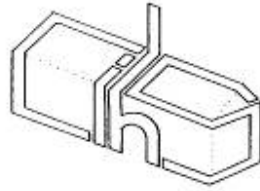


Cumbria Industrial History Society



BULLETIN

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EDITORIAL

We are back round to that time of year the spring conference and the Societies AGM. You should find that the papers for the AGM with this Bulletin. As usual there will be the usual call for new members for the committee. This year the committee has a number of vacancies both for general members and also for specific roles see page

The programme for this summer has been confirmed. Please note the change of the date for visit to Acorn Bank corn mill which is in July not June as in the last Bulletin. There may be a small charge for this visit.

Front Cover THE REMAINS OF THE WINDMILL AT WIGTON Venue for the May meeting.

SOCIETY EVENTS 2019

SPRING CONFERENCE SATURDAY 27TH APRIL 9.30AM North Lakes Hotel, Penrith. Booking form on the website.

INNOVIA FILMS WIGTON TUESDAY 14TH MAY. 10.30AM. A tour around part of the plant. Then a look at Wigton For booking please contact Helen.

CANAL HEAD KENDAL WEDNESDAY 19TH JUNE 6.30PM. A walking tour of the area meet outside the Factory Tap pub, 5 Aynam Rd, LA9 7DE.

ACORN BANK CORN MILL SATURDAY 6TH JULY 10.45AM. Meet at Acorn Bank car park for a demonstration of the mill working.

TARMAC SANDSIDE QUARRY AND ASPHALT PLANT, THURSDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER 2.00 PM. Meet at LA7 7HW road side parking for a tour of the quarry and plant.

AUTUMN CONFERENCE INDUSTRIES OF WHITEHAVEN, WHITEHAVEN GOLF CLUB. 9.30 AM. Programme to announced.

NOVEMBER EVENING TALK GREENODD VILLAGE HALL. Date and topic to be announced.

A CHOPWOOD KILN HUNT

In the CIHS Bulletin for April 2017 I wrote a little article about chopwood kilns. In it I mentioned Mike Davies-Shiel's list of 47 of them in Cumbria, some of which can be seen in his photo collection.

The Editor added one of these photos to the article - a front view of the kiln at Elfhow in the Kentmere Valley, dated June 1973. A similar photo appears in MDS' "Water-Power Mills of South Lakeland", with another looking down into the bowl of the kiln. I resolved to go on a hunt for chopwood kilns.

The Elfhow kiln is located at NY473001 off the lane to Park House from Barley Bridge at Staveley, but is not easy to spot. If you take the footpath heading west just after the bridge that crosses High House Gill, then wander across the field to the edge of the steep bank of the stream you stand a good chance of falling into it, for the kiln is built into the bank with its front opening towards the stream itself. Climbing down to see the front elevation is not easy, and an alternative is to take the bridleway that leaves the road before the Gill and use binoculars to view the kiln from that side. But it is there – a scheduled ancient monument still looking in good condition more than 40 years after Mike's photo and over 300 years since it was built (c.1694).

Why it was built at that particular spot is a bit of a mystery to me – away from paths for transport, down a steep bank and hemmed in by the stream, sheltered from the wind needed to fan the fire within. Other sites close by would have offered a rocky bank to build against, next to the path and open to the wind. But I guess the landscape looked very different at the time it was built, before the land which would have been more wooded was enclosed. In fact the kiln is located at a site almost identical to another I looked at near Cunsey on the east side of Windermere, again built into a steep stream bank.

Anyway the kiln was built there, and presumably to supply fuel in the form of dried logs to the nearby Scroggs smelt mill which processed lead from local mines. Details are given in the National Park's Historic Environment Record, although it is listed there as a potash kiln.

Roger Baker



THE KILN ON SEPTEMBER 2017.

CHANGES AT KENDAL ARCHIVE CENTER

For those of you who are not aware Kendal Archive office has been closed for upgrading. The former search room has been converted to a strong room, a newer smaller research room has been opened. Unfortunately the archives have imposed new regulations. These require you to book a place and request up to 10 items to view on that day.

If you find a problem using this new system please let a member of the committee know.

THE MOUSE THAT ROARED: THE CARK & DISTRICT ELECTRICITY COMPANY

Overview

Flookburgh Farm is now known as Stockdale Farm and sits off the Square in Flookburgh at the start of Moor Lane. It served its original purpose for 110 years before becoming a privately owned power station and substation for a further 40 years. After years as a builders yard, it is now converted for residential use. It is the use in the electricity supply industry that is the focus of this paper.

Background as a farm

The former farm buildings, together with the farmhouse, are Grade II listed. The listing dates the farm buildings to early 19th century and the farmhouse as being later. The Farm was built around 1803 by William Wilkinson, younger brother of 'Iron Mad' John Wilkinson. Although he lived at Plas Grono, Wrexham, William had married a local widow. He played a major role in modernising the French iron industry before their revolution. He had acquired land under the Cartmel Enclosure Act and the buildings

completed his new farm. After William Wilkinson's death in 1808 it passed down through his elder daughter to her husband, Matthew Robinson Boulton of Soho, Birmingham and Tew Park, Oxfordshire. M R Boulton was son of industrialist and Lunar Society founder Matthew Boulton. On M R Boulton's death in 1842, Flookburgh Farm was put into a trust for his son MPW Boulton, inventor of the aileron. MPW Boulton and his trustees sold off the farm in 1893 to Mrs Jane Hall, wife of the former miller at Cark. After the Halls ran the farm for 10 years they sold it on to the 8th Duke of Devonshire. As part of the Holker estate it was let to a local tenant farmer.

Change of Use: the Power Station

In about 1915 the Cark and District Electricity Supply Company Limited was formed to provide electricity primarily for a new wartime venture between Vickers and the Admiralty. They were planning to build a large new airship factory at Flookburgh together with a model village of 500 houses for the envisaged employees. The company would also supply customers across Lower Holker and Lower Allithwaite parishes. Flookburgh Farm was identified as the site of the necessary power generating station and by 1917 the Electricity Supply Company were negotiating with the Holker estate for a lease of the farm buildings, house and an adjacent field (presumably horses would be used to haul the necessary vehicles).

By 1918 the tenant of the farm, Robert Moore of West Plain farm, was renting the farm buildings and house but had sub-let the house and other barns to James Scott. Moore agreed to vacate the farm by May 1918 to allow the Electricity Supply Company take possession, leaving Mr Scott until that November to either vacate the house and barns or make arrangements with the company.

The date when the generating equipment was set up and electricity first supplied is currently unknown. The original plant at Flookburgh Farm consisted of an oil engine-powered generator capable of producing 32Kw of electricity. It appears to have been located in the south range of buildings. The eastern range was sub-let, apparently earning the company sufficient income to offset their annual lease payments.

The lease was due to be signed in early 1918 but is actually dated 25 March 1920. The delay was largely due to Vickers and the Admiralty abandoning their plans for the airship factory in early 1918; only 120 houses were completed at their model village. The Model Aero Village would become Flookburgh West and then Ravenstown (and for many years was known locally as Jutland after one of its avenues). Also at that time the company was awaiting Admiralty approval to extend its capital. The Electricity Supply Company spent around £7,000 on capital expenditure by 1921. With the loss of its main customer and with the guaranteed domestic custom much reduced, any attempts to serve Flookburgh and beyond were limited by the inability to raise further capital. This led to the failure of the company. It went into liquidation in March 1923 (creditors meeting held in Bradford) and would be finally wound up in 1929.

One of the original directors and largest creditor of the company, Edgar Cox-Walker of Messrs Cox-Walker, electrical engineers of Darlington, bought out the plant, assets and

goodwill. Cox-Walker set up a new company, the Cark & District Electricity Company Limited, registered in 1924. The new company capital of £1,500 and £1,000 in Debentures. The new company took over the lease on Flookburgh Farm, initiated by their predecessors. It had been generating power from late 1923.

Through its chairman, Edgar Cox-Walker, the business was set on a firm and profitable footing and by 1926 was looking to expand its limited customer base in Flookburgh, Cark and Allithwaite, with the local parishes considering street lighting.

Having already replaced the original gas engines with heavy oil engines on taking over the company, the Electricity Company was planning to upgrade the generating capacity to exceed 50KW. At the time they were producing less than that amount. This included proposals to install three new engines: one of 10bhp, one of 30bhp and one 50bhp A.C. motor powering the existing generators and balancer. The electricity supplied was DC at 240 volts and 460 volts. They made some alterations at Flookburgh Farm including creating a second floor in at least one of the buildings and adding additional entrances and making up the floor of the southern yard at the site. At some date a showroom was set up; older residents may remember where this was at the farm. The author assumes it was a room in the house, primarily for customers to pay bills.

The Electricity (Supply) Act had been passed in 1919 to enable local authorities set up voluntary Electricity Supply Districts across their areas. Barrow Corporation jumped at the opportunity of taking a lead by proposing the creation of a Supply Area across much of North Lancashire together with parts of Cumberland around Millom and Westmorland around Windermere and Kendal. Discussions took place with what Barrow saw as the current suppliers and local authorities, including Lancaster, where the corporation had recently acquired the Caton Road power station at the former Vickers National Projectile factory, and the long-standing Windermere & District Electricity Company (which had once proposed supplying a large area including the Cartmel peninsula).

Barrow proposed that with their Buccleuch Street power station, their planned hydro-electric scheme at Backbarrow and with the acquisition of Vickers' Cavendish Park power station at Barrow they would be more than capable of meeting any current and envisaged demand for the whole area. Trunk power lines would be laid out to serve the various areas. The other local authorities and electricity companies were not keen and during 1921 an enquiry was held. Apparently such schemes proved unpopular in several areas of England and Wales, with local authorities and local electricity companies being against these 'voluntary' mergers. Barrow's scheme appears not to have progressed. What is significant about Barrow's proposals is that the Cark company is not mentioned.

The mouse roars.

In September 1924 Cox Walker, for the Cark company, confronted Barrow Corporation over its latest plan for extensions of service to Dalton, Ulverston and Grange Urban Districts and to certain parishes within Ulverston Rural District including Lower and Upper Holker and Lower Allithwaite. This had again ignored his company's existence.

He claimed his area had a demand for 50Kw, with the potential to double that in a year. He claimed to have plans to install new engines to power the existing generators. Barrow claimed it was aware of the Supply Company's failure but were unaware of the new company or its area.

After much correspondence between Cox-Walker, Barrow Corporation and the Electricity Commission (part of the Department of Transport!) the parties agreed that Cark would retain its supply area, defined in its Special Order of 1926. This defined its area of supply as south of a imaginary line from Bigland Scar, north of Holker village, to High Fell Gate cross-roads, close to Grange cemetery. In other words the supply area would cover Ravenstown, Flookburgh, Cark and Allithwaite. Barrow would serve Cartmel. Barrow were reluctant to commit to supplying electricity to the Electricity Company.

Barrow Corporation built its trunk power lines alongside the railway from Plumpton to Cark and then over Hampsfell to Grange, and Meathop Sanatorium. Power from Barrow Corporation to Grange urban district notionally commenced in 1926 as the proposed High Tension lines over Hampsfell still being subject to some local opposition at the end of 1928. Negotiations continued until 1927 with the Cark company, the stumbling point being whether Barrow Corporation would buy the Cark company or respect its presence and sell a bulk supply of electricity instead. Barrow had no intention to buy the Cark company's assets. It expressed reluctance to provide a supply, claiming that it needed authority from the electricity commission to raise additional money to enhance its generating capability.

Eventually common sense prevailed and the Cark company would turn off its own generators at some time in 1927, instead buying its electricity from Barrow. The interface between the two systems was at Flookburgh Farm where a substation replaced the engines and generators. The Electricity Company maintained its own power lines and substations and sold on the electricity to its own customers. Interestingly Barrow's high-tension lines from the Backbarrow Hydro-electric station were routed to join into its Ulverston – Grange lines via Flookburgh. The provision of power and lines by the two bodies on the Cartmel peninsula did cause some confusion for locals as new substations and pole lines appeared – which were Barrow Corporation's property and which Cark's? On the border between Lower Allithwaite parish and Grange UDC one side of the road might be Cark's and the other side Barrow's.

The War Years and after

The supply from the Cark company was very economically managed. In early 1939 the Lower Holker Amateur Operatic Society were prevented from enhancing the stage lighting for their annual performances. The Cark company were reluctant to exceed agreed current levels from the bulk supply to avoid additional charges from Barrow Corporation. Apparently Mr King, the manager, diverted power from his own house to allow the stage lighting draw the necessary current. All the same a fuse allegedly blew at the Holker Club, where the performance was taking place, causing loss of power for the

whole of Cark. Litigation ensued between the company and the electrician supporting the stage lighting as to who was responsible.

At some point around 1941 Edgar Cox-Walker appears to have sold the company to a Hertfordshire consultant electrical engineer, Alec Avis and his family.

The second world war saw significant expansion of the Cark company's customer base when, in 1941, it provided power to the RAF and Army camps built on Winder Moor, below Flookburgh. A dispute arose between the company and John Rawson, builder of Cartmel, over the apparent quality of work carried out on several jobs in 1941. It appeared that Mr Avis used Rawson's men, without agreement, to carry out work relating to the camp supply which did not help the company's case in court.

Two of the final acts of the Cark & District Electricity company were:

- i) to renew their lease of Flookburgh Farm in August 1945, the original lease having expired in October 1944;
- ii) to formally agree wayleaves for 1100 yards of underground and surface lines across the Holker estate, eventually signed in January 1948.

The Cark & District Electricity Company survived until nationalisation of the Electricity industry. It was subsumed on 1st April 1948. Shareholders had their Cark shares exchanged for British Electricity shares. The North Western Electricity Board took responsibility for the lease on Flookburgh Farm and adjacent field. They gave up the lease on Flookburgh Farm in February 1957. By that time there were two tenants using some of the barns: Robert Benson, builder, who also rented the field, and Messrs H & G Hudson. Subsequently, through the 1960s and 70s, Flookburgh Farm became a builders yard for Robert Benson, who lived at the farmhouse.

Known management and staff of the two companies include:

For the Cark & District Electricity Supply Company Limited

G B Fordati (1917, 1920)

Negotiated with the Holker estate of Lord Richard Cavendish on behalf of the Cark & District Electricity Supply Company Limited.

The only G B Fordati found on Ancestry is George Basil Fordati (1871–1928) of Weybridge, Surrey and, after the Great War, Liss, Hampshire. He also maintained accommodation in Westminster.

For the Cark & District Electricity Company Limited

Edgar Cooke Cox-Walker MIEE. Director. 1867-1962 Darlington-based owner of a noted electrical engineering firm founded by his father.

F S Wrightson, Secretary (1924, 1927). Lived at Bolton-le-Sands.

Ella Cox-Walker (Director in 1936). Second wife of Edgar Cox-Walker.

John T E King. 1885-1949. Resident Engineer and Manager at Flookburgh until the early 1940s. He was resident at the farm. Appears to have moved to the Barrow area after sale of the company to the Avis family.

Marjorie M King, Book Keeper. 1899-1985. Wife of J King.

Alec Avis, 1889-1955. Director by 1941. In 1939 living at Letchworth, as 'Consultant and Advisory Engineer, Electric Distribution for the Town'. Presumably working for the Letchworth Electricity Company. Moved to south Devon at some point after nationalisation. In a 1947 letter he signed himself as Secretary to the company.

Helen Gertrude Avis, Director. 1896-1979. Wife of Alec Avis and Mother of Richard.

Richard Alec Avis, 1941. 1922-1962. Director and Engineer from around 1941, second child of Alec and Helen Avis. Moved with parents to Devon.

The Avis family were all living at Flookburgh by 1941 and until at least nationalisation. They must have bought the company from the Cox-Walker family.

C A Ansell, secretary in 1945.

Eric Leck, electrician at the electricity works in 1939, lodger at 1 Market Street, Flookburgh.

Thomas Martin, electrician at the electricity works in 1939, lodger at Chapel House, Flookburgh.

References:

Lancashire Archives:

DDCA/22/16, Cavendish of Holker, Letters addressed to Lord Frederick Cavendish, including one from William Wilkinson

DDCA/ACC12005/Box 26/198 Conveyance papers Flookburgh Farm

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London Gazette:

4 May 1923, Cark and District Electricity Supply Company Winding up

27 April 1926, 28 September 1926 Cark and District Electricity Company Special Order

Cumbria Archives, Barrow

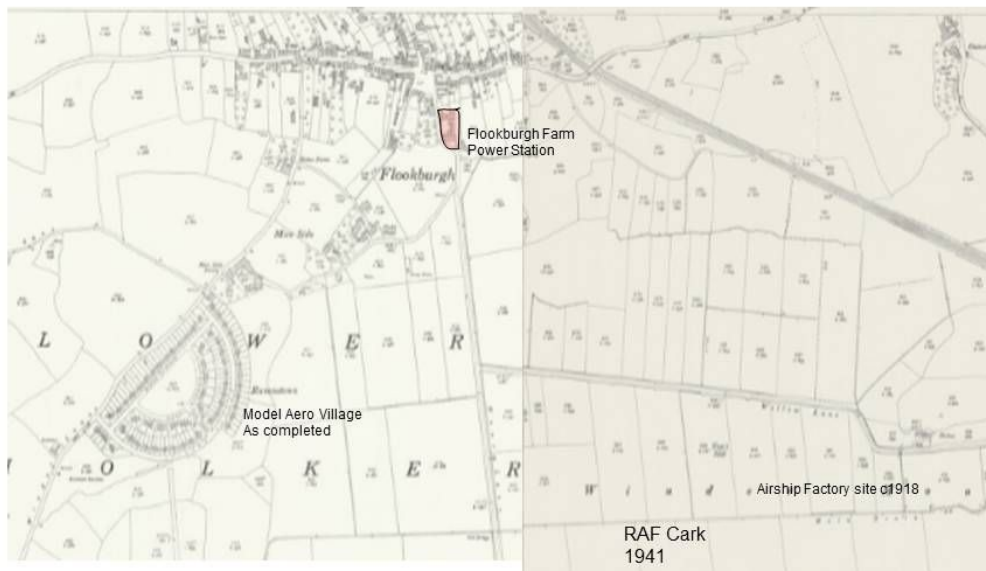
Various files regarding Electricity supply in North Lancashire and South Westmorland, including some uncatalogued correspondence between the Cark & District Electricity Company and Barrow Corporation.

Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Matthew_Piers_Watt_Boulton

MPW Boulton of Tew Park, including family history.

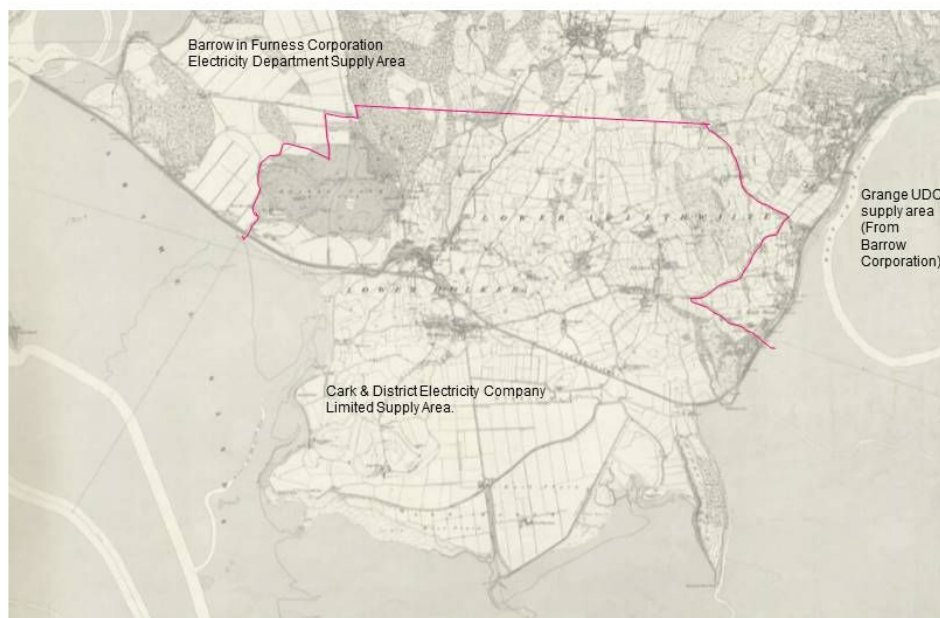
Les Gilpin

Cark & District Electricity Company
Original Admiralty supply area



From 6inch OS Map 1931

Cark & District Electricity Company
Supply Area 1926



6in Ordnance Survey Map 1890

BOOK REVIEW

QUARRYING IN CUMBRIA by David Johnson. 96pp. Published by Amberley, £14.99
ISBN 978 1 4456 7246 5

This slim soft back volume is a picture book. After a short introduction there follows 84 pages of illustrations, mostly colour photographs of disused workings taken by the author, but with an admixture of vintage pictures in sepia. Each item is accompanied by a short commentary, accompanied by a grid reference.

The geographical range is good, and the geology is kept under control by the simple device of devoting a chapter to each of the principal lithologies, namely slate, non-slate volcanics, limestone, sandstone and the 'softies' (gypsum, sand, mudstone and clay). All of this is preceded by a brief attention to "Early stone getting", and followed by chapters on quarrying infrastructures, stone processing, and transportation of finished products. Finally, consideration is given to "Afterlife" – every working has one, and it is fitting that we should be reminded that a hole in the ground is an asset with a number of potential future uses.

Though it is not a geology text, a little more care should have been taken with the geology map on page 6. Notwithstanding its necessary simplification, it omits all the igneous rocks covered in chapter 3 and wrongly includes the unacknowledged Triassic sandstones as part of the Permian outcrop.

The book is an entertaining and informative reminder of the role played by quarrying in our economic life and its contribution to the cultural landscape of the county. For readers uncertain of the broad historical, geographical and geological sweep of the subject, this book will be an invaluable introduction. For old hands, it can be enjoyed as an entertaining stroll through familiar territory.

Geoff Brambles.

YOUR SOCIETY NEEDS YOU!

The committee are looking for help with a number of specific roles in the future.

The first job is to help with the organisation of the Society's conferences, co-ordinating with the speakers and the venues etc.

The other job involves help with the Society's digital photographic and documentary archives. It might include responding to enquiries and making more use of our present resources as well as investigating other sources of material which are relevant to the society.

If you would like more details on either of these roles please contact Helen Caldwell at lowludderburn@btinternet.com.

Of course if neither of the above roles appeal to you, you could just volunteer to join the committee anyway.

COUNTRY HOUSE HOSPITALITY

All good hosts wish to make a favourable impression with their guests and visitors. This is especially true if you wish to sell your goods and services to them or if you wish to solicit their good offices in some way. To this end several of the larger industrial concerns located on the west coast of Cumbria operated their own private guest-houses in which important customers and people of influence could be accommodated, wined and dined.

Most properties suitable for such entertaining were already in existence and were acquired as and when houses of the appropriate ambience and location came onto the market. There is one notable exception as we are about to see.

Abbey House - Vickers Ltd

This property is the one exception to the criteria set out above. By 1910 Vickers wanted somewhere impressive in which to entertain ministers and heads of state while negotiating the sale of warships and armaments both to the British Government and to friendly Foreign Powers. No suitable properties seemed to be available and so Vickers resolved to build their own 'Country House'.

They engaged the celebrated architect Edwin Lutyens (later knighted). His brief was to design a country house but without its appendages of stables, service buildings and garden¹. Lutyens came up with a Neo-Elizabethan H-plan mansion as the guesthouse containing a flat for Vickers managing Director Sir James McKechnie. It was located in the grounds of Furness Abbey on Abbey Road on the outskirts of Barrow and was opened in 1914. Amongst its many illustrious guests can be numbered King George V and other members of the Royal family.

Despite becoming a II* Listed Building in 1949 Vickers disposed of the property to Lancashire County Council in 1951 for use as a Residential Care Home. Unsurprisingly it suffered from some neglect and was sold again in 1984 and after extensive refurbishment re-opened as the Abbey House Hotel, a four-star establishment. Historic England briefly describe it thus; *Irregularly coursed red ashlar sandstone, graduated slate roof. 3 storeys in H-plan extended by 2-storey cross-wings. Elizabethan style; symmetrical.*

Fleatham House - Albright & Wilson

Located in woodland just outside St Bees Fleatham House was about 3 miles from Albright & Wilson's Marchon Works near Whitehaven. It was built in Victorian times for Thomas Henry Brockbank, solicitor of Helder & Brockbank (43 & 44 Lowther St, Whitehaven).

By 1901 Brockbank had moved to the nearby house Khandallah and the property was owned by George Scoular a Mining and Civil Engineer and County Councillor. Listed there in 1929 was Alexander Scoular (George's son?) who was prominent in the

steelworks at Workington. The property was then purchased by the Smith family, owners of the Whitehaven packaging firm whose name it bore.

A lack of suitable local hotels in which to entertain important customers prompted Marchon Products to acquire the house in 1953. Renovations were overseen personally by Fred Marzillier, one of Marchon's founding fathers. The house was equipped with a full complement of staff including a manager, with several waiting and domestic staff. Guests were wined and dined lavishly by the resident chef and accommodated in one of nine bedrooms. Important contacts from major customers such as Unilever and Proctor & Gamble provided the bulk of the clientele. Visiting politicians such as Harold Wilson and Ted Heath were also entertained periodically. Indeed some wags suggested that it was only the existence of Fleatham House and Sella Park (see later) and their hospitality which could prompt occasional visits by Jack Cunningham to the constituency he 'served' for 22 years.

Fleatham was also the venue for meetings of senior management including the notorious 1966 gathering at which the ill-fated decision was taken to invest in the Long Harbour (Newfoundland) project to manufacture elemental phosphorus in preference to purifying phosphoric acid by solvent extraction². It may have seemed like a good idea at the time but events were to prove otherwise.

Junior staff *'of whom great things were expected'* could also expect an occasional invitation to break bread with members of the senior management team in order to test them out. (My invitation is still eagerly awaited). Occasionally accommodation was also provided for artistes performing at the nearby Rosehill Theatre.

Following the takeover of A&W by Rhodia in 2000 (and eventual closure of the Marchon Works) Fleatham was sold off and became a small hotel counting celebrated world statesmen such as Anthony Charles Lynton Blair and his family as guests. However due to the retirement of its owners in about 2013 the hotel closed. Some of the grounds were sold off to enable the construction of 3 houses including one named, appropriately enough, Scoular Howe for which the builders won a regional award.

Moresby Hall - High Duty Alloys

This impressive building was accorded Grade I listing in 1967. According to Historic England there were 3 main building phases the earliest of which dates to the late mediaeval period possibly comprising a tower with a hall range attached.

Sir Christopher de Moresby fought at Agincourt (1415) and his great granddaughter Mrs Anne Weston sold the Hall to a Cockermouth merchant William Fletcher in 1576. In the about 1615 the Fletcher family remodelled the house extensively to assume a courtyard layout and some attribute this work to Inigo Jones.. The south range was remodelled again in 1670-1690 possibly to designs by William Thackeray or Edward Addison.

The Fletchers owned the Hall for some 250 years but following the death of Thomas Fletcher who died childless the house changed hands several times and in 1881 was the home of Henry Spencer, a retired Major. (Was he the same Spencer who set up a Wine & Spirits business in Whitehaven and acquired the Old Brewery on Irish Street?). The Hall eventually ceased to be a manorial residence, fell into disrepair and was used as a farmhouse for some years. In about 1910 it was restored and re-emerged as a small manor house until about 1955.

High Duty Alloys' factory on the site of the defunct Distington Ironworks some 5 miles to the north was erected in 1940 as a 'shadow' factory to fabricate aluminium alloy extrusions and castings for the war effort. The factory continued operations after the war and in 1955 bought Moresby Hall for use as the company guesthouse for entertaining important clients. Ownership of the Hall was maintained even though the company itself underwent more than one takeover. Its proximity to Rosehill Theatre lent itself to convenient accommodation for artistes performing there when the usual lodgings at Rosehill House were unavailable.

After more than 40 years of custodianship in 1996 the then owners Pechiney put the property on the market. In 1999 the new owners decided to turn the property into a Country House hotel offering facilities for small conferences and weddings and similar events. As for the factory itself production ceased in June 2007 with final closure in early 2008. At the time of writing (2018) the factory buildings still remain but plans for a hotel, restaurant and filling station on the site have been mooted.

The promontory on which the Hall and the adjacent church of St Bridget was used by the Romans and several artefacts dating to their occupation have been found on the site. For those who believe in such things the Hall is also reputed to be haunted and has been the subject of a TV programme which investigates such matters.

Newlands House - Workington Iron & Steel Company (and successors)

This property was built as a country house with adjacent two-storey coach house in 1879 on the Whitehaven Road in Workington for local solicitor William Thompson of the firm J C & C Thompson (53 Edkin Street). It took the form of a detached two-storey property with a three-storey annex to the rear.

In 1900 the property was conveyed by Thompson's children (?) to Robert Ernest Highton (1863-1943) the first headmaster of Brigham School, Keswick (1880-1907) and a partner in the Harrington Iron & Coal Co. Highton was also an Alderman on Workington Borough Council and in that capacity on 10th September 1903 laid the foundation stone for the Carnegie Library in the town; on 6th October 1904 he also performed the opening ceremony. In 1913 Highton also purchased the adjacent property Elm Bank so that in 1920 he was in a position to sell Newlands to the United Steel Company. His son Langton Highton became Managing Director of United Steels in Workington.

The property was used as the guesthouse for the steelworks for many years until, due to the continual decline of the local works, it was sold off in the early 2000s. It was operated as a hotel but this venture did not prove to be very successful and the hotel closed for business in 2006. The property remained empty for some years until purchased by a local building firm Lattimers of Mealsgate.

The intention of this well-regarded firm was to divide the original house into 4 self-contained homes retaining original features such as stained glass windows and open fireplaces. A further 14 properties were built in the extensive grounds of the main building at comprising a mix of two, three and four-bedroom semi-detached mews with garages and gardens.

Lattimers proposed to name the development 'Newlands Close' but Workington Town Council made a counter-proposal which the builders were happy to accept. The works of Charles Cammell & Co were relocated from Dronfield to the town in 1882 by James Duffield. He also served as town mayor three times, buying the mayor's robes for the town. Since the move he had engineered had brought much prosperity to Workington the Council wished to see the name 'James Duffield Close' adopted and that is how the development is now known.

As an aside it is interesting that in 1901 Duffield's residence was listed as Tallentire Hall some 4 miles from Cockermouth and well away from the noise and grime of the works of which he was still General Manager.

Sella Park - British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL)

Located between Calderbridge and the Sellafield nuclear plant Sella Park is comprised of a 14th century pele tower incorporated into late 17th century house, with 19th century restorations and in 1967 was accorded Grade II listing. Its precise origins are unclear but it may be even earlier than indicated above since a date of 1278 has been suggested³ for it to be the 'Sea Grange' owned by the monks of nearby Calder Abbey. However to add to the mystery it is not mentioned in any list of the Abbey's lands⁴.

On the dissolution of the monasteries Sella Park was supposed to have been granted to Sir Henry Curwen of Workington Hall who in turn gave it to his younger son Thomas. However Henry is said⁵ to have bought the property from Thomas Fleming in 1594 casting further doubt on the supposed connection with Calder Abbey. Henry's grandson Darcy Curwen of the junior branch of the family is said to have built the current house⁶. In 1725 when the senior branch of the family died out the Lordship of Workington passed to Henry Curwen of Sella Park.

In 1770 The Curwens sold the property to George Edward Stanley of Ponsonby Hall and it passed to his son Edward who, previously, had married Isabel the eldest daughter of Thomas Curwen of Sella Park. The house remained in the possession of that family until 1925 when it was purchased by Capt. Llewellyn E H Llewellyn CB OBE RN (Retd) who in turn sold it to Mr James McGowan⁷.

In 1954 the property was taken over by the Riley family who ran it as a hotel (the venue for my 6th form leaving party - no 'proms' back then) until 1979 when it was purchased by BNFL. It was used as an exclusive guesthouse for important reprocessing customers such as those from Japan but following the MOX data fabrication scandal in 1999 relations cooled somewhat and such visits became scarcer.

The house was used increasingly to accommodate staff visiting the works from other BNFL sites and for management meetings. Following a re-organisation of the nuclear industry the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority (NDA) was established in 2005. After a review of its estates the NDA decided it was no longer appropriate for them to continue running Sella Park. In 2008 the property was leased to the Pennington family of Ravenglass who added it to their local portfolio of hostelrys and, once again, it is being operated as a Country House hotel.

Brian Quayle

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