-



A medieval iron ore bell pit.

tom, and fifteen to twenty feet deep, with the miners and ore raised and lowered in barrels by a horse gin (see diagram above).¹³ By about 1780 this surface ore was used up, and shafts and levels with primitive pumps were developed. Barnes states that, 'Furness ore, usually quite soft, did not need gunpowder and was worked with pick, spade, and gad or wedge'; turn-of-the-century maps of Askam show magazine depots, however these may have been for the extraction of limestone at Greenscoe.

The processing of the ore in the old bloomeries was a slow and wasteful process. The ore was crushed and mixed with lime (which acted as a flux to remove impurities) and surrounded by charcoal on a hearth.¹⁴ This was then ignited and a constant draught provided by bellows until a lump of soft, pasty, impure iron was created. This lump had to be re-heated and hammered over and over again to remove the impurities.

The finished iron was of a very high standard, but the process was hugely wasteful; Barnes states that , 'Five tons of wood made one ton of charcoal, and 11 cwts. of charcoal would produce about 3 cwts. of iron from half a ton of ore'. Lots of the original ore was lost in the slag, and so much charcoal was used that it became cheaper to carry the ore to the wood source rather than the other way around. By the time of the Dissolution of Furness Abbey, Low

Furness had been almost totally deforested and the ore was being carted and shipped up to bloomeries in High Furness.¹⁵

The blast furnace was discovered in southern England in the fifteenth century, but — probably because of costs — the old bloomeries were only superseded by a blast furnace in Furness in 1711. This blast furnace was built at Backbarrow by local ironmasters who faced competition from their Cheshire counterparts, who in their turn faced charcoal shortages. Eventually both the local and Cheshire teams joined forces to become the Backbarrow Company, which went on to become one of the largest producers of steel in the country. The company even owned its own mines, one of which — Heaning Wood, acquired in 1716 — became known as the Whitriggs Mine, famed for the amount and purity of its ore.¹⁶ This mine was described by Father West (a Jesuit priest and historian who lived at Tytup Hall in the 1770s, author of the 1775 publication *Antiquities of Furness*) as ‘the Peru of Furness’, which gives some idea of the scale of production.¹⁷

Mining and steel production always has been (and still is) a dangerous job, and in the days when the pits were primitive and safety issues were in the hands of the mine owners, many lost their lives. Walton reproduces several extracts from the diary of William Fisher, a Furness yeoman farmer, two of which directly concern Ireleth folk:

Nov. 25, 1828 James Benson of Ireleth & John Brockbank of Dalton wear sufacated by the foul air at Crossgates Iron Ore pit there was two others in at the same time which escaped with difficulty be accending the shaft in the bucket both the unfortunate men have left widdows and small famileys to bewail there loss.

Nove. 28 1848 a boy lost his Life at Orgrave Mill Iron works by his close getting entangled in the Masenery he was drown in and Killd Instantinely aged 15 years.¹⁸

It was not until 1851 that the Park iron ore deposit was discovered. This discovery is credited to Henry William Schneider, though another source states that the main discovery was made by unknown



'A Neilson 0-4-0T at one of the iron ore mines worked by Furness Mining Co., possibly Park in 1880.' Kirkman & van Zeller, p. 54.

miners working a week without pay after Schneider had decided to abandon the search for ore.¹⁹ It was after this time that ore production in the Ireleth area became heavily industrialised. Under the old system loads of ore were dragged by packhorse and rough carts to the shore for shipment, where it was dumped for collection by small coasting vessels for delivery to the High Furness furnaces. The shore at Ireleth Marsh (Askam) had long been a dumping ground for ore from the Crossgates Mine bound for the Duddon Bridge Furnace. With the new system, Cornish pumping engineers were employed keeping the mines drained and the Furness Railway was used to cart the ore to the steel works at Barrow.

The discovery of the ore at Ireleth and the development of the township which became known as Askam is a story in itself, and this is told in full by Alan Harris.²⁰ In short, the 1851 census shows that ore mining was already happening in and around Ireleth prior to the opening up of the large Park seam. Fifteen Ireleth residents — heads of households — described themselves as iron ore miners, quite a sig-

nificant number in a village of 2–300 people. By the time of the census miners' cottages had sprung up at Park and Thwaite Flat.²¹

A steelworks was built in 1870 and was described in the 1882 Directory of Furness thus: 'There are four blast furnaces, of which three are in operation. Two of the furnaces are on the largest scale used in this country, being 75 feet high and 23 feet in diameter at the boshes; the charging bell has a diameter of 14 feet. The chimney is 325 feet high, and can be seen for many miles around.'²²

By 1870 output had reached 350,000 tons per year,²³ and by the end of its life nine million tons of haemetite had been dug out.²⁴ The peak year for iron ore production was 1882, when 1,408,693 tons of ore were raised, but there was a gradual decline after that time.²⁵ By 1918 the steelworks was closed, and it was demolished in 1933. As an indication of the short life span of the Park deposit, by the end of its operation the Askam steelworks (like the ones at



'The end view of one blast furnace and the disproportionate chimney of Askham [sic] iron works at the turn of the century, with Black Combe shadowy in the background. The iron works closed during the depression of the 1920s.' Garbutt & Marsh, p. 153.

Barrow, Ulverston and Carnforth) had to use ore imported from Spain and Ireland to keep operating.²⁶

Slate and other types of mining

The other major mining or quarrying activities in the area include slate, limestone and clay. Remains of slate quarries are scattered throughout the low moors above Ireleth, mainly around Moor Farm and Standish Cote. None of these slate quarries are active any more, neither is the Greenscoe limestone quarry.

Other industries

Askam brickworks has operated for many years at its site on Dalton Road, just below Greenscoe Quarry. There has been very little else in the way of manufacturing in Askam or Ireleth, with most people having commuted to Dalton and Barrow to work. The major exception was the K-Shoe footwear factory, which had a large factory on Duddon Road for many years prior to its closure in the 1990s.

Endnotes

- 1 Inquisition at Dalton on the death of Sir John de Harrington shows that the three-field system was in operation in Furness in 1347, a relatively early date, a sign of the influence of the monks
- 2 Barnes pp.34–5
- 3 Barnes p.25
- 4 Barnes p.30
- 5 Barnes p.30
- 6 Melville and Hobbs, 'Marsh Grange', September 1963, p.1
- 7 *ibid*
- 8 Barnes pp.34–5
- 9 Barnes p.33
- 10 Barnes p.39
- 11 Barnes p.40
- 12 Barnes p.72
- 13 Barnes p.79
- 14 Until technical refinements in the eighteenth century, coal couldn't be

- used because of its high sulphur content, Barnes, p.74
- 15 Barnes p.72. Barnes also mentions that during the Battle of Lindal Moor, during the English Civil War, the fields were still open and hedgeless, indicating that Furness had still not recovered one hundred years later.
- 16 Barnes p.74–5
- 17 Barnes p.79
- 18 Walton p.59
- 19 Compare Barnes, p96 with Kirkman and van Zelder, p.53
- 20 Askam Iron: The development of Askam-in-Furness, *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society*, pp.381–407.
- 21 Harris p.386
- 22 Directory of Furness 1882, p.187
- 23 Barnes p.96
- 24 Kirkman and van Zeller p.53
- 25 Barnes p.94
- 26 Barnes p.95

chapter five

Entertainment

As can be seen from Margaret Ashburner's diary (chapter two), there was very little in the way of organised entertainment in old-time Ireleth. Most of the events were centred around the religious calendar, such as the Easter balls at Dalton which Margaret mentions. All this changed when Askam became established, with its rapid population growth and the influence of single men from around the country suddenly arriving to make a quick fortune, and more than likely to have a good time spending it.

Pubs and meeting places

Inns were increasingly common in English villages from at least the thirteenth century onwards, especially in villages such as Ireleth which lay on busy roads. However, up until the eighteenth century most ale was brewed and drunk at home.¹ Of the original pubs in Ireleth all but one have closed down, though Askam has managed to hang onto its pubs in spite of the demise of the steel industry.

The oldest pub in Ireleth is the Bay Horse, which is marked on the Dalton Parish Tithe Commutation map of 1842 as 'beershop, cottages and garden' owned by John Pearson. The Travellers Rest, which was on Broughton Road between the Bay Horse and Ireleth School (next to Blea Beck) was at that time a homestead and garden, and so may have been converted some time after 1842 to take advantage of road traffic, possibly increased following the development of the turnpike in 1763.

Other pubs in Ireleth opened with the growth of Askam, and these include the Hare and Hounds (also known as the Brig Jerry) at what is now 248 Ireleth Road, and the Ship. Both of these have been converted into private residences. There may also have been pubs called the Farmer's Arms and the Grey Mare, on Ireleth Road near the Railway, but I don't have any further information on their exact locations.



'Ireleth village, with the Travellers Rest on the right, c. 1910. Jane Massicks was the licensee. Mrs Margaret Parker ran the sub-post office.'
Garbutt & Marsh, p. 156.

Askam has many pubs from the steel era which are still open and operating. These are the Railway, the London House, the Furness Tavern, the Vulcan and the Askam Hotel on the Lots. In recent years the K-Shoe Social Club has opened, and both Askam rugby and soccer clubs have club-houses at their grounds on Fallowfield Park and Duddon Road. There was a Conservative Club on Duke Street, which is now a private residence, though whether this operated as a bar or club I don't know. The Cons is probably the building which was originally known as the Askam and Ireleth Unionist Club, which was built in 1897 on a block of land donated by the Duke of Devonshire.² In 1910/11 it contained a library, reading, billiard and games rooms and had a bowling green and miniature shooting range.³

Ireleth's Temperance Hall, on Saves Lane, was built in 1872 by the Society of Friends (the Quakers) as a meeting house. This reflects Ireleth's links with the Fells of Marsh Grange, which go back to the beginnings of Quakerism (see chapter six). Of course the 'Temps'

never served alcohol, but it did act as a meeting place for many years, and I understand it had a snooker table — probably to act as an alternative attraction to the pubs. It is now mainly used as a venue for the local branch of the Women's Institute.

There was a cinema in Askam for a short time, operated by Harry Barker. I understand that this was at the top of School Street, or around Marsh Street. I also believe that travelling cinemas would tour the country at the turn of the century; my grand-dad told me of one such show in a tent on Tudor Square at Dalton in about 1910, with the film projected onto the tent wall.

Sport

Organised sport only really arrived when Askam arrived, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are few level fields in Ireleth which could be used for playing fields. Although there are records of a village green, this has long since been built over. Secondly, many sports were only codified and recorded in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, at the same time that Askam was booming. Thirdly, the population of Ireleth alone was too small to organise teams of eleven, thirteen and fifteen people at a time.

Askam has, or has had, many sporting teams, including: the Rugby League Football Club; Askam Celtic Football Club; Askam Cricket Club; and a men's hockey club.

There have also been a couple of bowling greens in Askam. I mentioned the one at the Cons Club above, and there was also one next to Dale Terrace, on the site now occupied by Dougie Lattimer's garage. People tell me that this bowling club had a beautiful club house with a deep verandah. The current bowling green is on the old Askam School playing field next to the former Cub and Scout hut; it is dedicated to Dennis Jackson, the principal person behind its creation.

Dances, carnivals and other entertainments

As with the other towns and villages in Furness, Askam has an annual parade. When this actually began I don't know, though I do have



a couple of photographs (one of which is reproduced above) of 'Askam Rose Carnival 1931', with my auntie Kathleen in a dance troupe.

Askam has had a Silver Band for many years. The photo below shows the Askam band leading a parade up Ireleth hill, past the Bay Horse, to Ireleth Church for the Sunday school flower service in 1906.

In an article in *The News* of Friday, August 9, 1963, Mr Edward Walker is interviewed. He describes some of the entertainments of more recent years in Ireleth and Askam. Part of this article is reproduced below:

Mr. Walker, a sprightly 82-year-old, who lives at Askam View, has lived in the village all his life and as a boy attended the village school. Those must have been the grand old days for Mr. Walker, the days when step dancing was at the height of its popularity. Every quarter, a man called Staint Robinson used to come to the village from Lakeside and teach step dancing in the old Bondage Store at Askam, another building which long since suffered under

the hands of the demolition crew.

Mr. Walker recalled with some pleasure and a touch of nostalgia, the old jockey, nigger and clog dances. But his favourite was the sailor's horn pipe done the old way, with a man dressed up as a policeman, another as an old woman and a third as a sailor, and he says he could still do the dance today.

At the end of 12 weeks a ball was always given for all the villagers and the townspeople of Askam followed by a parade for the dancers, which often included tiny tots.

Mr. Walker has many treasured memories of the old village and is rather sorry to see so many of the local events and competitions become things of the past.

One contest he clearly recalls is the smoking competition which



'A village band, possibly Askam, followed by the Boys Brigade, wends its way up the steep hill to Ireleth church for the Sunday school flower service in 1906. Askam and the Duddon estuary can be seen in the distance. The Askam Prize Band secretary was Thomas Satterthwaite. The Ireleth church vicar was the Revd T.A. Leonard and the curate the Revd G. Clayton.' Garbutt & Marsh, p. 157.

was held in one of the public houses. A small prize was awarded to the smoker which produced the best coloured clay pipe. This of course, could only be done by smoking the pipe until it seasoned. At the time these contests were held, there were six 'pubs' in the village, Traveller's Rest, Bay Horse, Brig Gerry, Ship Inn, Farmer's Arms and The Railway. Today only two of them are in existence some of the others have been converted to houses.⁴

Finally, there is the Askam Band Hall, home of the Askam town silver band for many years, as well as countless dances, discos, birthday parties and wedding receptions.

Endnotes

- 1 Muir pp.147–50
- 2 Melville and Hobbs, 'Askam: The modern settlement', p.1
- 3 Bulmer, North Lonsdale Parliamentary Division, p.266.
- 4 Anon, The days when step dancing was the 'craze' in Ireleth, *The News*, August 9, 1963.

chapter six

Schools, churches and chapels

Schools, churches and chapels are often the focal points for the social life of village communities, and Ireleth and Askam are no exception. The age and type of these institutions in the two villages illustrate some important aspects of the area's development. While the actual buildings themselves are of roughly similar ages, the Church of England school and church in Ireleth, and Askam's National schools, Nonconformist chapels and Catholic church all have very different histories.

St Peter's Church of England School and Church

Some time in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, a young man named Giles Brownrigg of Ireleth went to seek his fortune as a tailor in London. Giles must have done well for himself, for in 1607 he bought a three hundred year lease on land at Fitchett's Field for £160. The original lease had been granted in 1579, and by the time Giles bought the lease an underlease had been granted allowing building to take place on the land. A tenement known as Lincoln's Inn Grange¹ was built, and this provided Giles with the small but steady annual income of £13 6s 8d.

No-one will know what obstacles of education or social background Giles overcame in London, but perhaps they influenced his decision to dedicate the income from his lease to the establishment of a school in his home village in far away Lancashire. Giles endowed a school master's salary for a school at Ireleth, an act which is commemorated in an oak panel still at the school. It reads:

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Although the panel is dated 1608 there was some delay in building; a document dated 1612 states that work had begun, and that it would be completed within one year, under condition that the tenants of Ireleth provided the following:

- (a) to fence and inclose a piece of land adjoining the school-house known as Hobkin's Garth, also another plot in the common Town Fields, for the sole use of the master.
- (b) to grant him pasturage and feeding for his 'nagge' in the Moor Close, and also pasturage for two cows, one with the tenants' kine on the Marsh, the other similarly in the Cow Close.
- (c) every tenant, for each 13s. 4d. of rent, would once a year provide and deliver at the school one cartload of good peat from Angerton Moss 'if the weather be seasonable for that purpose'.
- (d) the tenants would, whenever needful, provide all necessary material for keeping the school building in good repair.
- (e) they would take to the school-house, as soon as required, stone, sand and lime, whereupon Giles Brownrigg promised to erect a 'handsome porch and sufficient before the dore of the house'.²

However more delays followed, and it was 1624 before the school master's stipend was actually available. This wage was made up of the income from Brownrigg's lease receipts, less ground rent and a £2 annuity to an Alice Bolton of Marton. This left £10 for the master, who was also responsible for repairing the glass windows of the school house, in what has been described as a 'somewhat ingenious provision for ensuring his attention to good discipline of his pupils'.³ Under the terms of the original agreement (signed in 1624) the master was to be appointed by the tenants of Ireleth, a loose body of people, only four of whom are named in early documents.

The informality of this arrangement suited the times. The four named tenants — Christopher Brownrigg, Thomas Pirrie, Thomas Youdall and George Brockbank — were possibly friends and family of Giles's, and it would have made sense for him to have people he knew administering the spending of the money which he was sending from London. There was a negative side to this informal arrangement, however, as became apparent in later years.

Giles Brownrigg died on 20 December 1633, and was buried at Dalton. Hobbs states that the original schoolhouse was 'well situated on an eminence in the village at the junction of the road leading to Askam'⁴, though given that there was no road to Askam at the time this could be a couple of places: at the Ireleth Road/Saves Lane junction; or at Ireleth Brow, where Ireleth Road meets Broughton Road. The building was oblong in shape and had two floors, with a porch on the south side.

As early as 1637 some of the villagers were using the schoolhouse as a chapel, as no place of worship existed in the village at that time. A previous attempt to carry out worship in the schoolhouse had been stopped by the Bishop of Chester, who deemed the building 'neither decent nor large' enough for divine worship. Eventually the villagers got their way, and permission was granted to pull down the upper floor, or loft, and extend and beautify the lower floor 'to the satisfaction of the vicars of Dalton, Urswick, Pennington and Aldingham'.⁵ In order to make the most of limited resources the offices of minister and schoolmaster were combined in one person, an arrangement which carried on until the end of the nineteenth century. Although the combining of offices solved an immediate problem it brought a much more powerful party — the established Church — into the relationship. From this time on and for the next 250 years, the school often took a back seat to the chapel, and the building was in later years often referred to as a chapel with a schoolroom attached rather than the other way around.

On 27 July 1639 an agreement was signed between the villagers and James Waller, the minister and schoolmaster of the time, allowing Waller to build a large house, at his own cost, on Ireleth Green.

The agreement was that this house would be Waller's for his lifetime, and his wife's afterwards, provided she kept it in good repair. Thereafter the house would be available for succeeding ministers and masters rent free — a bargain for the villagers. This house still stands; it is the (much altered) Old Parsonage on Sun Street, and must be one of the oldest houses in the village.

Over the years the curate/masters' lands were increased by gifts from various villagers. In 1733 land adjoining the master's garden (known as the Butts) was donated by villagers, and in 1734 Mr John Hart donated land known as Back Green, or Hopkin Garden.⁶ The chapelry received other monies through grants from the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty. In 1749 £200 was received, and the chapel used this money to go halves with Walney Chapel to buy land at Cocken. Other lands, at Ulverston and surrounding districts, were also bought following further grants from Queen Anne's Bounty in 1753 and 1772.

The villagers' gifts would have been welcomed by the curate/masters, who at the time were still living on the original £10 stipend allocated by Giles Brownrigg almost 150 years before, supplemented by money from the church for the curate's position. To add to the financial pressures, claims came from London demanding that Ireleth pay a proportion of the land taxes on the Grange Inn land, though these claims were strongly resisted by school master Hugh Hunter in 1695 (in fact he put in a counter claim for an increase in stipend) and also Thomas Tyson in 1765.

This Thomas Tyson completed a questionnaire (undated) about the chapelry, which provides some background to conditions at Ireleth in the late eighteenth century. Tyson's answers are reproduced below:

1. The Chapel of Kirkby Ireleth is a Chapel of Ease under the parish church of Dalton in the County Palatine of Lancaster. The Chapelry consists of one small village comprehending Nineteen Dwelling Houses and many/most of the Inhabitants are Tenants at Rack Rent.

2. and 3. No Sectaries of any Denomination within the said Chapelry.

4. There are none who obstinately or previously absent themselves from public Worship on the Lord's Day.

5. I reside constantly upon my Curacy, not in the House belonging to the Chapel, but in one of my own, and am in Priest's Orders.

6. Divine Service is duly performed twice every Lord's Day and one sermon preached. Prayers are mostly read on such days as are appointed by the Rubrick, the Children are catechised every Year in Lent and an expostion read either from Bishop Beverige or Dr. Clark during that season. The Sacrament administered three times in the Year; there are generally above twenty Communicants and last Easter twenty-seven.

7. The Chapel of Kirkby Ireleth was first endowed with the yearly Salary of four Pounds ten Shillings by Gyles Brownrigg of the Parish of St. Clements Danes in the Strand in the County of Middlesex in 1624. It received the Benefit of £200 Queen Ann's Bounty in 1749 and a Purchase of Lands made in 1750. A second lot came in 1753 and a Purchase of Lands made in 1754, a third lot fell in 1772 and a purchase of Lands made in 1774. All which said several purchases now let at the Yearly Rent of Thirty one Pounds.

8. The Inhabitants have heretofor elected and the Vicar of Dalton nominated to the said Chapel/Curacy of Kirkby Ireleth. The Chapel House is in good repair. And as there are no Glebe Lands, there is no Terrier. We have no public Register, there being a proper Register of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials regularly kept at the Church at Dalton for the whole parish.

9. I teach a Free school at Kirkby Ireleth (for want of School House) in the Chapel. It was endowed by the said Gyles Brownrigg at the time of his endowing the sd Chapel, with the yearly salary of £5/10/- together with £5 which the inhabitants have obliged themselves to contribute yearly for ever, Make the whole Income to ten guineas a year. For which said School I obtained a licence from S. Lord Bishop of Chester the 23th December 1744. The number of Scholars are about 30, and are taught Greek and Latin,

Writing and Accts and such other kind of Learning as are most likely to ground them in the Principles of the Ctn Religion.

10. No Alms-houses etc.

Tho. Tyson curate of K. Ireleth.

Kirkby Ireleth Curate — Tho. Tyson nominated 21 Dec 1743.

Deacon, 24th Sept. 1744. Saml Chester. Priest May 25th 1746 S. Chester.

This Thomas Tyson died in 1790, at which point Robert Ashburner (father of Margaret, who appears in chapter two) became curate and schoolmaster. His appointment caused considerable trouble between the Ireleth residents, the vicar of Dalton (Rev Christopher Couperthwaite) and the Bishop of Chester. The dispute dated back to Giles Brownrigg's establishment of the original school almost 200 years before. Then, Brownrigg vested the appointment of the school master to a number of tenants, residents of Ireleth. The intention was that as any of this group died or left the village, the remaining tenants would elect a new person to their body. The problem for the villagers was that, by the end of the eighteenth century no elections had been held in living memory, and the electors had become a somewhat loose bunch. At the same time, the vicar of Dalton believed that he held the right to nominate curates to chapelries within his parish (remembering that, to all intents and purposes, Ireleth was by 1790 a chapel with a school room attached rather than vice versa). Couperthwaite nominated John Singleton (who at the time was curate and schoolmaster at Dendron) to the position. Who should nominate the position? Was it the vicar of Dalton, as in all the other parishes, or the residents? If it was the vicar, then did the residents retain the right to nominate the school master? The Bishop refused to licence either candidate and effectively gave the residents and the vicar six months to settle the dispute; if the dispute wasn't resolved by then the title would lapse to him.

Eventually it was decreed that, while the vicar had the right to nominate curates within his parish, a court would preside in favour of an alternative method of appointment if it could be shown that

this practise followed ‘ancient usage’.⁷ Although the dispute almost went to expensive litigation, common sense prevailed and the vicar of Dalton backed down, and on 14 March 1791 nine inhabitants and landowners signed a nomination for Robert Ashburner, in agreement with Couperthwaite. This Robert Ashburner remained in office until his death in 1840 at the age 81; at 49 years the longest of anyone in the history of the school and chapel.

By now times were changing in Ireleth, and Ashburner’s successor, Rev HN Walton, was the last of the combined curate-schoolmasters. By 1859 the influx of iron workers resulted in a huge growth in the population and an application was lodged for Ireleth to become a parish in its own right, separate from Dalton. This application was made in 1860, along with a request to have the offices of curate and schoolmaster separated. In 1862 Walton resigned as master in order to become curate full time. From the beginning of 1863 the old Free School established by Giles Brownrigg ceased to exist, and scholars began paying ‘a few pence’ tuition fee weekly towards the new master’s salary.⁸

The Duke of Buccleuch funded the building of a new school house in 1862, and that part which is the core of the current school was built. In the following year the old school was demolished. All that survives of the older building is the font, pulpit and the oak plaque. The font was taken to Cliff House (where it was still at in the late 1940s); the pulpit is in the churchyard of St Peter’s Church. The chapel bell is believed to have ended up at the mission church at Newton-in-Furness.⁹ The oak plaque is, of course, still in place — though hidden behind a blackboard installed in the early 1970s by the then headmaster, the late Mr Roger Plane.

The present St Peter’s Church was consecrated on 29 June 1865. Hobbs (writing in 1948) said that, ‘Ireleth tradition has it that [John Todd of the Guards, Kirkby] owned the site now occupied by ‘Bankfield’ and intended that the church should be erected there, but a conference at the “Bay Horse” Inn resulted in an exchange of land, and so the church came to occupy its present position’.¹⁰ I can just imagine what sort of a ‘conference’ that was.



St Peter's Church, Ireleth. This picture is from a postcard sent to Mrs Crellin of 37 Hood Street, Barrow, on 21st August, 1917.

The separate parish of Ireleth-with-Askam, which had been requested in 1860, was finally formed on 12 May 1874. In 1879 the original lease purchased by Giles Brownrigg expired, and so the trustees of King's College Hospital (which by then partly occupied the Grange Inn site) offered £1,000 in settlement of all claims.

The school building was enlarged in 1898, but has almost closed a couple of times since then. The Education Act of 1944 made many schools redundant, though Ireleth survived, and again in the late 1950s/early 1960s — when pupil numbers were low — local government sought to rationalise the number of schools. At the end of the twentieth century, over 370 years after its establishment, Ireleth school has undergone a resurgence. Pupil numbers have continued to climb throughout the 1960s, 70s, 80s and 90s under headmasters Mrs Ainslie, Mr Plane and Mr McPherson. In 1997 there were over 100 pupils enrolled, some occupying the new schoolrooms at the eastern end of the playground which were erected in 1990s.

A list of the known curates, vicars, school masters and teachers of St Peter's is being compiled for future editions of this book.

Askam's schools

The National School on the corner of Duke and School Streets was built in 1873. It cost £2,500 to build and originally had three departments: boys, girls and infants. The building was intended to accommodate 500 children, but according to the Directory of Furness there were 'about 720 children' in attendance.¹¹ By 1910 this number had declined to about 300 children; due both to the opening of the Victoria Council School on Lots Road in 1888 and the movement out of Askam following declines in the steel and iron ore industry. Askam School closed in 1970s, at which point all pupils were transferred to the Victoria School, and the old school was converted into a community hall.

The Victoria Council School on Lots Road was built to accommodate 278 children, and in 1910 had approximately 240 in attendance.¹² It has been fully renovated, and is now the main school for Askam.

Catholicism and Nonconformism

There is a strong tradition of Nonformism in Furness which can be dated back to at least the mid-seventeenth century. Probably the most well-known local nonconformists are the Quakers, who still have strong links in the area at Swarthmoor. Separate histories of the Quakers are widely available, but for this history it is worth noting that George Fox, founder of the Quaker movement, married Margaret Fell of Marsh Grange in 1669. Margaret, known as the 'nursing mother' of Quakerism, was born at Marsh Grange, and very likely attended Giles Brownrigg's school.¹¹ Strong Quaker links were maintained between the Askews and Lowers of Ireleth and the Fells of Swarthmoor for many years after. The most prominent surviving artefact of the Quakers is the Temperance Hall on Saves Lane, built in 1872 as a meeting house for the Society of Friends. The 'Temps' is still in use today, though mainly by the Women's Institute.

Historically Furness was a relatively tolerant place for dissenters and nonconformists. Particularly tumultuous was the period during the English Civil Wars, barely a century after the Reformation, the dissolution of Furness Abbey, and the establishment of the Church of England. During the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell the Book of Common Prayer was abolished and the Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and others vied for religious and political supremacy.¹² Throughout all this Furness folk generally kept a distance from dissenters whilst allowing the Nonconformists among them to continue unmolested.

Throughout the Civil War period, and after, Catholicism maintained a low but constant profile in Furness. Some prominent families, such as the Kirkbys of Kirkby Hall, remained true to their faith — though the Kirkby family lost the hall following the Oates Plot of 1678.¹³ Catholicism could well have been kept alive in the area by the arrival of migrants to work in the infant steel industry. Irishmen were brought in to build the furnaces at Backbarrow, and perhaps these men — or others like them — stayed on in Ireleth and district to work in the Park iron ore mines.¹⁴ I believe that Brow Foot, former home of Mrs Sherwood, has a priest hole, indicating committed but hidden links. The local Catholic community worshipped at the Christian Meeting Room in Crossley Street, which was built in 1907 at a cost £350.¹⁵ This is now St Anthony's Roman Catholic Church.

During the period of Furness's industrialisation a wave of nonconformists arrived with the Cornish miners and other migrants who came to work the iron ore mines, and here after Askam's religious life was predominantly nonconformist. The Zion Chapel (as it was then known) of the Primitive Methodists on Beach Street was built in 1870 and improved in 1902. At this time a Sunday School was added at a cost of £500.¹⁶ The Wesleyan Chapel on Duddon Road was also built in 1870; it too was enlarged for a Sunday School, at a cost of £800. There is also a United Methodist Chapel on Duke Street.

The nonconformists were heavily involved in industry at local and national levels. Barnes believes that, 'Perhaps exclusion from

public office and the state church made dissenters concentrate their energies on industry and commerce; or perhaps the spontaneity and individualism of Quakers and Methodists flourished in industry where self-reliance, assertiveness and enterprise were essential'.¹⁷ For whatever reason, there is a strong legacy of buildings in the village — though not so much of practising worshippers.

Bulmer, in the North Lonsdale Parliamentary Division, also notes that there was a Salvation Army Hall on Duke Street in 1910/11.

Endnotes

- 1 This was later known as the Grange Inn, and is still marked in the London A-Z, map A2.
- 2 Hobbs, p.147
- 3 Hobbs, p.148
- 4 *ibid.*
- 5 *ibid.*
- 6 Hobbs p.157
- 7 Hobbs p.162
- 8 Hobbs p.164
- 9 Hobbs p.165
- 10 Hobbs p.165
- 11 Directory of Furness, p.188.
- 12 Melville and Hobbs, 'Askam: the modern settlement', p.1
- 13 For info on the 'nursing mother', see Quaker booklet p.6; for attendance at Ireleth school, see Melville & Hobbs.
- 14 Foulds, p.4
- 15 Barnes pp.69–70
- 16 See Barnes; also footnote 53 of Harris, p.398
- 17 Melville and Hobbs, 'Askam: the modern settlement', p.1
- 18 *ibid*
- 19 Barnes p.78

Appendices

1. Food in Margaret Ashburner's diary

The most commonly mentioned foods are beef (cold or roasted) 36 times, potatoes (roasted, 'O' and potatoes, podish, pudding and pie) 56 times, herring 21 times, milk 17 times, fish 14 times and bacon 10 times.

By group, the most common protein foods were:

Red meat (beef, bacon, 'meat', mutton, spare rib, veal) 70 times

Fish ('fish', herring, fluke, salmon) 47 times

Fowl and game (fowl, rabbit, goose) 6 times

Offal (giblet pie, stewed offal) 7 times

Eggs 6 times

The most commonly mentioned vegetable was the potato, with 56 mentions. Other vegetables mentioned were cabbage, 'greens' (with bacon) and turnips.

Meals mentioned by frequency (alphabetically) were: bacon (and greens or beef) 10; baked muffins 1; barley pudding 1; batty pye 1; beef (steaks and roast) 36; berry pie 1; black pudding 6; broth 2; cabbage 1; crrow pye 3; custard 8; dumpling 4; eggs 6; figg/fegg sue 2; fish 14; fluke 4; fowl pye 1; fowl (roasted) 1; giblet pie 4; goose (roasted) 1; herring 21; lobescouse 8; meale pye 1; meat 2; milk 17; minst (mince?) pie 1; mutton (boiled) 6; O and potatoes 6; oatbread 2; offal ('stud oufel') 3; pancakes 3; pepper with cream 1; podish 13; potatoes (roast) 22; potato pie/pudding 15; pudding 3; rabbit 3; salmon 8; spare rib 8; sweet pye 1; turnips 1; veal (cold and roast) 8; wheat-bread 1.

2: Tasks featured in Margaret Ashburner's diary

Tasks, in order of regularity

Cleaning	36
Washing	31
Mending	29
'Houseafarse'	22
Knitting	20
Baking	20
Making clothing (apron, 4 shifts, 3 stockings, plaited bonnet 3, 1 bedgown, 1 night- cape)	13
Gardening/weeding (This includes weeding, setting potatoes, looking after bee hives)	11
Sewing	9
Mangling and starching	4
Going to get rent	3
Nutting ("went a nuting")	2
Brewing	1
Cleaned parrot!	1

3: Places featured in Margaret Ashburner's diary

Most commonly mentioned places

Chapel	40
Ulverston	39
Dalton (mostly her father)	20
Moorside	16
Funerals	5
Lancaster	2
Sea shore/sands	2
Ronerd/Ronard (Roanhead)	2
Urswick	2
Assembly (Dalton)	2
Greensea	1
Pertree	1
Marion	1

Penneton (Pennington) (for eggs)	1
Wana (Walney?)	1
Marsh Grange	1
Ouldpark	1

Other events places mentioned

Went to a ball at Dalton, (with Hannah), stayed overnight (p62) (and the next year, 26/3/1819), also Robert went to a dance school there 1 Feb 1819

A 'danse' at John Postlet's, there was a 'cresning' next day (Saturday) 23 January 1819

Mr Lishman's Publik day 19/3/19

Hannah went to Park for 'Ounings'

4: People

Allon, Dr; Answorth, Betty; Ashburner, Betty (cousin); Ashburner, John (uncle); Ashburner, Robert; Ashburner, William; Atkinson, Dr; Atkinson, R; Atkinson, Samuel; Atkinson, Thomas

Barrow, Thomas; Bellmor, John (uncle); Biggins, E; Bishop of Chester; Boulton, Mr & Mrs; Breure, Jane; Bridges, Dr (also spelt Brigs); Brogbank, Mr & Mrs; Buckley, Mr Buttler, John & Betty Carruthers, Mr; Caruthers, G[e]orge; Chamley, Mrs; Chanak, Betty; Chanak, Thomas; Chomley, Miss; Cocrton, James (also spelt Cockrton); Cocrton, Robert (also spelt Cockrton) Cockrtons, Miss Coopthet, Miss Copathet, Wm; Coward, Jas; Cragg, H; Cunsworth, Elnore

Douglass, Betty; Duk, Sara (and daughter)

Ervin, Mr

Fell, Agness; Fell, James (cousin from Muncaster); Fell, M

Garner, Mr & Mrs; Garner, Miss; Gilpin, Mrs; Goad; Grenger, Miss

Hart, Captain; Hart, Mrs; Hartley, Ann (also spelt Artley); Hateley, Mrs; Hodshin, Marey; Hodshin, T; Huse, T

Jackson, Mr; Johnson, Miss J

Kitchen, M (also spelt Kitching); Kitchin, J; Kitching, B

Leck, Sarah; Lotus, C; Long, Mr; Long, Ann; Long, John; Long, Nancy; Long, W

Newby, James; Newby, John; Newby, Miles (Betty's son); Nicklson, Betty; Niclson, Ann; Niclson, J; Niclson, R; Niclson, T; Nuby, Betty of Dunnerom; Nuby, Bridget; Nuby, Milse (poss. Miles Newby); Nuby, Mary

Park, Ann; Park, Mr (also Parke); Pears, Miss; Pearson, J; Pearson, Martha (also spelt Person); Pearson, R (also spelt Person); Penney, Miss; Petty, Mr; Pictor, T; Poslet, Ann (also Postlet); Poslet, Mr; Postlet, T; Poslewate, Mr; Preston, Agnes; Procter, Elling

Quay, John

Richins, Miss

Serven, Mr B; Sharp, L; Sharpe, Thom; Silver, Betty; Slater, A; Sleater, T; Sorrow, John; Stabls, Edward; Stables, Ann

Talor, Betty; Thompson, B; Thompson, Mary; Thompson, R; Thompson, W; Todd, Mr; Townson, Margaret; Towrs, Miss; Turner, Henry; Turner, Joseph; Turner, Robert; Turner, Thomas

Webester, Mr & Mrs; Wield, Miss; Wild, Mr; Wild, Mrs; Woodborn, Mr

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Notes

