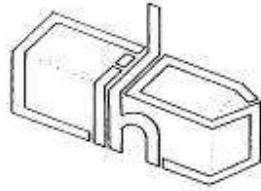


Cumbria Industrial History Society



BULLETIN

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AUGUST 2013



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EDITORIAL

An apology for the last Bulletin I forgot to change the contents from the December Bulletin.

The weather is starting to become a bit of a talking point in this editorial. July has been a wonderful warm sunny month but again I am sat here on the last Sunday as the rain pours down. Hopefully it will only be a short wet interlude and the nice warm weather will start again.

The meetings so far this year have been very well attended and it is very gratifying for the committee who put in a lot of hard work to arrange the outings and conferences to see them so well attended.

The programme for 2014 is slowly coming together with a spring conference on Cumbria at war' and the Autumn conference possibly at Brampton in the north of the county. We are looking for speakers for both conferences and also ideas for places to visit. Please let any of the committee members know of any ideas.

David Beale is to re-join the committee as Minute secretary, this will reduce te burden on Helen and allow her to concentrate on other business of the Society.

Front cover The Assay House Nenthead.

SOCIETY EVENTS 2013

WALK round Coniston Copper mines led by Warren Allison Sunday 11th August 10.30 am

Meet in lane behind Ruskin Museum.

The route will follow the beck to Cobblers level in Red Dell then to Old and New Engine shafts then to the Back String at Levers Water and return via Paddyend Mill about 6 miles.

Visit the Mills of Cockermouth Sunday 15th September 11.0 a.m.

Eric Cass is guiding us around the Mills of Cockermouth on Sunday 15th September. He suggests we meet at the Kirkgate Centre at the bottom of Kirkgate (off Market Place) starting at 11 am to give us all time to get there. Grid ref NY125307 or postcode CA13 9PJ. There are car parks next to the centre, but free on-street parking should be available as well. The walk will be in a figure of 8 looping back to the town centre at lunchtime.

AUTUMN CONFERENCE 19TH OCTOBER SEDBURGH.

See enclosed booking form for details

NOVEMBER EVENING MEETING, 14th NOVEMBER 7.30 PM GREENODD VILLAGE HALL.

There will be a talk on brick making in Furness and also a video showing Askam brickworks in operation.

BOOK REVIEW

EDWARD WADHAM DIARIES. CD

As mentioned in the last Bulletin the diaries of Edward Wadham the agent to the Duke of Buccleugh were being transcribed by volunteers. This is now complete and the CD is available from the Archive and Local Studies Centre in Barrow. Price £5.00.

THE EARLY YEARS The story of Lindal & Marton School in the Nineteenth Century Price £3.

The Early Years tells the story of how a Cumbrian school was established in Victorian times. It seeks to give an insight into how the vision of two inspired men

was brought to fruition. Many of the problems they faced are not unfamiliar to the present day, yet such difficulties were overcome. The original building survives as fit for purpose and so do the alterations that were made in the first half century of its existence. It is a fitting tribute to the builders and also to the Rev Paddy Morgan and Edward Wadham that it still serves the communities of Lindal and Marton.

This book may be purchased directly from St. Peter's Church, Lindal, Lindal & Marton Primary School, or Barrow Archives and Local Studies Centre. Alternatively contact royston.wri@tiscali.co.uk to arrange postal delivery.

ENGLISH HERITAGE GUNPOWDER MILL REPORTS

Stephen Read of Levens History Society has arranged with English Heritage for their three reports - on New Sedgwick, Old Sedgwick and Basingill Gunpowder Works to be reprinted and made available on order, via Stephen.

Cost, including VAT and Postage: New Sedgwick£15.32
Old Sedgwick.....£10.21
Basingill.....£10.21

If you are interested, please contact Stephen Read
<levenshistory@btinternet.com>;
within 14 days.

HAPPENINGS ON A PEAT MOSS.

Following the June evening meeting to the peat cuttings Rob David has sent the following extract.

GAZETTE 1834 STEALING CRANBERRIES

This beautiful berrys delicious preserve is found in various places in this part of the country, and they are scarce or abundant, vary in price from 1-2 shillings per quart, but nowhere are they found finer or of higher flavour than on Foulshaw Moss. The property of George Wilson, Dallam Tower & rented by A. Webster & H. Cottam as tenants and for the moss alone, where the berries are found, they pay a large rental, consequently they endeavour, as far as they are able, to protect their property from depredation at this time of year when the berries are ripe for gathering. On Saturday evening last a boy was on the look out, when he discovered a trespasser and went up to him. The fellow deliberately knocked him down and kicked him severely, swearing he would stick him if he troubled him further. The lad went home sorely bruised but early next morning was at his post, when he saw the same fellow again plundering his master. Not relishing a second encounter, he went back to the Farm and raised hue and cry, and the

Master, Henry Cottam, two men servants and the boy gave chase. They made a demonstration on the thief at four points he had quarter of a mile start and made for Ulpha Wood. The pace was a slapping one, over Moor and Moss, sometimes up in the middle of ling or heather, then upto the knees in mud and through the wood oer the muin and among the heather. At length after a gallant chase of half an hour, the fellow began to waiver in his course, they cut off his retreat and captured him. At first he gave his name as Rawsthorn from Kendal, an eninous name, and we all knew George Rawsthorn well, the authorities ordered him a sea voyage, for the benefit of his health, and he was set sail and said "my native land goodnight". The culprits name is Robert Gill, an idle fellow who lives nowhere. The question now was what to do with him, it being Sunday. The Constable of the Township was informed that a robbery had been committed and the offender taken, and that he was to take charge of him, and bring him before the Magistrates the next day. But this wise functionary of the law said as there was no warrant from the Justices, he would not hev oot to dew wid him. And that according to the principal of justice as laid down by this rural officer at the extensive, a robbery or murder may be committed, but the party must not be apprehended till a warrant be obtained. A favourable clause for thieves. The fellow was detained and next day taken before a Magistrate, where he was charged with Trespass only. Because the Constable refused to interfere, he was fined 10/5d damage and costs, and might have gone to prison for this, but was believed by two Samaritans, who took his promise to pay. But when they heard that he was again to be pulled up for an assault on the boy, they wished themselves out of the scrape.

Swill making in 2012.

Swill making was one of the many woodland industries of Furness which thrived in the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries. Swills are oval-shaped, shallow baskets made of oak strips woven on a hazel rim. Swills were used wherever a strong container was needed; they were used on farms for potato picking and feeding stock, carrying bobbins and cotton in mills, coaling ships and domestically for carrying items such as laundry, firewood and refuse. A long-held ambition to make a swill was realised last summer when I joined six other 'apprentices' assembled in the hamlet of High Nibthwaite on a bright sunny morning in August. After a coffee Owen, the swill maker and tutor, talked us through the three days of the course and gave a brief history of swill making.

Before us on the ground were half a dozen trunks of newly felled oak, each 5 or 6 feet in length and 6 or 7 inches in diameter. The oak is coppiced on 25-year cycle to give maximum production. Our first task was to saw and split the oak. We soon became aware of the swillmaker's expertise and understanding of the material. Careful examination of the lengths of oak would determine whether it was best to saw into lengths or to split it first. Knots and uneven growth were to be avoided whilst trying to get out optimum lengths of woods. Precise lengths were needed for the different spelks and taws which would make up the basket and so a measuring stick was used to mark the saw cuts. To split the logs a large axe, heavy wooden

mallet, steel wedges and a throw or lat axe were available. With these tools splitting of the wood could no doubt have been eventually accomplished with simple brute force; but through proper use of the tools, careful placing of the body and application of pressure the large logs were split with a minimum of effort. The logs were first halved and quartered lengthways and then the heartwood of each segment was sliced off. Each length or billet was then trimmed and tidied using the throw and a knocker, a round wooden mallet. Working for a couple of hours, between us we had prepared sufficient materials for ten swills.



The oak billets were placed in a large rectangular iron boiler and covered with water. A fire of shavings and offcuts was lit. The water would take a couple of hours to boil and was then kept on a rolling boil for two hours. The billets were left in the water overnight and the fire relit in the morning so the wood came from hot water to be worked.

The bool makes up the top of the swill. It is the frame on which the swill is woven and forms the carrying handles of the finished basket. We each selected a hazel rod of about 1¼ or 1½ inches diameter which would form the bool of our swill. This had to be trimmed and shaped and to do this we used the swiller's mare.

The mare is a foot-operated vice which holds wood firmly. Sitting astride the mare the wood is held by a large wooden block on the bench in front of you, it can then be shaped using a two handled draw knife. The bool was first cut to length and then, on the mare, each end was bevelled so they could form an overlapping joint and the inside surface had to be shaved flat. Taking account of the way the rod had grown

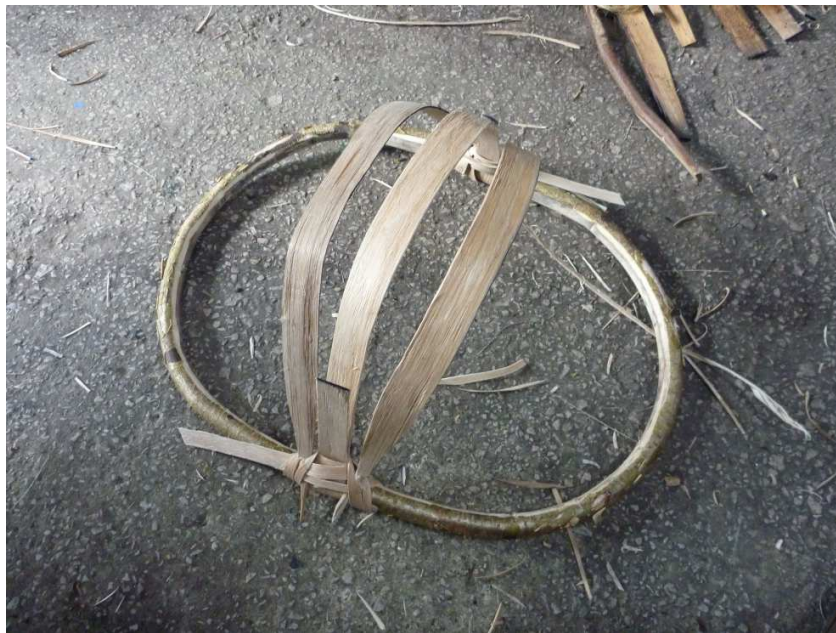


and anticipating the final curved oval of the bool, the natural curve or the belly of the rod determined how it was shaped and where the bevels would be cut.

Next morning when the fire was relit the bool rods were placed on logs in the boiler above the water to be steamed ready for bending. After about half an hour steaming the rod was bent round a substantial wooden frame, held in place by pegs and then the overlap nailed with two swill nails. These narrow gauge nails are still available and known as 'swill nails' in the local ironmongers (but probably not at B&Q!). Using a large triangular framed set horse pressure was applied to make the bool a regular oval and then the ends were bent up to give the whole thing a shape reminiscent of the Olympic velodrome better to take the tension of the weaving.

Our next task was to learn to rive. Riving or splitting the oak billets to make the spelks ('k' is silent), which run across the basket; and the taws, which run the length of the basket. The billets, stained black from the tannin, were taken hot from the boiler. The strip of bark on each was easily peeled away; it had a warm, deep, fruity aroma. The billets were split tangentially to the growth rings. A riving knife and knocker were used to start the split at the top of the billet; the knife was hammered in just a few inches. Once the split had been started various techniques could be used to split the two halves further. It was easy to see what to do; the skill was in developing a feel for the wood and careful technique. The aim was to have two halves of equal strength and working with the two halves applying gentle force to draw them apart. With practice it became possible to pull on the stronger half and so to transfer the strength into the weaker half to try to keep them even. This process was repeated until the pieces of oak got thinner and thinner. The aim was to have pieces just between an eighth and a sixteenth of an inch thick, one and a half to two inches wide and of varying lengths up to about six feet.

The 15 spelks which run across the short axis of the oval and are of varying lengths. These had to be dressed and shaped on the mare. Dressing involved removing rough uneven sections and ensuring they were a constant thickness. Some of spelks were made parallel and some had to be made crescent shaped. Each spelk was bent to ensure it could take the shape it would need to fit in the basket. The taws, the long strips which run the length of the basket, were riven and dressed on a leather kneepad. This involved holding a knife steady and pulling the taw against it to remove any unevenness. Bundles of spelks and taws were tied up and put in an adjacent stream to keep them damp so they would remain more flexible and be easier to weave.



The lapping spelk is the first spelk to be attached to the bool. Bent over the bool it is held in place with strips of oak. The first bottom spelks were then threaded into the weaving. The next spelks, the second bottom spelks, were attached by splitting the bool using a sharp metal tool, a bodkin. It was an anxious time as the bodkin was forced into the bool, horizontal and not too deep. We could then begin to weave the taws at each side to fix the spelks and keep them properly spaced. Spelks were added as the weaving progressed. The taws were taken in and out between the spelks and "twice round the bool". A twist with the wrist as the taws went round the bool kept the weave tight and the weave was also knocked tight with the bodkin and knocker. Six more spelks had to be fitted, pushed in between existing spelks and threaded into the weave. It was important to maintain the alignment of the spelks to leave spaces between each for weaving and to maintain a good bowl shape and the edges of some spelks and taws had to be pared down as weaving progressed.

Taws were carefully overlapped and the joins hidden beneath spelks. Handle spaces were pared back; neat twists were put into taws to form the sides of the handle spaces. As weaving progressed and we became more familiar with materials and technique and fears of damaging the bool or splitting or breaking the spelks and taws was overcome. The oak is tremendously strong and as we worked we became more confident at pushing and hitting the weaving or tapping it with bodkin and knocker. The final taws were carefully trimmed to equal widths to ensure symmetry of the finished basket and then woven together and overlapped to give extra strength.



Making a swill is a totally absorbing activity. Learning and practicing techniques, one realises why they are as they are and indeed how clever were the craftsmen who devised them. Even in a very short time working with the oak and hazel one developed a feel for the materials. Real apprentices would have spent many years learning their trade; we 'three day apprentices' developed a huge admiration for the craftsmen of old. We were very grateful for the generosity and guidance of our expert tutor who shared his skills so freely. And we are all extremely proud of our finished swills!

William Varley

Further extracts from Wadham Diaries

6 March 1877 Tuesday

In office till 12,30 – then to Furness Abbey to meet Bargate & Captain Ainslie – Got an arrangement made between them whereby Captain Ainslie was to receive one penny -/1d per ton on all Iron Ore shipped from Newton Crommelin and on all coal imported from Whitehaven estimated to be together 100,000 tons per annum – equal to a salary of £400 per annum – but his guaranteed salary to be £350 per annum – this arrangement to last for one year from 1 March now current – and the salary to be paid quarterly – Afterwards brought Captain Ainslie up to Millwood and promised to place £300 at his disposal on condition that he should give me a written undertaking not to drink Beer & smoke tobacco for 12 months – and not to sell his shares in the S.S. Ardeer – Captain Ainslie returned to Belfast at night

22 June 1877 Friday

Left Portrush at 8.0 am and by train to Belfast – saw Mr Collins and Mr Stewart about Rails for 1878 for the Belfast & Northern Counties – Saw Capt Ainslie who was “maudling” with drink at 11 o’clk in the morning – but he wouldn’t be talked to – Went to the Agricultural Show, and then to dine with Mr Valentine at Glenavna – came across by the steamer at night

17 August 1877 Friday

In office till 11 o’clock, then to Piel to meet the Cumberland and Westmorland Archaeological Society – home at 3 o’clock

28 August 1877 Tuesday

To Longlands Mines, then to Moor Farm – took levels for the Turbine – Told old Thomas I was going to show my Turnips – In office in afternoon

23 October 1877 Tuesday

To Southend (*Walney*) to see about the exchange of lands, etc – Ward (*coachman*) & Loney went to Dalton Fair, and were out late at night. Locked Ward out.

31st October 1878

In office till 11.30 then to Ulverstone. Saw Woodburne about ‘Blawith Common’, also ‘Biggar Bank’ saw Geo Butcher about the Tomb rails etc.- Home by 2.10 train and drove Wife up to the farm. An engine ran off the Lindal Moor Tramway line, fell from embankment viaduct with the road below, & killed two men.

An accident occurred yesterday on the railway connected with the collieries of Messrs. Harrison, Ainslie, and Co., Lindal-in-Furness. An engine left the rails and fell down an embankment, killing the driver and stoker.

Liverpool Mercury Nov 1 1878

24 March 1879 Monday

In office till 10 o'clock, then to Barrow – Attended at first opening of Ramsden Dock Gates, when the Glasgow trader of Messrs Little & Co steamed in and brought up alongside – Attended Yearly General Meeting of Corn Mill Co – Also General purposes Committee and got our extra £1,000 for the Walney Embankment – Waited upon the County Court Judge as to enlargement of facilities for business at Barrow – Attended Gas ?deposits Committee – also Abbey Road sub-Committee

4 April 1879 Friday

In office in morning – then over the Estate with Stables – especially to inspect outfall drain at Ireleth Marsh – Dined at Conishead Priory at the opening of the Hydropathic Establishment – nothing but Water !!

10 April 1880

In office till 10 o'clock then drove Jack down to Barrow and recorded our Votes – came home and showed Jack over the premises &c – had lunch went into Ulverston by the 1 o'clock train to see W G Ainslie about sundry matters – A regular riot going on there – stones came through the windows where we were sitting at the Sun Inn & broken heads were quite common – Dalton also was in a state of siege! –

7 March 1881 (*Ridings had applied for the job of gardener*)

In office till 9.30, then to Barrow attended Magistrates Court also Corn Mill in morning. Attended Council Meeting, General Purposes and Special Council in afternoon and went up to Ulverston by the 4.45 pm to see Kennedy about the North Lonsdale Co's affairs in reference to Thwaite Flatt Royalty. Found that Ridings had also been applying to him for a situation, set Williams Sol^r & Barker Supt. of Police on trail, suspecting from information obtained from Mr Raby of Manchester that he had sent me a false character.

28 January 1883 (*George Bargate named a ship for Mrs Wadham*)

Engaged in office until 12 o'clock – then to Barrow, to see Bargate about launch of Mary E. Wadham – in afternoon rode down to Southend to inspect new Ballast Pier – Bargate & Little rode with me, and Bargate got an ugly fall from his Horse in jumping a ditch and had to be brought home in a "conveyance" - and I led his Horse

26 April 1883

In office till 9.30 then to Barrow to meet Mr Smith and a deputation from the Barrow Town Council as to the widening of the Road past the Wireworks etc to Ormsgill. To Ulverston by the 11.30 train- saw Mr Patterson about the purchase of Tyson's property and got a proposition from him. Home by 2.10 train and took the family down to Piel to inspect work. Had a walk in the evening. Gave "the women servants" notice that they could either give up the Salvation Army- or their places.

8 May 1883

In London- Engaged with Mr Nicholl, dined with Dr. Wadham. Very dark- Green fog- Gas lighted till 11 o'clock.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS DETAILS

Roger Baker, Membership Sec
3 Sun St
Ulverston
Cumbria
LA12 7BX
mbarb@freenetname.co.uk

Mr Ron Lyon
Chondrenn
Church St.
Skirwith
Penrith CA10 1RO
Chron12@btinternet.com

Geoff Brambles, Chairman
21 Derwent Drive
Kendal
LA9 7PB

Mrs Helen Caldwell, Secretary
Low Ludderburn
Cartmel Fell
Windermere LA23 3PD
lowludderburn@btinternet.com

Mr Dan Elsworth, Publicity Officer
6 Town Street
Ulverston
LA12 7EY
dwelsworth@cooptel.net

Mr Robin Yates Membership Secretary
Glenrae
Brigsteer Rd
Kendal
LA9 5DX

Bill Myers
20 Lord St.
Millom
Cumbria
LA18 4BL
bill.myers@nwemail.co.uk

Mr David Powell
45 High St
Workington
CA14 4ET
daipowell@btinternet.com

Graham Brooks, Bulletin Editor
Coomara
Carleton
Carlisle CA4 0BU
gbrooksnet@tiscali.co.uk

Alan Postlethwaite, Treasurer
17 Railway Terrace
Lindal-in-Furness
Ulverston LA12 0LQ
mandatelsop@btinternet.com

Dr Ian Hill
5 Parkside Drive
Arnsdale
Cumbria LA5 0BU
fi.hill@btopenworld.com

