

ART. XI.—*Eelchist: a forgotten farm in Holme Cultram.*
By the Rev. F. B. SWIFT.

Read at Barrow-in-Furness, July 10th, 1951.

STANDING in Holme Cultram church yard at Abbey
Town is a headstone bearing the inscription:—

In Memory Of Jane Wilkinson Of
Eelchist Who Died June 24th.
1772 Aged 77 Years

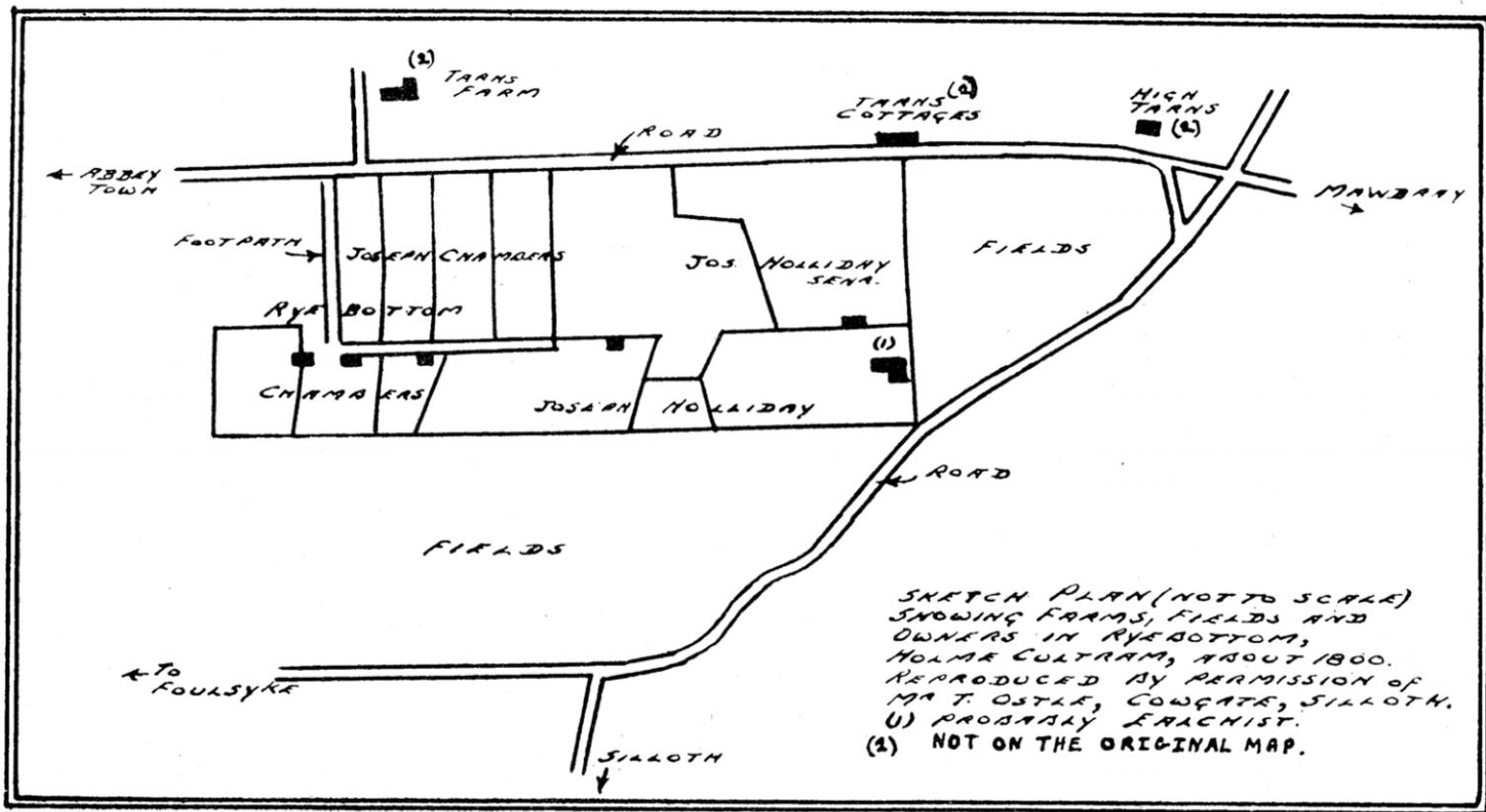
The most interesting thing about this stone is the place-name "Eelchist". Before seeing it the writer of this article did not know that a place of this name had ever existed in Holme Cultram, and inquiries among people who had lived in the district for many years failed to throw any light on the matter. Nobody had ever heard of the name or knew anything about it. Entries in the parish registers, however, showed that a farm so called existed from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Further investigations have revealed its approximate position and something of the story of its former inhabitants. Besides the registers, searches in other local records have yielded information, but most help has come from documents in the possession of our member Mr J. L. Messenger of Weybridge, Surrey. It is due to his kindness, in allowing them to be examined, that the position of the farm has been finally established. In this article these old documents are referred to as the "Eelchist Papers", as some of them are endorsed with these words.

Nothing of the Eelchist farmhouse and buildings now remains, but it was a farm at Tarns in what is now the parish of Holme St. Cuthbert. At one time Tarns formed a grieveship in the manor of Holme Cultram and

as such contained seven farms, or eight if Lowsay be included. At the present time, apart from the last named, there are only the three known as The Tarns, High Tarns and Low Tarns.

Remains of another farm can be seen a short distance from the Tarns to Abbey Town road, to the north of The Tarns, at the place marked on the six-inch ordnance survey map as Ryebottom. Though the house was dismantled some years ago, a barn was standing there until recently, but that is now gradually being demolished. Eelchist was situated near here, with two other farms now also lost. These four farms must have been very small, judging from a comparison of manor rents payable in the sixteenth century. The Tarns, High Tarns and Low Tarns each had at that period about 20 to 36 statute acres of arable and meadow land and they paid manor rents of £1. 6. 6., £1. 6. 6. and £1 respectively, whereas those "in Ryebottom" only paid 3/-, 8/9, 2/9 and (Eelchist) 6/-.

Nothing remains to show where the buildings of these four small farms stood, except in the case of the one marked on the ordnance survey map, but fortunately they are shewn on a pen and ink sketch map of Tarns in the possession of Mr T. Ostle of Cowgate, Silloth, made about 1810. The map gives farmhouses, buildings and fields and also the names of their owners or occupiers. Mr Ostle has kindly allowed it to be reproduced for this article, and it will be noticed that apart from the buildings belonging to the sole existing Ryebottom farm (the one on the six-inch ordnance survey map) then in the possession of Joseph Chambers, three other unnamed dwellings are shewn in the same neighbourhood. Eelchist was probably one of the two in the possession of Joseph Holliday. As there were two persons of this name (father and son) at Tarns at that time and Eelchist was sold to the younger (see below) shortly before 1800, it seems reasonable to assume that the Joseph Holliday,



on the map (fig. 1) without designation, is the younger man as distinct from the one marked "senior". In this case Eelchist was one of the two farmhouses shewn on the land belonging to the former, and I have marked the one which seems the more likely.

Eelchist is never mentioned by name in the public records except in the parish registers, and along with its three neighbours it is usually referred to simply as "a messuage and tenement in Ryebottom" or "in Tarns", just in the same way as Lowsay is occasionally mentioned without name as "a messuage and tenement in Tarns".

To sum up—this forgotten farm called Eelchist was adjacent to the site marked Ryebottom on the six-inch ordnance survey map; it was a messuage and tenement in the grieveship of Tarns in the manor of Holme Cultram, an area now included in the parish of Holme St. Cuthbert. It paid a manor rent of 6/- and a gressom of 3/-. As we shall see, it had lost its identity by 1800, having become part of The Tarns farm, the materials of its house and buildings no doubt being used for repairing the larger farm. For at least a hundred years its very name has remained unknown.

THE STORY OF EELCHIST.

Here in 1538 lived "Widow Sibson" who, according to the Holme Cultram Survey of that year, paid a corn tithe of three bushels of meal, gave three days a year in shearing to the lord of the manor, had the right to keep six oxen and cows, one horse and six sheep on the common pasture and paid the rents of 6/- and 3/- mentioned above. Such was the "custom" by which she held her farm which was copyhold.

The name "Eelchist" is not mentioned in the known manor surveys, but as it was the only farm in The Tarns grieveship which paid a rent of 6/- there is no doubt about its identity.

In 1573 (the date of the next Survey) William Berwis was at Eelchist, and his family stayed there until some time between 1603 and 1647. The Holme Cultram parish registers contain a number of entries belonging to this family but only two of them actually give the name of the farm:—

2 Apr. 1587 Katheren Berwis de Eile Chist buried.

17 Aug. 1596 Robt of Robt Berwis of Eelchist buried.

Katheren's Will, in Carlisle Probate Registry, is endorsed "Katheren Berwis of Eelchist" (Appendix I). Her husband, Robert, was the son of the William mentioned in the 1573 Survey, the Robert buried in 1596 being her grandson.

William, son of Robert and Katheren Berwis, was at Eelchist in 1603, but between that date and 1647 he and his family removed to the farm which stands at the Tarns cross-roads. Eelchist now passed into the possession of the Sim family and in 1647 John Sim sold it to William Wilkinson. Among the Eelchist Papers are two deeds dealing with this transaction. The first, dated August 1647, begins:—

"Be it known unto all men by these presents that I John Sim of Newton in the pish of Holmecultram . . . yeoman doe by these presents acknowledge myselfe to have had and received at the hands of William Wilkinson of Ryebottom in the afore-said pish yeoman . . ."

It goes on to record the receipt of the money due to John Sim and concludes with this postscript:—

"Post I say received for the some of the lands I say received the some of ffortie one pounds currant English money in full satisfaction of the lands layte purchased by the said William Wilkinson."

The other deed is an agreement, dated 1 May 1647, between John Sim and William Wilkinson stating that the former and his heirs would make no claim on the "tenement lying in the townshipp of Tarnes and now in the possession of the within named William Wilkinson of the yearly rent of six shillings."

WILLIAM WILKINSON was buried 24 March 1695, and is described in the register as "of Eelchist". He had issue,

1. John.
2. Robert, baptized 24 Dec. 1654.
3. Jane, baptized 8 Feb. 1656—her father is described in the register as "of Eelchist".
4. Mabel.
5. Susan, marr. . . . Ruke.

Before his death William drew up a deed of gift conveying all his possessions to his son John. The following is an extract:—

"I William Wilkinson of Ealchist in ye lordship of Holme Cultram and county of Cumberland yeoman . . . for ye love . . . that I beare unto John Wilkinson my son of Ealchist blacksmith to him I give my goods chattles leases personal estate utensils implements . . . I the said William Wilkinson have put the said John Wilkinson in full and peaceable possession by the gift and delivery of one iron pott . . ."

"Sealed and delivered and quiet possession and seison given and delivered by the said iron pott parcell of the said premises according to the effect of this present writeing . . ."

The deed, which is among the Eelchist Papers, goes on to state that John Wilkinson is to give his father maintenance for life, pay his debts and after his death pay 20/- to his (John's) brother Robert and 10/- each to his sisters Mabel Wilkinson and Susan Ruke. The document is dated 10 Dec. 1694.

The mention of the occupation of blacksmith is interesting because a lady who used to live at Edderside a few years ago remembered being told, when a girl, that there had been a blacksmith's shop somewhere near Ryebottom.

JOHN WILKINSON succeeded his father William in 1694, as noticed above, and had issue:—

1. Jane, 1695.
2. Japhet, 1698.
3. Thomas, 1699 bur. 1700.

4. Jacob, 1701.
5. Joseph, 1703.
6. Abraham, 1704 bur. 1705
7. Tamar, 1707.
8. Mary, 1710.

(The dates are those of baptism unless otherwise stated. In the register John is usually described as "of Eelchist").

John Wilkinson was buried 28 April 1711 leaving a Will dated 16 April 1711. It mentions his wife Martha and children Japhet, Jacob, Joseph and Jane. Martha died in 1747 and also left a Will (Appendix II).

The daughter JANE WILKINSON died unmarried in 1772 and it is her tombstone which still stands in the churchyard at Abbey Town. Among the Eelchist Papers is a receipt, dated 25 July 1766, for the rents which Jane collected when acting as grieve for Tarns. (Appendix II for her Will).

Eelchist eventually passed to her brother JAPHET WILKINSON, and the manor court books show that at his death, between 1772 and 1782, it came into the possession of THAMAR MESSENGER, widow, as his sister and heir, the usual rent of 6/- being payable. Thamar had married John Messenger of Lessonhall near Wigton at Wigton Church in 1731, as his second wife. On her death in 1788 their son John Messenger inherited the farm, and the manor court books show that between 1789 and 1793 he sold Eelchist to Joseph Holliday, younger, of Tarns. After this sale it was absorbed into the farm now called The Tarns and lost its identity, so that in course of time not only was all vestige of its house and buildings removed but even the name Eelchist ceased to be remembered.

It has been mentioned that there were three other farms besides Eelchist in the area called "in Ryebottom". One of them paid a manor rent of 2/9 and a gressom of 1/-. Among the Eelchist Papers is a deed dated 16 May 1624 stating that it was sold by Anthony Ladthere

to Richard Kindell with the reservation of the use of a bedroom to the former for life. A list of tenants in James Jackson's Diary in 1653 puts it as being in the possession of William Wilkinson (of Eelchist). In due course it passed to John, son of John and Thamar Messenger, who appears to have sold it. No doubt it was eventually absorbed into The Tarns like its neighbour.

Like many other place-names the spelling of Eelchist varies in the parish registers and other records. For general use I have kept to the form used most frequently in the Eelchist Papers.

I was engaged in collecting information for this article when the English Place-Name Society was dealing with Holme Cultram, and I was able to suggest the inclusion of Eelchist. In connection with its derivation the following now appears in their *Place-Names of Cumberland, Pt. II*, pp. 296-7.

"Probably from ael eel and O.E. c(i)est "chest", not recorded in N.E.D. or E.D.D. but identical in meaning with Lincs dial. *eel-trunk*, box with holes in it, in which eels were kept alive for the table."

This raises some interesting conjectures. Possibly Eelchist had originally something to do with the supplying of eels for Holme Cultram Abbey.

My thanks are due to Mr J. L. Messenger and Mr T. Ostle; also to Colonel Halton for access to the Holme Cultram Manor Records, to Mr Atkinson of Abbey Cooper for James Jackson's Diary and to the late Rev. J. B. Wood for the Holme Cultram Parish Registers. All baptisms and burials are from these registers unless otherwise stated. I am grateful to Mr E. Burne of Hunsonby, Penrith, for making the copy of Mr T. Ostle's map. The following do not appear on the original: Tarns Farm, Tarns Cottages, High Tarns, the words "road", and "footpath", and the directions to Silloth, Foulsyke and Mawbray. These have been added to make the position of the Ryebottom farms clearer. Boundaries of fields

which have no bearing on the present subject have been omitted.

APPENDIX I.

Abstract of Will from Carlisle Probate Registry.

Katheren Berwis of Eelchist in the parish of Holme, 1 April 1587.

To son William six whitfaced kowes and 18/-.

To said son William and son Robert sheep etc.

To daughters Janet and Mabel sheep etc.

Residue to children Robert, William, Janet and Mabel whom she appoints exors.

Witnesses John Lowther, Symond Messenger, Thomas Browhems, John Paipe and Anthonie Lowson. Proved 14 June 1587.

APPENDIX II.

Abstracts of Wills among the Eelchist Papers.

(a) John Wilkinson of Eelchist, yeoman, 16 April 1711.

To son Japhett Wilkinson £2, a great chest, a bedstead and frame standing in the house.

To sons Jacob and Joseph £10 each.

To daughter Jane £20 and the cupboard after the death of her mother.

Residue to wife Martha whom he appoints executrix.

Witnesses Robert Wise, Robert Berwis, Jno Barwis. Proved 2 June 1711.

(b) Martha Wilkinson of Eelchist in the parish of Holme Cultram 28 Feb. 1735.

To daughter Tamar £5.

To son Joseph three yards of linnencloth.

Residue to daughter Mary whom she appoints executrix.

Witnesses William Wilkinson and Jno Barwise. Proved 15 March 1747 by Mary Wilkinson, spinster.

(c) Jane Wilkinson of Eelchist, parish of Holme Cultram 15 May 1763.

To brother Japhet Wilkinson £10.

To brother Joseph Wilkinson £20.

To nephew Thomas Messenger £15.

To nieces Ann and Sarah Messenger £15 each.

To poor of St. Cuthbert's quarter £1.

Residue to nephew John Messenger whom she appoints exor.

Witnesses William Langcake and John Wise.