The Mourholme Magazine of Local History

THE MOURHOLME MAGAZINE OF LOCAL HISTORY

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Contents

The Mourholme Magazine of Local History is issued by the Mourholme Local History Society for the study of the history of the ancient Parish of Warton with its seven constituent townships: Borwick, Carnforth, Priest Hutton, Silverdale, Warton, Yealand Conyers and Yealand Redmayne.

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

Yearly subscription £5.00, (family memmbership £8) includes evening lectures and field trips, the Mourholme Magazine and access to the Society's archival material.

Application for membership should be made to Mrs. J. Chatterley, 173a Main Street, Warton, Carnforth, Lancashire.

Contributions to the magazine - articles, letters, notes are invited. Please send them to Mrs J. Clarke, 55 Silverdale Road, Yealand Redmayne, Carnforth, LA5 9TB. Tel. 781363.

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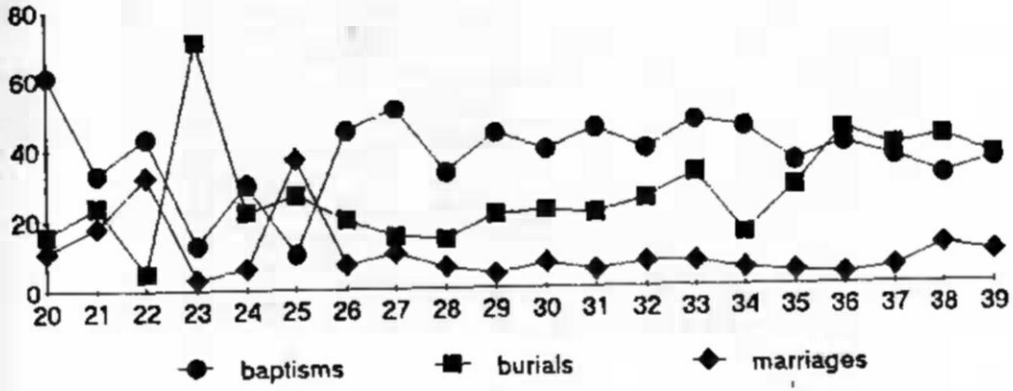
THREE SICKLY YEARS IN WARTON PARISH

John Findlater

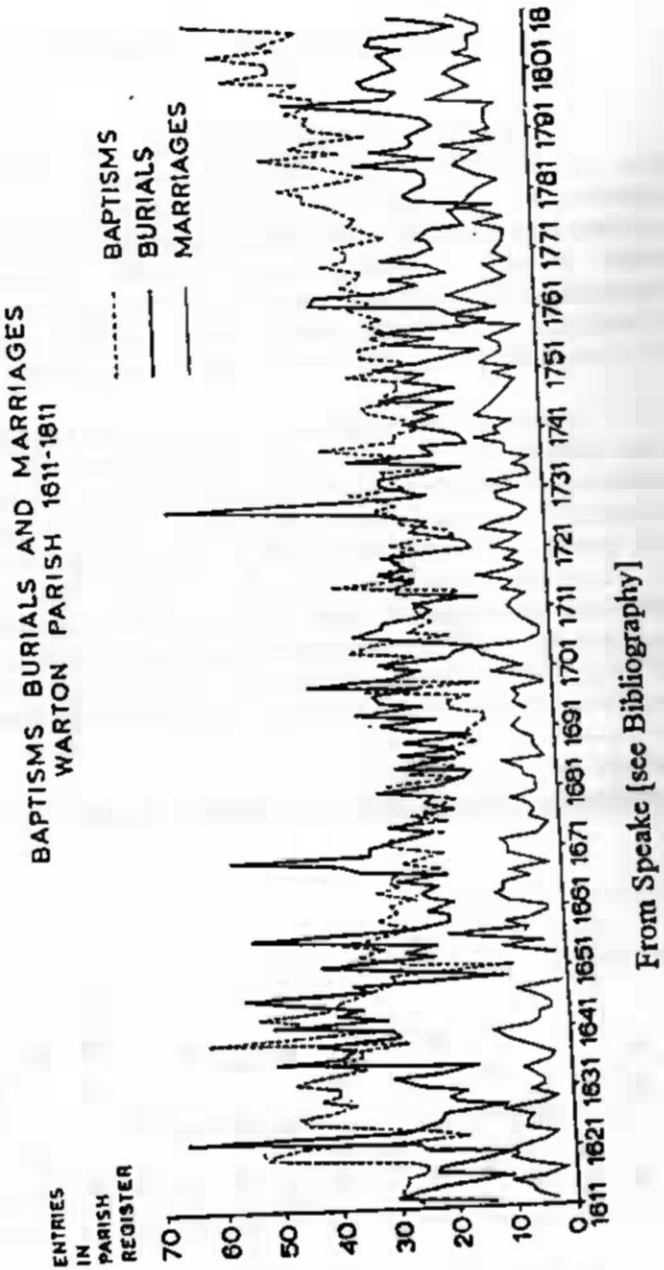
When the Parish Registers for Warton during the period 1600 to 1750 are examined, three years stand out. These are 1623, 1670 and 1728 when burial rates were unusually high [see Graph.1 on the next page]. These were each years when a "mortality crisis" occurred. In two other years, 1647 (during the Civil War) and 1657 (during the Protectorate) burials were nearly as many.

Historical demographers are most interested in "mortality crises". These are, strictly speaking, occasions when yearly burials (a surrogate for "deaths") occur twice as often as the average for the period. The year 1623 is the best example, when 71 burials are recorded[1], while the nine year "moving average"[2] for 1623 was 26. There were 62 burials in 1670 (nine year average 32.67), and 63 in 1728 (nine year average 32)[2a]. Warton Parish Register Statistics, 1620 to 1639 are graphed below.

Graph 2.
Baptisms, burials and marriages, Warton 1620-1639



Graph 1.



From Speake [see Bibliography]

Earlier historians, taking up Malthus' work, favoured famine as the probable cause of mortality crises, though even they granted that when plague, the "Black Death", stalked the land it had primacy. Inevitably, revisionists have elevated the impact of disease to prime place above famine. The debate has been long-running, swaying one way and another.

After the 14th century Black Death, plague replaced all other diseases, such as leprosy, in the public mind as a public health threat. It became endemic[3], with epidemics from time to time. There was a tendency to blame plague as the responsible cause of any mortality crisis which occurred till towards the end of the seventeenth century when, inexplicably, plague suddenly almost died away and smallpox took over the rôle of demon. Howson went so far as to claim *"as far as we know plague was the only epidemic disease of great significance until the mid-seventeenth century"* (Howson p.33).

Today, as we confront "smart" disease organisms, endlessly adapting themselves into attacking armies making war on humans, it is not possible to believe that Howson was correct. Indeed, Creighton, who favoured typhus as the cause of the excess deaths in 1623-25 (an assumption rejected by Howson), recognised that there were significant outbreaks of other diseases which have not been properly identified. At the time they were called "epidemic catarrhs", "hot agues" [ague sometimes indicated malaria, but clearly not always], and "sweating sickness". In 1557-8 sweating sickness *"this new burning ague"* as it was called, was all over England and in 1612-16 *"new disease"* was thought to be rife. We know that syphilis and other venereal diseases were taking hold. Shrewsbury(1971) decided that in the 1623 mortality crisis there had been outbreaks of plague, some smallpox, some epidemics of typhus, and that dysentery, too, may have contributed.

There are great difficulties in deciding what diseases were implicated at a given time, or in a given place. Conclusions are easier to reach when contemporary accounts are still extant, such as notes in parish registers or in diaries. In the absence of such documentation, there are strong clues in the seasonality of the burials and the favoured target of the disease (by age-group and sex).

Poor harvests were common, but the idea that starvation might itself be responsible for high burial rates has been viewed with some scepticism. There has often not been any firm evidence of very many people dying because, literally, food was unavailable at those times. There was in 1649 - *"The Moderate"* of Newcastle carried harrowing reports about Cumberland and Westmorland.

> *All the poorer sort are almost famished and some really so...many...have died in the highways for want of bread...no less than 30,000 families...had neither seed nor bread corn, nor monies to buy either* (Thirsk and Cooper, p.443-4).

Attention having been drawn to the fact that very often people's incomes were too low to allow them to buy sufficient food from elsewhere to sustain vigorous life (as above), it has been the tendency to describe the problem as a "crisis of subsistence".

Numerous investigators have worked on "mortality crises" affecting the North West in the period 1550 to 1650. These occurred in 1568-8, 1596-8 and 1623-4, though the experience of individual parishes varied somewhat. Probably it is fair to say that a consensus was developing around the view that there may have been occasions when virulent disease scythed through populations of both vigorous and frail, and other occasions (especially in earlier times) when starvation occurred, but most often there was a combination producing famine-related crises resulting in opportunistic infections carrying off weakened people.

As if, perversely, to overturn this common-sense approach, recent research workers, ever alert to paradox, point to instances where deaths occur not at the time of famine, but *pari passu* with the restoration of nourishment[4]. This interesting idea does not alter the fact that the deaths are famine-related.

The Crisis in 1623

The year 1623 has been much studied. Five per cent of the Lancashire population died, especially in the winter and in the early spring of 1624. This is really not the pattern of plague, (see below p.10), though plague was present in pockets like Penrith. Yet Dr Howson is adamant that plague was the culprit. Laslett(p.142) says "*it can be exculpated*". Turning back to Warton parish, the monthly burials are charted below:

Graph 3.
Monthly Burials in Warton 1623-4

There is a paucity of information in the registers as to whether many burials were poor, children, beggars - but, in all probability Warton suffered the same "crisis of subsistence" as did so many other parishes where deaths of these

vulnerable folk were noted [5]. It is accepted that the period "*1580 to 1630 was a period of gathering crisis...punctuated by a number of years of acute distress. Dr Bowden called them among the most terrible years through which the country had ever passed*" (Wrightson, p.142). There were many contemporary references to scarcity and poverty in 1622/23.

The prices of foodstuffs for the country as a whole are known, but there is a lack of precise figures for the North West. The Privy Council admitted they were especially high in the North West. Plotting the average price of wheat against burials, marriages and baptisms in Warton does not seem to show any clear relationship between wheat prices and the vital statistics. It should be said that wheat was not the only grain involved and perhaps oats and barley figured more in the north.

There were certainly general inflationary factors at the time making it difficult for the population to find the wherewithall to buy food. Copyholders on small fixed rental (the characteristic pattern in Warton), would be insulated from inflation to quite a degree. Landlords in many areas, themselves plagued by inflation, were attempting to raise their rental income by charging tenants higher entry fines and rents and insisting on shorter leases and "*where possible troublesome copyhold tenures were converted into leaseholds*" (Wrightson p.131). Walton(p.31) notes the absence of food riots in the North West and attributes this partly to "*the power of custom*", but also to landlords being less exploitative. Unfortunately the Middletons of Leighton Hall were an exception and their tenants had to battle hard and, though not entirely successful, did obtain some amelioration.

Appleby (1978) in his work on historical demography draws attention to the postulate that due to malnutrition conceptions fall alongside

increase in deaths, bumping up afterwards. This is supposedly due to anovulation in women due to nutritional lack. Others have taken up this idea as a tool, using depressed baptismal figures, back-dated to represent conceptions, as a marker for crises of subsistence. Walter (1989) puts emphasis on reduced sexual activity, early miscarriages and stillbirths associated with dearth. Laslett(p.130) discloses that in Ashton in 1623, where ("*a rare thing*") abortions were recorded, they reached 7% of baptisms.

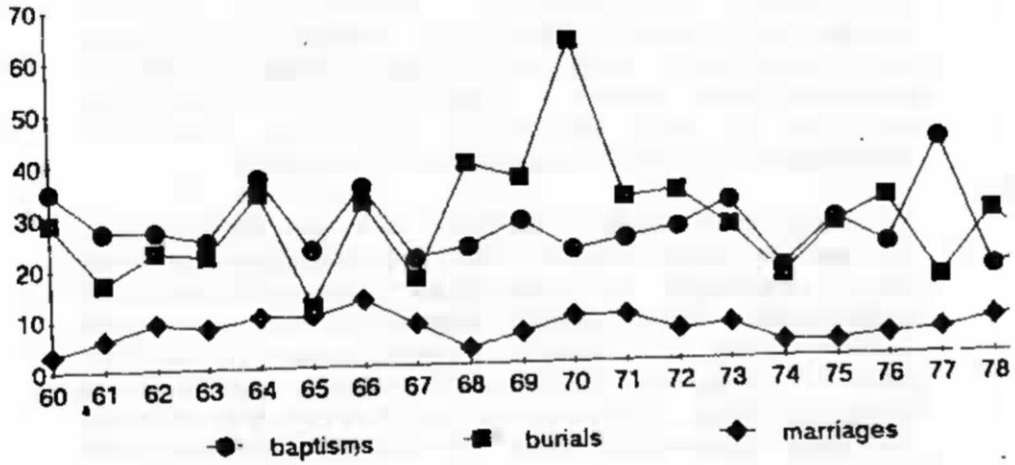
Looking back to Graph 2 one can see that for the period 1620 to 1639 the process appears very clear. Baptisms and marriages were high in 1622 while burials were low; fell steeply in 1623 as burials rose abruptly to a peak; spurted somewhat in 1624 only to drop in 1625 before rising again to a sustained high level until the end of the period. Marriages showed a steep rise in 1625, falling back in 1626 and remaining at a fairly low level thereafter. Wrightson(p.124) has written of a "*clear tendency towards homeostasis*" whereby populations, subconsciously no doubt, behaved in a manner whereby "*rough equilibrium between fertility and mortality in early modern society*" was attained[7].

Walter, amongst others, has drawn attention to the Book of Orders, codified in 1586/7 to ensure sufficient grain would be available to the poor in the event of a harvest failure. It worked well in the south, but not "*in regions like Cumberland and Westmorland*"(Walter,p.4) So administrative failure was probably quite a factor when a "crisis of subsistence" loomed in Warton.

The Crisis in 1670

When the Parish Registers are examined for the period 1660 to 1679 the year 1670, with 62 burials, stands out.

Graph 4
Baptisms, burials and marriages, Warton 1660-1678



Graph 4a. Monthly Burials in Warton 1670-71

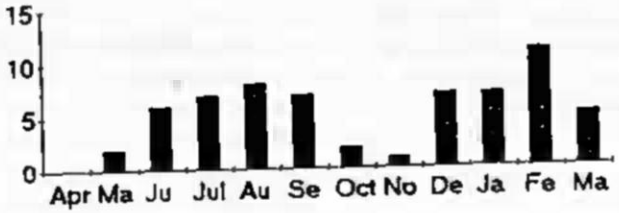
The monthly burial figures from 1670/71 are shown above in Graph 4a. They make a different pattern from 1623/4 (See Graph 3.) Shrewsbury has advised that when excessive burials occur in any given year, if 50% or more occur from June to October it is very suggestive of plague; this is the

case here with 35 of the 62 being recorded in those months. Shrewsbury further advised that if 66% occur from July to September it is certain; this was not achieved here. On the face of it, then, an outbreak of plague was possibly implicated; Warton being involved in a late flourish of this malign pestilence. The relationship of the baptismal, marriage and burial graphs between 1667 and 1674 are also different from the corresponding years centring on 1623. Perhaps it was because adults in the later crisis did not suffer famine-prejudiced reproductive physiology, but were suddenly and severely culled, possibly by plague, resulting in depletion of those of reproductive age for a period.

The Crisis in 1728

Going somewhat beyond the seventeenth century, the intriguing year 1728/9 is reached. There were 63 burials in Warton; the second highest total after 1623. They appear as two distinct humps in the monthly mortality statistics, one in summer and the other in the following winter/early spring.

Graph 5. Monthly Burials in Warton 1728-29



Of these burials three were of stillbirths, twenty of children and one of a pauper. It is believed that when a high proportion of these vulnerable groups succumb it points to a "crisis of subsistence". We also have the advantage of a contemporary account of affairs in this region at

that time, in William Stout's Autobiography. He writes that in 1728,

> *"It was a very sickly summer, and great mortality in the plain country, much more than in the towns; and the burials were double this year to what they were last year, and corn proved dear - wheat 20s, barley 10s, oats 7s, beans 13s, oatmeal 14s a windle and potatoes double what they were last year, and linen manufactury very low and spinning one third less than last year so that the poor have had a hard year."* (Marshall, p.201)

Epidemics were widespread, with "starvation fever" or typhus prominent. Typhus is louse borne, attacking all but the very young, particularly during winter and early spring, probably represented by the winter bulge in the above graph. The summer bulge would probably be due to "summer diarrhoea", dysentry, perhaps typhoid.

Each of these three years is an example of a "mortality crisis", but represents a different community experience in Warton. 1623/4 might be described as a "crisis of subsistence, with famine the predominent problem. A case can be made for thinking plague was the reason in 1670. In 1728/9 the population, enduring very lean times, with short supplies of expensive food suffered a microbial "double whammy".

NOTES

1) In the Warton Parish registers the year begins somewhere in March each year. I have stuck to April 1st as the start of the year; thus figures for 1623 run from April 1st, 1623 to March 31st 1624.

2) An average of burials is struck for each year in the nine year period in which 1623 is the middle year.

2a) Strictly speaking 1670 and 1728 fail marginally to qualify as years of "mortality crisis", but within an acceptable margin of error.

3) Endemic; found somewhere at all times. Epidemic; a disease attacking many at a particular time.

4) Chadwick's observation on British gaols in 1830, Adelberger's work on Second World War concentration camps, and Murray and Murray's work on Somali nomads in 1975. The hypothesis is that germs lie dormant in the underfed, but when the hosts nutrition improves, the germ becomes a virulent predator.

5) The Greystoke in Cumberland Parish Register recorded them.

6) Conceptions are appropriately dated 9 months back from baptism.

7) The work was done on Forest of Arden communities

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REV. JOSEPH MITCHELL, M.D.

Basil Clarke

Joseph Mitchell was the vicar at Yealand Conyers from 1869 to his death in 1927.

He was born in Leicester in 1844 and educated there at the John Highton Collegiate School. He entered St. Thomas's Hospital in 1866. There he was among the first men of his year and won prizes. Subsequently he took his M.R.C.S. (Eng.) in 1869, his M.R.C.P. (Edin.) in 1875 and his M.D. (St Andr.) in 1887. In 1886 he had become the medical attendant and secretary to Dr John Haddy Jones, a blind doctor at Exeter, until the death of Dr Jones. He then had fairly short attachments to the Tower Hamlet Dispensary and in Plaistow, and was the resident accoucheur at St Thomas's Hospital.

Then in 1870 he began a private practice in London, and was elected the medical officer of No.4 District of St Pancras Workhouse. He had many dealings with the people of the slums in St Pancras; and he had much experience of their physical and spiritual needs.

Being strongly religious and belonging to the evangelical side of the church, he decided to give up his medical career and spend his time in missionary and social work. While a doctor he had become an enthusiastic temperance lecturer, and sometimes shared a platform with Lord Shaftesbury.

He passed the Cambridge theological examination in 1877 and was ordained Deacon at Ripon; in 1878 he was made a Priest. His first sermon was in Pentonville, London, and the same evening he preached at Somers Town to a crowded congregation consisting largely of his old patients, among whom he was popular.

His first curacy was in New Wortley, Leeds. He then spent a few months in Reading and, when the benefice of New Wortley became vacant in 1881, he was unanimously chosen as the vicar. New Wortley was a large urban parish; many of the men there worked on the railway, and it was said that a warm affection developed with them and their families. A new church was erected in New Wortley, largely through his efforts.

His wife, née Emma Burton, whom he had married in 1871, was a very active helper. But Leeds did not agree with her health, and Dr Mitchell resigned in 1889, and accepted from the Hyndman Trustees the living of Yealand Conyers *"A picturesque village near the English Lakes"*. Mrs Mitchell's health improved, and she remained an enthusiastic aide till her death in 1908. Dr Mitchell continued to work successfully in Yealand for over thirty years.

One small child was sent to him with a button in her ear. He said his instruments would be a little rusty, but he dealt with the problem without trouble. The child recalled this in age, when visiting Yealand, where she no longer lived.

He was a keen supporter of Sunday Observance and of Foreign Missions, and was personally a strict teetotaller; but he remained very tolerant of those who disagreed with him.

He resigned finally in 1919, when 75, through failing health and eyesight. His farewell sermon made a great impression, and a copy was in circulation in the village till a few years ago. He retired to Kew and then to Wadhurst in Sussex, where he died in December 1927 at the age of 83. He is buried at Yealand Conyers. He asked for the words "*God is my exceeding joy*" to be engraved on his tombstone; they are on the base of the stone.

LEIGHTON IRON FURNACE: where did its water supply come from?

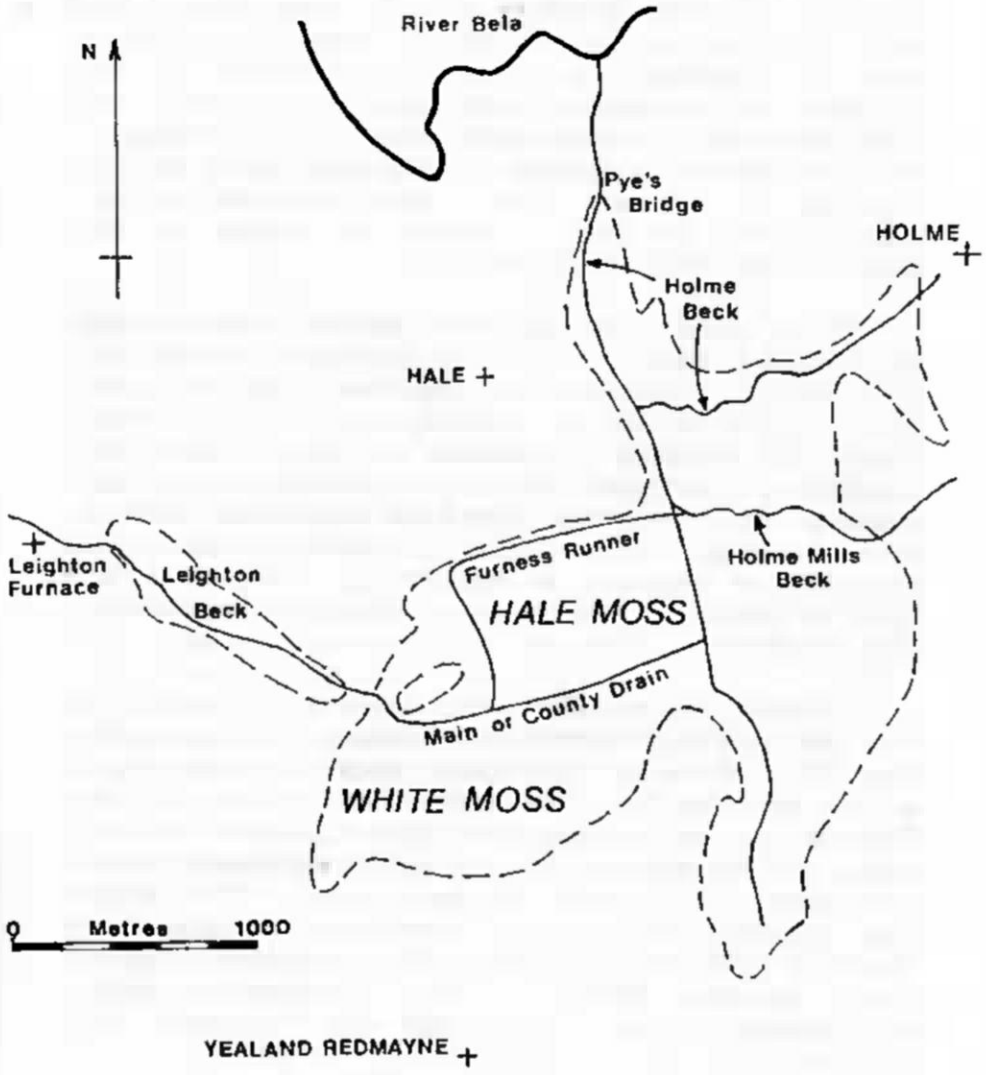
Michael Wright

It is a peculiarity of Hale Moss, north of Yealand Redmayne, that it drains both to the east, into Holme Beck, and to the west, into Leighton Beck. The gradients of the ditches draining the Moss are so low that alterations of a few feet in depth can induce reversal in the water-flow direction. The water flowing east once helped to power the mills on the River Bela, while that flowing west down Leighton Beck was needed by Leighton Furnace, which was built by the Backbarrow Company in 1713.

John Bolton has suggested that the drainage west from Hale Moss into Leighton Beck was man-made, intended to augment the flow down the Beck and so keep the furnace working[1]. Strong support for this suggestion comes from two letters in the estate papers of the Earl of Derby, which show that the managers of the furnace were seriously concerned to maintain a flow of water from the Moss into the Beck, and were actively involved in organising drainage of the Moss. Both of the letters are addressed to the Earl of Derby's Agent at Knowsley.[2]

In the eighteenth century the Earl of Derby owned the Beetham Hall Estate and he wished to improve the drainage of about five hundred acres of the lowlying land that extends from the River Bela south to Holme Moss and Hale Moss. The improved land would then command a higher rent from the Earl's tenants. This was evidently planned to be a large-scale undertaking, in contrast to the routine cleaning of ditches regularly demanded of tenants, evidence of which is revealed by the records of the Beetham Manor Court. The work was apparently to be supervised by a local agent, Thomas Sill.

The first letter to the Earl's Agent at Knowsley is from Anthony Lickbarrow, agent to the Leighton



Sketch-plan of the drainage from Hale Moss.
The broken lines show the boundaries of the areas of moss and low-lying damp ground.

Furnace Company. Though he was in favour of the drainage scheme he was concerned that any work that improved the drainage on the east side of the moss could reduce the flow to the west into Leighton Beck, so affecting the water-power available at the furnace. His comments show that his company was fully involved in matters concerning the drainage of the moss since he refers to the poor state of the ditching on the east side of the moss, and writes that recently he had *"...damed the watter at the head to turn it down to Bethom..."*.

It is quite clear that the second letter to the Earl's Agent, which is from his employee Thomas Sill, was written in response to enquiries from the Agent following his receipt of Anthony Lickbarrow's letter. Thomas Sill hastens to reassure the Earl's Agent that Lickbarrow has been involved in discussions on the drainage work and has raised no objections to it at these meetings. In irritation he comments that *"This Duplicity of Conduct is convincing proof, that the Garb of Humility is sometimes a Disguise to Sincerity and Truth."*

Thomas Sill explains that much of the effort in the new drainage works will be put into improving the flow of water in Holme Beck between Pye's Bridge and the Bela. He assures the Agent that the furnace has no prescriptive right to water from the moss, and he appends a copy of an agreement dated 1747 which had a term of seven years. This states that Leighton Furnace had permission to take *"...so much of the Water as can be conveniently spared from Beethom Millns..."* This delightfully vague arrangement seems tailor-made for argument and dispute.

Thomas Sill's letter may throw further light on the origin of the Furness Runner, the ditch that cuts across the moss plots near the north side of Hale Moss. He mentions that during discussions with Anthony Lickbarrow they had considered the

possibility of diverting water to the west from Holme Mills Beck. Though not specifying how this was to be achieved, it must be significant that the eastern end of the Furness Runner reaches the Beck, and could no doubt be lowered to capture its water. As John Bolton has suggested, the Furness Runner may be more correctly designated the Furnace Runner, dug to supplement still further the flow down Leighton Beck [1].

Adjustments to the flow from the mosses also had repercussions on the supply of water to the farms down Leighton Beck. The 1747 Agreement specifies that the watercourse to the west should be well maintained so that water does not damage the land in Arnside belonging to the Hon. and Rev. John Stanley (presumably a relative of the Earl of Derby). And Anthony Lickbarrow mentions that he has on occasion controlled the flow to ensure a water-supply for cattle downstream.

Today the fact that water in the County Dyke that crosses Hale Moss can flow west from one end of the dyke and east from the other is largely a matter of curiosity. But in the eighteenth century the direction and volume of the flow had very important implications for local wetland drainage and for waterpower for local industries.

NOTES

1) John Bolton "Leighton Beck", *Mourholme Magazine of Local History*, 1990, No.2, pp.19-20.

2) The letters are in the papers of the Earl of Derby at the Lancashire Record Office; DDK/432/43 (Anthony Lickbarrow's letter); DDK/432/37 (Thomas Sill's letter, with appended copy of the agreement with Leighton Furnace Company).

NOTES AND QUERIES

YEALAND SCHOOL AND LOCAL HISTORY

The pupils of Yealand School have joined the Mourholme Society as a group. They are the first school to do so, and we are glad to take this opportunity of welcoming them, for they are interested historians. They have been working on the history of their school. They have studied old school log books going back to 1909 (the earlier ones have not come to light). They have interviewed old pupils, they have found old accounts about repair work on the school building, they have photocopied the tattered remains of the first trust deed of the school, and much more besides. The result of this work is seven "Evidence Books" which would do credit to far older historians. It is only a pity that there is not room in this small format magazine to show any samples of their work.

They would like to try their hand at a "dig". Are you thinking of any building or alterations in your garden? Would you like to know what historic finds there might be under the soil? If so please do contact the head master, Mr Quinn. He has already conducted a "dig" in the garden of a house in Carnforth and made many fascinating finds which were on show at our last Christmas meeting. As well as the interest of the finds to yourself, you would be helping the children to a greater understanding of the past.