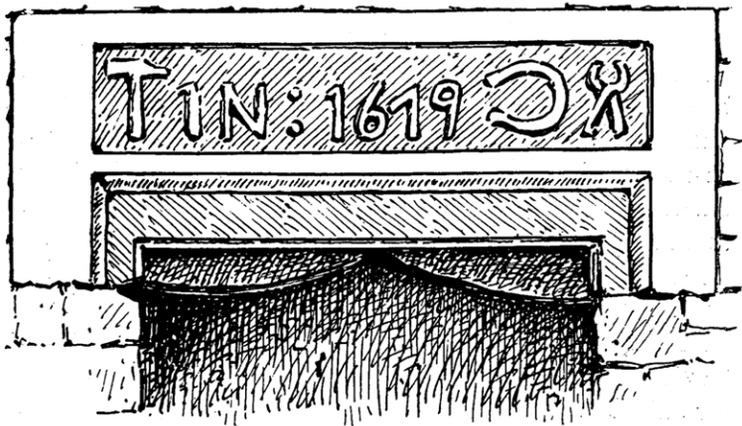


ART. IX.—*A Relic of Pack-horse Days in Eskdale.* By  
MISS MARY C. FAIR.

*Read at Penrith, July 7th, 1921.*

ESKDALE Green (formerly known as Yeat House Green) was formerly an important centre on the pack-horse route from Broughton to Cockermouth. It is not wonderful, therefore, to find that the smithy on Randle How was evidently of some consequence, a fact testified to by the lintel of a cottage (now the property of Mrs. J. H. Rea, Gate House) on the pack-horse track as it comes over the summit of Randle How.



This lintel is made from a fine block of red sandstone ; it has carved upon it the insignia of the smith's trade—hammer, horse-shoe, and pincers—together with the initials I. N. and the date 1679. I. N. stands for John Nicholson, doubtless the 17th-century blacksmith who plied his trade here. The Nicholson family has long been mentioned as occupying tenements at the time of the

Jury of Court both in 1587 and 1659. In the parish registers there is an entry "Child of John Nicholson of Randle How bapt. 1717." Also Rachel Nicholson of Randle How, bur. 1779; Hannah Nicholson of Randle How, bur. 1780; Hannah Nicholson of Randle How, bur. 1790; William Nicholson of Randle How, bur. 1804. In 1587 and 1659 the Nicholson family were dwelling at farms in Mitredale, and Hollinghow, as well as several tenements at the Boot end of the dale. They were then evidently a numerous and important clan. One is described as a "Forrester." The family is still well represented in Eskdale.

In pack-horse days, several roads converged in the vicinity of Randle How. The road from Broughton came up somewhere near the "King George" hotel joining that from Ravenglass which turns up to climb the ascent at Randle How just before Eskdale Green station is reached. Beyond the smithy another road came across the bog from an ancient track passing across towards Whitehaven from Muncaster Head direction. There is still a right of way across this soft ground. The road passed through Eskdale Green and up Smithy Brow (where there was another shoeing-forge, now vanished) past Low Holme and through Porterthwaite Wood to Strands and Whitehaven. From this road another branched off up Mitredale, passing over Tongue Moor to Wasdale Head and Cockermouth and Keswick. This road over Tongue Moor was known as "The Highway."

Another road passed eastwards up Eskdale on the line of the Roman road over Hardknott Pass, and so to Ambleside, etc. There was also a road under the north side of Muncaster Fell, following the course of the narrow gauge railway track in places; in others it may be seen (notably near Murthwaite) adjoining the line.

Near Eskdale Green railway station there was a tavern on the pack-horse route, now marked by a barn. The

sign of this tavern hung in a tree. Probably it, like John Nicholson's smithy above it, did an excellent trade when the commerce of the country-side was carried on by the trains of packhorses.

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