

ART. XI.—*Notes on the Chapelry of Helsington.* By  
the REV. J. WHITESIDE.

*Read at Carlisle, April 18th, 1907.*

THE one place of surpassing interest in this ecclesiastical parish is Sizergh Castle, which must be left alone as having been fully dealt with in our *Transactions* and elsewhere. I must also endeavour to avoid incidents too modern or more suitable for a local gazetteer, so that between the very old and the very new not much remains to be noted.

The chapel is dedicated to St. John, Apostle and Evangelist, but the deed of consecration\* is not in the safe. It was founded in 1726 on a somewhat unfortunate site, except that it commands a magnificent panorama of sea, plain, moors and distant mountains. The probable explanation is that the idea of a separate chapel having originated with the earliest benefactor, John Jackson of Holeslack, he would consider his own convenience. No residence in the parish can be seen from the chapel, which stands on ground which was at the time of its erection a wild fell stretching from Lyth to Kendal—a distance of six miles. No fence surrounded the early fabric, so that it was said to possess “the largest churchyard in England.” †

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\* This ceremony was not performed until 1745, by Bishop Peplow of Chester. Several of our chapels have never been consecrated at all and their supposed dedications are fictitious.

† Nicolson and Burn, p. 103, refer to Jackson's gift “so as a chapelyard should be sufficiently fenced out,” “all which was accordingly effected.” If there ever was such a fence, it disappeared. The testimony of old inhabitants has no tradition of its existence. If there was a fence, one would expect the yard to be consecrated at the same time as the chapel. I believe that in remote places the fabric was sometimes on the open fell; at Swindale, for instance, and probably at Mardale also, there was not originally a fence on every side.

If a scheme were considered of re-arranging parochial boundaries, Helsington with its sections of population bordering on four other parishes might with advantage be extinguished. This opinion, however, may be regarded as a treasonable judgment upon my own parish.

The graveyard was consecrated by the Bishop of Chester on November 19th, 1822, in answer to a petition of the people, who desired it as "a great accommodation, especially in the winter seasons."\* It is important to observe (inasmuch as the residents of that part of Brigsteer which is in the township of Levens appear to claim the right of burial at the ordinary fee), that the deed expressly limits the privilege to Helsington in Kendal. The deed was signed in the presence of John Hudson, vicar of Kendal; John Dowbiggin, deputy registrar, Lancaster; Joseph Fawcett, curate of Kendal; George Holden Johnson, schoolmaster of Levens; John Wilson, Christopher Garnett and William Ward, notary public, deputy registrar of the diocese of Chester.

The appearance of the chapel and yard is greatly disfigured by the adjoining school and offices which were actually built on the consecrated ground in 1858. But this was only in continuation of the previous policy, the ancient chapel and school having been under one roof, and the surrounding land used as the playground. After 1822 the scholars were supposed to be limited to the north side, but as a matter of fact bounds were not observed, and, as an old boy says, "we ran all over the place, setting cappers at anything we liked, and slurring (sliding) over the flat grave-stones (of two former incumbents) in winter, until Harris came and put on fresh restrictions and kept us in subjection." The yard is remarkable for the paucity of grave-stones, few of which have interesting

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\* As the soil is only a few inches deep, the graves are cut in the solid rock; a great hole is quarried and then a dry wall is built. For this reason no fixed sexton's fee is possible; the charge varies from 15/- to 20/-. The graves are often admired as a work of art and as "terble nice dry spots to lig in."

inscriptions. Only this, of Mary Garnett of Sizergh, who died in 1831 :—

This lonely spot of ground contains  
The dust of Mary's last remains :  
Her deeds of charity and worth  
Will be recorded long on earth.

In the north-west corner are the graves of the Claughtons of Beathwaite Green, who are said to be relatives of a recent Bishop of St. Albans and Rochester.

The old chapel, which with the school, stable, peat-house and other offices was on the same foundations as the present fabric, was a very unpretentious building, with square windows and small panes, "the same as in cottage houses." Built on the separating wall between school and church was a neat square tower, with simple arch-holes, in which hung the bell. The interior was plainly furnished with three-decker and box pews, three of which appear to have been allotted to Holeslack, Low House and Boundary House ; probably all were allotted. How this came about I cannot ascertain, but Miss Briggs of Boundary House is said to have "given £5 for a pew." Affectionate memories of the gallery linger in the minds of venerable parishioners. Those were the "good old days." The father of Anthony Wilson (whose family, of Low House, may be the oldest other than the Sizergh Stricklands in the parish) "raised the tunes" on a pitchpipe,\* but a more important instrument of music was the bass fiddle, which "stood 3 feet 6 inches high," and was played by a quaint person named Crewdson, of Kendal, who made capital boots and bad poetry. His rhymes were rough doggerel stuff, principally directed against one of my predecessors, Harris "the reformer,"

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\* This pipe, much dilapidated and roughly repaired with cobbler's thread, is in the safe, but it is now incapable of raising a note. Where are all the pitchpipes gone? A Kirkbride rector gave his to the schoolmaster. This may have happened commonly.

for his innovations in the direction of reverence and for his building of the school which was reckoned unduly extravagant and ornate. The shoes he brought in a bag to service, leaving them in the porch and then going off before the sermon, or earlier, "if owt went wrang" and he "tyeuk t' pet," that he might "'liver them out" in Beathwaite Green.

The clerk (we no longer possess one, having abolished him as unnecessary) came forth from the three-decker to announce the metrical Psalms. Each verse was given out *ore rotundo* from the gallery, and then he returned to his box. One of these clerks, Joseph Pearson, was a most worthy man. His tombstone, erected after his death in 1861 in gratitude by Thomas Armstrong of Richmond in Surrey, records that he filled the offices of clerk and master for nearly forty years. Pearson, according to custom, hurried out of church first, and mounting a stone a few yards from the porch notified any sales, letting of work, etc. I am inclined to think, inasmuch as we are supposed to have degenerated, that attendance at church was largely affected by the prospect of such important announcements in days when there were few newspapers and no railways.

The original fabric remained with little alteration—beyond some extraordinary repairs, which cost £50, in 1852—until 1858, when a faculty was granted to the incumbent, to Miles Smithson and W. Dixon, wardens, and to John Garnett and William Ireland, to "restore" the church, when it assumed structurally its present appearance. The cost was £500, and a principal instigator of the work was the late William Henry Wakefield, who then resided at Prizet.

Further alterations at a cost of £184 were made in 1898 to make the interior more comely. But there is nothing worthy of notice except the oak credence, which has been cut down from the original Holy Table, and a painted east window, placed in 1898 by William Stavert

of Prizet in memory of his sister Elizabeth Vose of Liverpool.

The plate consists of :—(1) pewter cup with cover, inscribed "The gift of John Wilson, M.A., Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, and Minister of this Chapel, 1779"; (2) pewter paten, inscribed on the back, "Helsington Chapel, 1824"; (3) silver chalice and paten, presented by Mary Ann and Catherine Fidler of Lane Head at Easter, 1904; (4) silver flagon presented by William Stavert of Prizet, in 1904, in memory of his wardenship of forty-two years; (5) a brass alms dish, "In memory of Mrs. Bourne\* of Helsington Laithes *obit* (*sic*), 4th January, 1852."

The registers are as follows :—(1) of marriages, from 1813 to 1834, 8 entries only; (2) of baptisms, from 1813 to 1907, 798 entries, one space now remaining; (3) of burials, from 1824 to 1865, 168 entries; (4) of marriages, from 1837 to date, 102 entries; (5) of burials, from 1865 to date, 162 entries. A very large number of the burials, more than one-third, are of non-parishioners. But we have now imposed a very necessary protective tariff.

The plate and papers are preserved in a strong safe† in the vestry, and as a further security against loss an inventory has been printed, which is checked at the annual vestry by a resolution passed in 1904. That we ran some risk before the purchase of a safe is shewn by the fact that in 1870 a meeting was called to consider how the expenses of a sacrilegious outrage (on the night of February 9th) were to be met, the church having been broken into and "the books heaped up in the aisle and burnt." The registers may have escaped through being at the parsonage. A similar offence was committed at Crosthwaite in Cumberland by the same culprits, who were apprehended.

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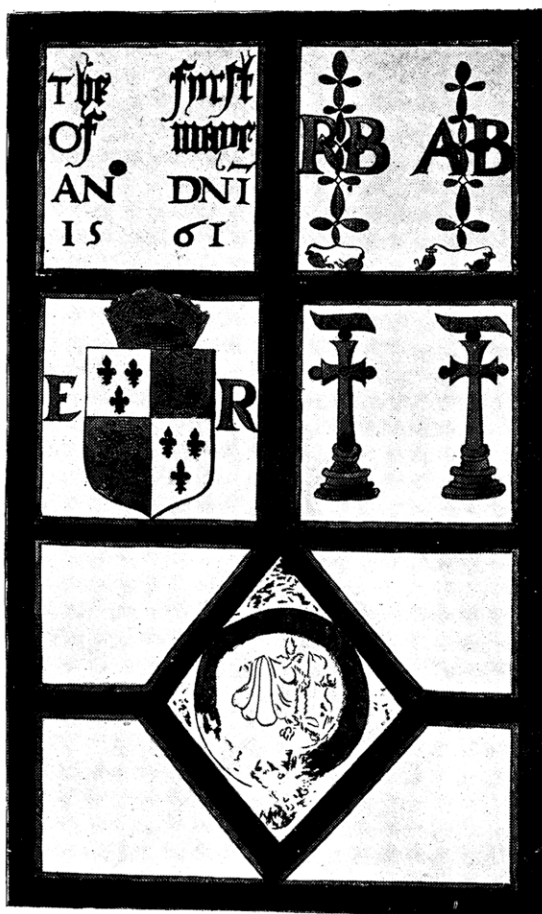
\* A grave-stone records the burial of Jane, wife of Charles Bourne, who died on the above date, aged 73.

† The terrier of 1894 mentions "One Iron Safe"; this was gone in 1900.

The font is of the year 1858 ; its predecessor of 1726 is about to be taken from the parsonage to the chapel-yard, so much of it as remains ; the bowl is gone.

The following is an incomplete list of incumbents :—  
1726, James Mattson ; 1779-1782, John Wilson ; 1791-1831, William Moore ; 1831-1838, William Hutton ; 1838-1850, James Muckalt ; 1851-1859, Charles Butler Harris ; 1859-1860, G. W. H. Tayler ; 1861-1895, Thomas Whitwell Rogers ; 1895-1900, Thomas Heelis ; 1900, Joseph Whiteside.

Mr. Mattson, according to Nicolson and Burn, was instrumental in 1735 in considerably augmenting the value of the benefice. Mr. Wilson, a man of much learning, was subsequently vicar of Gainford, to which he was presented July 16th, 1782. Mr. Moore was previously incumbent of Killington. He was M.A. of Trinity, Cambridge. Mr. Hutton is said to have lived at Sizergh Fellside ; the curates mostly had lived in Kirkland, Kendal. He was a grandson of Hutton of the "Beetham Repository," to which, having become vicar there in 1844, he "added much interesting matter during his incumbency of thirty-seven years" (to 1881). Mr. Muckalt, M.A., of Queen's, Oxford, built the parsonage in 1840 on a portion of Chambers tenement, and planted the fine avenue of trees, 200 yards long. He is described as a "girt powerful man," "terble nonsensical," who "always had a droll say for us lads when he met us." He is interred here by the side of Mr. Moore. Mr. Harris has been already alluded to as "the reformer," who had a large part in rebuilding the church, building the school, and enlarging the vicarage. He introduced many wise changes and incurred thereby the aforesaid fiddler's indignation. "Before he came only the clerk said 'Amen' ; now us Sunday scholars clerked" : "things had been as rough as they could be." Mr. Tayler was afterwards incumbent of Grayrigg, and later of Holy Trinity, Carlisle.



WINDOW AT BRIDGE HOUSE,  
 HELSINGTON. TO FACE P. 119.

The parish is not rich in antiquities, but a few deserve a brief notice. Bridge House (a corruption of Briggs' House) was burnt down on Easter Eve, 1906. This was the residence of Robert Briggs,\* first recorder or steward of Kirkby Kendal (1575), by charter of Queen Elizabeth. In the house at its north end was a chapel, and therein a painted window with two lights, which was subsequently placed in the south end of the building. This was the only part that escaped destruction, except that some one thrust a ladder through one of the lights. The other which is exactly the same, I secured in time, and I produce a photograph taken from a traced copy.† The initials are of Robert Briggs and Ann his wife, who was a Sedgwick of Collin Field. The faded fragments represent the royal arms and motto. Another ancient piece of glass is in the staircase window at Stonebank Green. Miss Alice Wilson of Aynam Lodge, Kendal, has painted me a copy of it for the vestry. In the centre is a kingfisher on a shield; above it, over some scroll work, is another with a fish in its beak, and below is the motto "*Vigilat qui valet*"—"Keep your eyes open if you wish to succeed." At this place, which has since been greatly changed, lived in 1687 John Fisher, one of the magistrates to whom questions were addressed touching the Penal Laws and Test Acts.‡

At Helsington Laithes, or Helsington Hall, or Manor House, as it would more properly be called (the title of the buildings or of a demolished farm-house, of which there are traces and notices, having been transferred to the big house), the manorial courts were held, of which are several records at Levens. Captain Bagot tells me he has :—(1) Helsington Court Rolls from 1552; (2) old leases and bonds of Helsington Mills from 1566; (3) lease

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\* See *Boke of Recorde* of Kendal, p. 29 and p. 283.

† For this I am indebted to Mr. John Lightfoot of Oxford, a grandson of Canon Weston.

‡ See *Transactions*, O.S., iv., p. 368.



of Helsington Demesne by Lord Lumley to Bellingham, 8 Henry VIII. [1517]—*i.e.*, probably to Thomas, son of Alan who bought Helsington; (4) "the manor of Helsington, how conveyed and how holden"—36 Henry VIII. [1545]. At the south end is the ancient chapel, of whose fine pre-Reformation window I give a photograph; also in the drawing-room, in the centre of some tracery on the west wall, the initials and date

B  
15            38  
I A

Some argue that these are Bindloss initials. There is a little obscurity and uncertainty. Nicolson and Burn say—"till the reign of Henry the Eighth, when it [the manor] appears to have been in the possession of a family of the name of Bindlose." Alan Bellingham bought the manor house and land from the Bindloses, probably about 1487-9, and either this Alan or his son was granted the Lumley Fee about 1547. The house was probably restored or rebuilt by the new owner and the date may be the date of the work. The family occupied Helsington and Gaythorne as well as Levens, and we may suppose the smaller houses to have been inhabited by junior members. This is Captain Bagot's view, and it seems most reasonable. But the initials are more difficult than the date, supposing them to be of Bellingham. Alan's wife was Elizabeth Gilpin\*; may the I represent a second wife, whose initial he placed before his own? Or, which is more likely, had he a son James, who resided here? Anyhow, I think it is clear the initials are not of Bindlose. The purchaser and restorer, rather than the seller, would be the person to make his mark.

Approached through a trap door in the floor of a closet is a small chamber which is suggestive of a "priest hole."

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\* Nicolson and Burn, i., p. 204.



CHAPEL WINDOW AT HELSINGTON LAITHES.

TO FACE P. 120.

There seems to have been no window or door through any wall—it may have been the upper portion of a well, or was used for a domestic purpose; still the “priest hole” is not at all impossible.

A “Catholic priest,” which popularly denotes “Roman Catholic,” is said to have resided at Lane Head, a few hundred yards above, and he would supply the duty at the chapel. But what authority have we for supposing that, where there was a chapel and a priest, it and he were necessarily non-Anglican?

At Barrow House in Brigsteer, the property of Kendal Grammar School, is a stone tablet over the entrance with this inscription :—

HASCE ÆDES  
HOSPITIO DE SANDES  
APUD KENDALENSES  
DONO DEDIT  
JOHANNES GIBSON  
A. XTI. MDCCLII

—  
IMPENSIS SVIS  
REFICIENDAS CURAVIT  
MARIA WILSON  
MDCCCLXIII

—  
LAUS DEO

At Plumtree House in Brigsteer, is a lead cistern, of a sort that used to be very common, 5 feet long, 3 feet wide, 3 feet 6 inches deep. It is inscribed

W

1772

M I

and was brought from High House, Helsington, by the Wilson family when they purchased this property. Another with the same initials, but dated 1767, is at Low House, where there is some old oak furniture contemporary

with the building. So also at Berry Holme, where resided in the early Wesleyan days Stephen Brunskill, a famous local preacher, who has recorded that the church-folk of Helsington fought with him like wild beasts at Ephesus. But he was himself a militant spirit, and we may divide the honours.

Many of those cisterns might have survived, had they not been so useful when melted and moulded into bullets of the size of a "stony" (marble) for shooting rooks. For in Brigsteer is an extensive rookery, and up to twenty years ago it was customary to shoot them with the cross-bow, which is described to me as being "very nice sport, with more art and less noise" than in the use of a rifle. Though several residents can shoot, none now does, because "nobody can fettle them up;" they are "varra kittle" and "git oot o' gear," especially in thundery weather. One of these bows made by Johnson of Manchester, can be seen at Joseph Robinson's, Brigsteer. Old-fashioned people despise shooting with a gun at rooks, but they are also timid. I handed an air-gun to an expert bowman that he might explain the structure and mechanism of a cross-bow, but he said—"Nay, I'll hev nowt to dyeu wid it; I'se fair flate o' them things."

Alas! the glories of Brigsteer melt away—not only the lead cisterns, hundredweights of which lie interred near the rookery, but the cock-fights also (there is a pit near the chapel), and the superstitions and the customs and the dialect and the peat industry. Whereas half a century ago some twenty-six carts would go to Kendal every day, selling from house to house at 2/6 to 3/- a cart, now only one goes occasionally, and the price is 7/6. Railways and canals have much to answer for! But the mosses are being levelled; only three houses in Helsington now possess any, viz., the Parsonage, Berry Holme and High House. In place of bogs and swamps, haunted by wild geese and ducks, and crossed in danger

by circuitous tracks, are now fertile fields and safe roads between Brigsteer and Lyth. You may no longer meet on the Kendal road cart after cart with curious old women smoking their short black pipes; fewer of the men are engaged in what was once as profitable a harvest as the corn; cottage after cottage falls into untenanted repair, the old-world "peat-reek" begins to cease to pervade the atmosphere of the valley, and the hearth fires that have burnt for forty years in tenements with cobbled floors will soon be unable to boast that they "go not out" from generation to generation.

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