

ART. XXII.—*Ninekirks and the Countess's Pillar.* By the Rev. ARTHUR JOHN HEELIS, M.A., Rector of Brougham.

Read at Ninekirks, August 28th, 1902.

WE cannot, I think, be wrong in connecting the common name "Ninekirks" with the ancient British saint, Ninian; but whether a church was here founded by him in his lifetime, or connected with his name by an after dedication, remains one of the uncertainties of antiquarian lore.

For my own part, I am inclined to think that Ninian, when in the flesh, did actually preach and baptise near this spot, and that the caves of "Isis Parlis," or the "Giant's Caves," in the face of the crag across the Eamont, at one time sheltered men of John the Baptist type, pioneers of Christ's army, sent to "prepare the way of the Lord."

In Ninian's day an armed Roman garrison held the country, but sound policy might well look for pacificatory results to the subduing influences of a taste for Roman art, Roman fashion, luxury—even religion. The adoption of the toga by the sons of British chieftains was a striking victory for Rome. The journey of a young chieftain to Rome to be instructed in the Christian religion, and fitted in due time to become a very influential bishop, was a vantage gained for a higher and more lasting kingdom than that of Imperial Rome.

Ninian, born on the shores of the Solway, was such a young chieftain.* The date of his return from Rome is

* Ailred of Hexham, who (in the 12th century) wrote the earliest extant life of Ninian, is the authority for his being son of a Solway-side Chieftain (rex). He professes to rely on Bede, (who only says that he was "de natione Britannum"), and on a book about N's life and miracles "barbario (!) scriptum." (J.R.A.)

fixed at about A.D. 396. His natural route would carry him within a mile of this spot, and he may have chosen to use the ford within a few hundred yards of the church for his passage onwards to his goal.

The friend and father in God of Ninian—the Paul of this young Timothy—was St. Martin of Tours, whom he visited in Gaul on his journey back from Rome. The following extract from Dr. Hook's *Ecclesiastical Biography* favours the belief that this sacred spot and the caves hard by had a real connection with Ninian or his disciples:—

He (Martin) continued to live as an ascetic in the neighbourhood of his church till, finding himself too much intruded on by visitors, he crossed the Loire, and in a nook in its banks formed a cell where he lived. This was the foundation of the abbey of Marmoutier, one of the most noted in Gaul. It was destroyed in the revolution, and amidst its ruins the cells of St. Martin and his monks, hollowed out of the rock, are still visible.

The caves (Isis Parlis) have plainly been adapted by artificial means for human habitation. Doubtless, in a long series of revolving years, they have been put to many uses. Better hiding-places could not be chosen by the wicked, who are enemies of their kind; or the good, whose kind are to them unkind. The iron grates and strong doors, whose hinges remained in the middle of last century, point probably to its later use as a place of retreat during incursions of the reiving Scots, and here the far-famed "Luck of Edenhall" may more than once have been deposited for safety along with other treasures.*

I am bound to say that my mind is not clear as to whether this church may not have had a later dedication to St. Wilfrid, for—

(1) We read in Nicolson and Burn:—

* Indeed, it is conceivable that here was the earlier and proper abode of the "Luck," which is generally supposed to have been a sacramental vessel, and which, according to tradition, was purloined from fairies at no great distance from the caves.



Rude Sculpture
found in St Ninians
Churchyard



The Bird
Chalice

*Ex dono Jacobi Bird in usum Sacrosanctæ Eucharistiæ
in Ecclesia Sancti Wilfridi de Brougham
Vulgariter appellata Ninekirkes in Comitatu
Westmerlandiæ*

The church is vulgarly called Ninekirks, supposed to have been dedicated to St. Ninian, a Scottish saint, to which kingdom probably this church did belong at the period of that dedication. It is sometimes called the church of St. Wilfrid. Thus Sir Thomas de Derby, rector of Brougham in the reign of King Edward the 3rd, bequeathed his body to be buried in the church of St. Wilfrid de Burgham. And in the year 1637* Sir Robert de Wolseley, rector of Merton, in his will requested that his body might be interred in the church of St. Wilfrid de Burgham, and bequeathed 26s 8d to purchase a book for the said church. So that we must either suppose that the Scots had one tutelar saint of the church and the English another, or rather, perhaps, that this latter is the saint of the chapel, which, indeed, is not so properly a chapel of ease under the mother church as another church (as it were) in the same parish, for there is not the rector to officiate in the parish church and the curate in the chapel, but the rector officiates in both at different times and on different occasions.

(2) A chalice, presented probably in the seventeenth century, bears this inscription:—

Ex dono Jacobi Bird, in usum Sacro Sanctae Eucharistiae in Ecclesia Sancti Wilfridi vulgariter appellata Ninekirkes in Comitatu Westmorlandiae.

The following single entry in the registers corroborates the view that the appellation "St. Wilfrid's Church, commonly called Ninekirkes," once belonged by confusion or otherwise to this church:—

Mrs Mary Dalston of Litle Salkeld in the County of Cumberland, was buried in woolen onely in the church of St. Wilfrid of Burgham, upon the ninth day of January 1701-2.

It is not likely that this refers to the chapel—(a) from the use of the word "church;" (b) from the fact that the Dalstons had lately come to reside at Hornby Hall, in the

* 1637—*sic* in Nicolson and Burn—an obvious misprint, probably for 1367. Sir Robert de Wolseley was inst. rector of Longmarton 1362, and followed by a successor in 1369. Thomas de Derby was inst. to Brougham in 1365, resigned in 1367; was inst. *de novo* 1367.

immediate vicinity of the church ; (c) because two years later Bishop Nicolson notes " no burials in the chapel."*

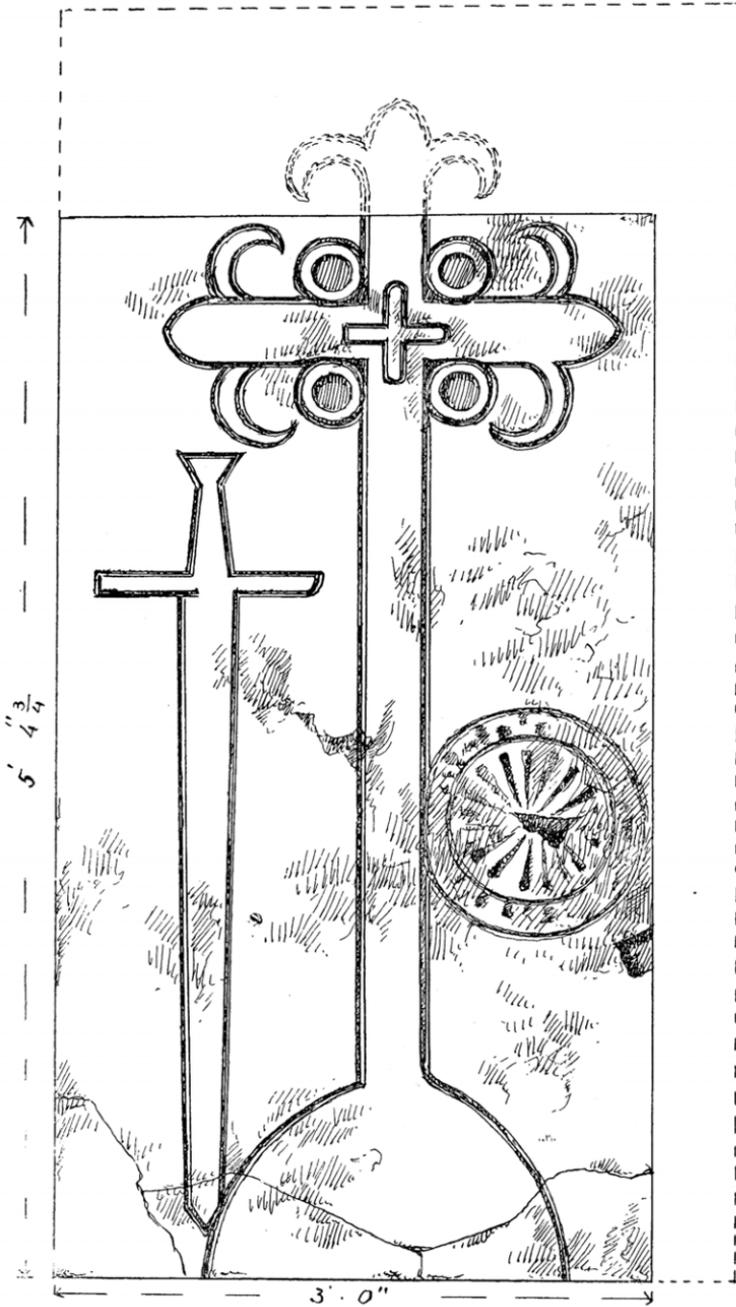
It is quite certain that both church and chapel existed at a very early date. To quote Nicolson and Burn :—

In the year 1393 it is said that there was an agreement between Thomas Reding, lord of the manor of Brougham, and Edward Skelling, then rector, concerning frequent prayers to be had in the chapel of Brougham ; that from thenceforth all manner of sacraments of the church shall be administered at the chapel of Brougham, except burials ; that on Christmas Day in the morning shall be song and mass at the chapel, then after to go to the church to the high mass and offering ; on Easter Day in the morning at the chapel mattins with resurrection and one soling mass for servants and aged persons and sick persons, and all the residue to go to the church to the high mass (and so the rest). That the parson shall find two searges afore St. Wilfrey, on his own proper costs. For which services Thomas Reding, lord of the manor, gave to the chapel at Brougham and parson of the church and his successors, one tene-ment as it lies at the west end of Brougham, with the garths about the chapel, within the precincts of the wall and no farther, with the woods and wastes and all the commodities within belonging ; with one acre of land arable at the south side as the plough head goes and no further.

It may well be conjectured that the chapel had been in existence for at least a century previously to the above agreement. The Veteriponts came into power in 1203 by grant from King John, and late in John's reign or early in that of Henry III. took place a transaction by which Gilbert de Burgham granted half the town of Brougham and the advowson of the living to Robert de Veteripont, as the price of substituting the tenure of the manor of Brougham by "drenge" for the tenure of the remainder by "cornage." As the outcome of this transaction the chapel was built, possibly as early as A.D. 1215.

The incised slabs, commonly called the "Crusader's

* It seems reasonable to surmise that Rowland Borrow, who made this entry and was the contemporary of James Bird, may have been the author of the inscription on the chalice also, and may have been misled by records of ancient burials in the chapel. Still the point is by no means cleared of doubt.



RED SANDSTONE SLAB IN ST. NINIAN'S CHURCH, BROUGHAM :
from a drawing by Mr. E. TOWRY WHYTE, M.A., F.S.A.

tomb," have been claimed as covering the remains of Odard and Gilbert de Burgham, father and son. This is not improbable. On this assumption we may regard the circular disc on the larger slab as the round buckler proper to an Anglo-Saxon warrior. The de Burghams clearly had an ancient connection with Ninekirks, for they held the advowson of the living; while their tenure of part of the manor of Brougham by "drengeage" (a form of villenage) affords reasonable grounds for concluding that they were descendants of Saxon Thanes, who had been allowed to hold part of their ancestral estates under their Norman overlords.

In A.D. 1170 Hugh de Morville, descendant of Randolph de Meschines, the first Norman owner of Brougham, for his overzeal in serving his King in the matter of the murder of Thomas à Becket lost his estates, which were held in the Crown till A.D. 1203, the date of the grant to the Veteriponts.

In A.D. 1176 Odard de Burgham was one of the custodians of Appleby Castle when it was successfully besieged by the Scots, and for his share in the matter was heavily fined. His son Gilbert, as before mentioned, made over the advowson of the church and half of the town of Brougham to his feudal lord, Robert de Veteripont, the lineal ancestor of the present patron.

The skull of the old warrior of the tomb, his "good sword's rust," and the remains of his spear, spurs, &c., have found a resting place at Brougham Hall.

A cross of large dimensions has at one time stood in the yard, the socket still remaining.* There was lately found in the yard a rudely-sculptured corbel or gargoyle, which has been inserted into the wall of the porch for safe keeping.

* It is of red sandstone, measuring about 30 by 29 inches, and about 14 inches high. The edges of this top surface are bevelled, and the hole for the shaft measures 12 by 10 inches. Like some other socket-stones, it has sometimes been called an old font.—ED.

The church as we see it to-day, with inner fittings remarkably similar to those of Haddon Hall Chapel (date 1624), must be, to all intents and purposes, the same as it met the approving eye of the great Anne, Countess of Pembroke, on the occasion referred to by this entry in her diary:—

And the 30th day of this March (1662 or 1663) being Easter Sunday I received the blessed sacrament in the church called Ninekirkes this being the first time I came into it after I had repayred and new built the said church.

The good lady was making one of her periodic residences at Brougham Castle, aged 72-3, and was suffering some infirmities which she afterwards overcame.

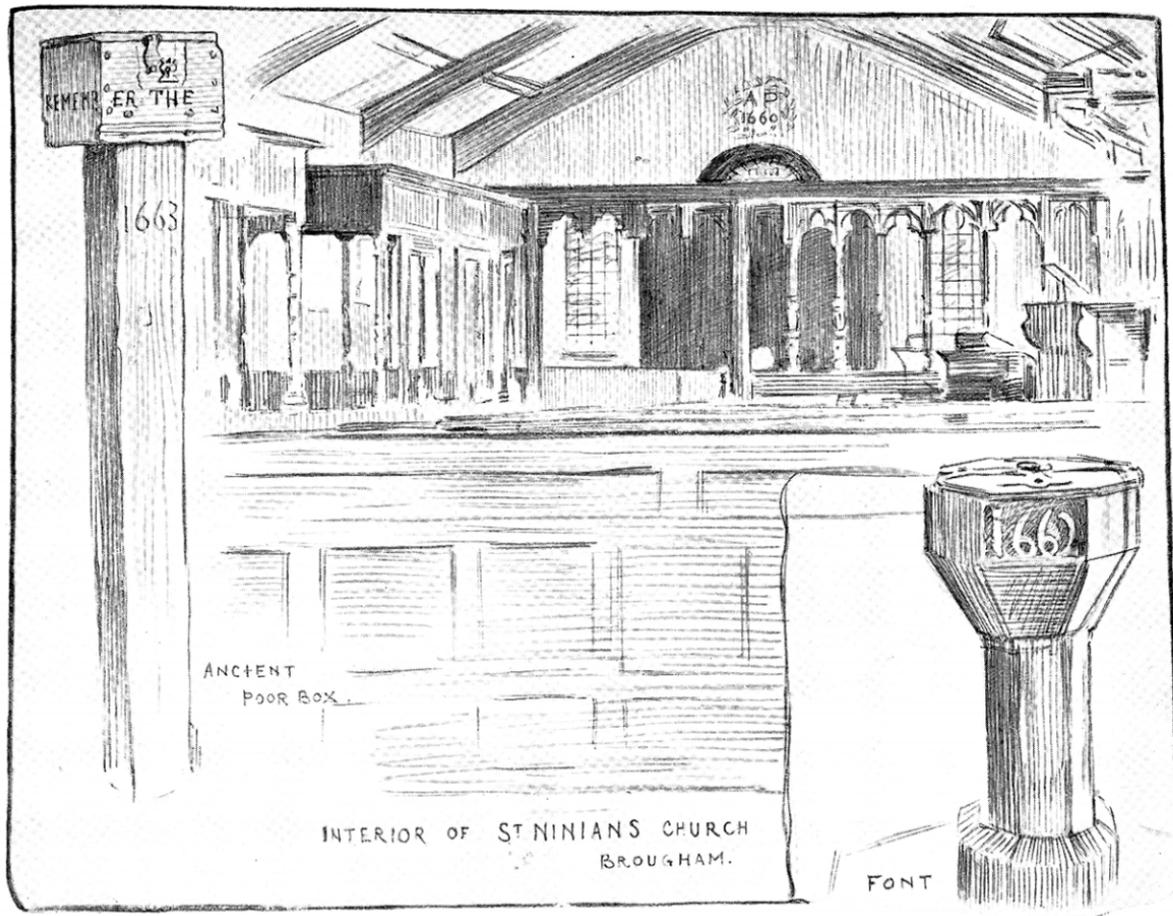
“During the time of my lying at Brougham Castle,” she says in another passage, “I received the Sacrament thrice, once at Xmas in the Chappell at Brougham Castle, once at Ninekirkes on Easter day, and once at Brougham Chappell the 27 of Julie, which Chappell I have lately built, and this was the first time that I ever received the blessed Sacrament in this Brougham Chappell, and I seldom else went out of my chamber or upon the lands of the castle as I used to doe, but only into the painted chamber to have praiers.”

Earlier still we have the entries :—

And the beginning of this summer a little before my coming out of Westmorland did I cause the church of Nynekirks to be pulled down and new built up again in the same place larger and bigger than it was before, which was finished the latter end of this summer though myself and my friends were then att my Castle of Skipton in Craven, and this Church of Nynekirkes would in all likelihood have fallen down it was so ruinous had it not been repaired by me, Ps. 116 v 12-13-14.

Again :—

This summer I caused the Chappell at Brougham to be pulled down and new built upp again larger and stronger than it was before at my own charge, and it was wholly finished about the latter end of April in one thousand six hundred and fifty and nyne. For which God be praised.



INTERIOR OF ST NINIANS CHURCH
BROUGHAM.

FONT

Ninekirks, from the monogram and date on the east wall, appears to have been completed in A.D. 1660. The font bears date 1662, and the quaint poor-box 1663.

The pathetic story and noble life of Anne, the last of the Westmorland Cliffords, involves too much explanation to be fully entered upon; yet I am under promise to say something about the "Countess' Pillar," and the occasion which it commemorates.

Anne was then wedded to her first lord, Earl of Dorset. Her mother, Countess of Cumberland, dwelt in Brougham Castle as jointure-house. Her uncle held Appleby, Skipton, and the remainder of the property, it having been alienated to him by his brother's will, which mother and daughter refused to acquiesce in.

The contest ran high. Husband, king, archbishop—all the powers were in league against Anne. At length, half-bullied into concurrence, she obtained leave to visit her mother to obtain her consent to an arrangement. We learn the details most fully from the earlier diary kept by the countess at Knowle, and lately in part made public by Mrs. Aubrey Harrison in *Famous Ladies of the English Court*.

The earl and countess start north together with two four-horse coaches and 26 horsemen. They quarrel at Lichfield, and Dorset turns back. Anne goes on to Brougham with 10 persons and 13 horses. Mother and daughter decide on "a direct denial to the judges' award," the mother being, says Anne, "a woman of an high and great spirit."

Meanwhile Dorset sends letters

To shew that it was my lord's pleasure that the men and horses should come away without me, and so after much falling out betwixt my lady and them, all the folks went away, there being a paper* drawn to show that they went away by my lord's direction and contrary to my will.

* For this paper and also an interesting letter of Anne to her mother, see MSS. of Lord Hothfield, Hist. MSS. Commission, 11th report, appendix, part 7, p. 84.

On the very next day we read:—

I went after my folks in my lady's coach, she bringing me a quarter of a mile in the way, where she and I had a grievous and heavy parting.

In the later diary we read:—

So on the 2nd day of April following in the same year was the last time that ever that mother and daughter saw one another. For that day about noon, a quarter of a mile from Brougham Castle, in the open air they took their last leave one of another, with many tears and much grief, the mother returning into the said castle again, where she died the four and twentieth day of the month following.

When Anne ultimately came to her own—not by process of law, but by death of uncle and cousin—one of her first acts was to erect upon the spot of parting what is known as the “Countess’ Pillar,” and to charge her land in Brougham with a payment of £4 per year, to be distributed to the poor of Brougham “on the stone table hard by” each 2nd day of April for ever.

I will give one more extract from the countess’ diary. The entry is in 1658, the year of the rebuilding of the chapel:—

This summer by some few mischievous people secretly in the night was there broken off and taken downe from that tree near the paille of Whinfield Parke (which for that cause was called the Harte Horn tree) one of those ould Harts horns which (as is mentioned in the summary of my ancestor Robert Lord Clifford’s life) were sett upp in the year 1333 at a general hunting when Edward Balioll then king of Scotts came into England by permission of king Edward the third and lay for a while in the said Robert Lord Clifford’s castle in Westmoreland when the said king hunted a great stagg which was killed neare the said oak tree. In memory whereof the hornes were nayled upp in it growing as it were naturally in the tree, and have remayned there ever since till that in the year 1648 one of those Hornes was broken downe by some of the army and the other was broken downe (as aforesaid) this year. So as now there is noe part thereof remaying. The tree itselfe being now so decayed and the

Barke of it soe peeled off that it cannot last long. Whereby we may see that time brings to forgetfulness any memorable things in this world bee they never soe carefully preserved. For this tree, with the Harts Horne in it was a thing of much note in these parts.

Bishop Nicolson, visiting Ninekirks on August 20th, 1703, remarks :—

The Quire is decent and separated from the body of the Church by a fair skreen of wainscot. The Communion Table is well Railed; the pavement good; the Windows Lightsome, etc. The Body is answerable to ye Quire; very well Timber'd, floor'd and seated, with Wainscot pews throughout. The Slates want repairs, ye roof being full of holes. A little will mend it. Here's a neat Font, and one good Bell. The Churchyard lies miserably open. Noe Monuments.

He further notes :—

The School* is taught by the curate (Mr Soulby) at ye Chapple; near Mr Bird's, at a mile and half's distance from the Church. He has no settled salary; nor more than 12d in ye Quarter for any one scholar. This Chapple has two Bells; but is in a base condition (in ye roof) considering that it was wholly rebuilt by the Lady Pembroke (in the same manner with the Church, with Buttresses, etc) in the year 1659, as attested by a subscription under her Armes at the East end. All the North side is taken up with seats for the Noble Family at ye Castle; the eldest whereof, as appears by the carving, were made in 1556. The children are taught on the Altar Part, three steps above the floor; and the Table is removed to make it look more like a school than a Chapple. None are bury'd here, Mr Bird saies the Rector ought to repair it; for that it was built for his ease, at his request to the Bishop, and on conditions to that purpose. It is indeed much nearer to the Parsonage house than the Church itself; and, whilst the town of Browham had a being,

* In connection with the use of the chapel as a school two interesting facts deserve mention :—(1) We learn from Nicolson and Burn that the de Veteriponts demolished the half of the town of Brougham which they obtained from Gilbert de Burgham, incorporating the site in their demesne, and that this gave rise to the building of the chapel to suit the altered centre of population; (2) there exists, on the Whinfell property of Lord Hothfield, a parcel of ground which from time immemorial has been called the "schoolhouse field," although no school is known to have existed in the parish previous to the building of the Whinfell school (on another site) in the latter part of the last century.

was more convenient for the greatest part of parish; but, that village being now demolished and ye lands swallow'd by Mr Bird's demesne, and none being ever likely hereafter to live at the castle, Mr B himself and his family are chiefly accommodated by it. The lands about it, formerly the Parson's, are also now exchange'd (for others nearer the rest of the gleab) into Demesne; so that this gentleman seems to be most justly liable for repair. The crazy condition of the Roof, and want of slates, makes it necessary that this controversy be speedily determined; unless (which perhaps will do as well) the Chapple be wholly taken away.

It seems probable that "this controversy" was not determined; nor was the bishop's alternative suggestion followed. Up to 1764 the chapel was the favoured place for marriages, naturally as being the more convenient. From that date until 1840 all marriages were solemnised in the parish church. Before this latter date the chapel found a better friend and neighbour, for Lord Brougham and Vaux, lineal descendant probably of its old friends the de Burghams, thoroughly repaired the fabric, restored the roof, and refitted and decorated the interior at great cost and with much taste.

Under heading "Clifton" on the same date as the above entry, Bishop Nicolson notes:—

I saw not the Registers of Brougham and this Parish: But the Rector (at whose house they are kept) assures me that they are each above 100 years old, and that the former gives a particular acct of King James the First entertainment (hunting, etc) at the Castle, as he returned this way from Scotland.

The then rector of Brougham and Clifton in plurality was Rowland Borrow. He lived in the large mansion at Eamont Bridge, which, after serving as "poor-house" for the West Ward, has now been partitioned into several tenements for artisans. If its walls could speak they might inform us as to the fate of the early registers of Brougham and Clifton, both lost to view.

The extant registers at Brougham date from 1681.

Copies for some 35 previous years are said to exist in the Diocesan Registry.

The bell at the parish church bears inscription, "Ninekirks 1625. R.A." Of two bells at the chapel one only remains.

The chalice, called the "Bird cup," is described in *Old Church Plate of the Diocese of Carlisle*, p. 209. A terrier of 1749 mentions a cover to the above cup.

The plate now in ordinary use (also described as above), though of Elizabethan date (so far as the chalice is concerned), was purchased in 1862.

A pewter patten and flagon are preserved at the rectory, and a black-letter Bible (date 1640) in excellent condition.

The vessels in use at the chapel are of silver gilt, with inscription "Adrien P." These vessels, along with pyx and monstrance (kept at Brougham), are by some supposed to have been anciently used in the chapel, but I have heard no conclusive evidence on this point.

The late Chancellor Ferguson, in his history of Carlisle Diocese, states that the vicar of Brougham still has the right of "Whittle-gate" at Hornby Hall each Sunday. This is incorrect. According to old terriers, the tenant of Hornby was bound to provide entertainment for the rector and the chief of his family, on Christmas Day and Easter Day. The right was commuted, however, along with the tithe and other dues.
