

ART. XV.—*William Field of Cartmel and the Three shire stones.* By Mrs H. D. RAWNSLEY.

Read at Penrith, July 3rd, 1956.

IT is well known that on Wrynose Pass, close to the sources of the Duddon and the Brathay, three stones formerly marked the meeting-point of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire. Among the deeds of Cockley Beck, in the Duddon valley, there is an undated map which gives, among other names of "ancient boundary marks of the manour of Cockley Beck", that of the *Three foot Brandreth*,¹ which clearly refers to the shire stones; they are marked on Saxton's map of Westmorland (1610), the earliest dated map of the county.² The earliest known literary reference to them is in Sir Daniel Fleming's *Description of Cumberland* (this Society's Tract Series no. 3, 1889, p. 30), written in 1671:

"*Wrey Nose* a great fell, on the top of the highway side are placed three stones called shire stones which are but about a foot from each other yet stand in three several counties, viz.: Lancashire, Cumberland and Westmoreland."

See also his *Description of Westmorland* (Tract Series no. 1, 1882, p. 2), written in the same year, which refers to "the Shire-stones on Wrynose". Thomas Machell noted in 1692, under Wrynose (Machell MSS., vol. ii):

"There are long stones pitched up about a yard distance, and a spring near them, which are called the Shire Stones."

Nicolson and Burn gave a slightly more elaborate account in their *History of Westmorland and Cumberland* (1777), i 176:

¹ B. L. Thompson, *The Lake District and the National Trust* (1946), Titus Wilson.

² Cf. J. F. Curwen's account, CW2 xviii 7-12.

"In Langdale are two high hills, in the road from Cumberland to Gresmere, called *Hardknot* and *Wreynose*, the latter being so denominated from its crookedness. Upon the latter of which mountains are placed the shire stones, being three little stones, near the highway, of about a foot high, and a foot from each other, set in a triangle, where the counties of Westmorland, Cumberland, and Lancaster do all meet together in a point, each of the said stones being in one of the three counties aforesaid."

Finally, Whellan's *Cumberland and Westmorland* (1860), in the "Survey of the Lake District" contributed by Harriet Martineau, contains the following note:³

"The point of junction of the three counties is at a spot close by the road on Wrynose, where three ancient stones, called the Shire Stones, have been from time immemorial so grouped as that any person who chose to occupy them with three limbs, might boast of being in three counties at once. As these stones might easily be passed unnoticed, a more conspicuous mark, in the form of a pillar, has been recently set up by the public spirit of a resident of Ambleside."

Miss Martineau's last sentence is not correct. The tall stone on the summit of the pass, marked *W. F. 1816* on one side and *Lancashire* on the other, was cut to the order of William Field of Cartmel (1770-1860). As a boy he had been educated by his uncle Robert Field, curate and schoolmaster of Field Broughton; later in life he became a great power in the neighbourhood. Stockdale⁴ states that "Cartmel was governed by him, though he appeared to be unconscious of the fact." In addition to being a general dealer, "he was Bridge-master, High Constable, Stamp distributor, Vestry clerk, and Will-maker", and excellent antiquary and numismatist and, Stockdale adds, "it is to him we owe the preservation of what remains of the Headless Cross and other antiquities of the parish."

The stone was cut and made ready in 1816, as the date on it shows; but for many years it lay in the entry opposite the Cavendish Arms at Cartmel, and it was not until

³ Whellan, p. 39.

⁴ *Annals of Cartmel* (1872), p. 575.



THREE SHIRE STONES, WRYNOSE

By T. L. Aspland, 1852

facing p. 157

after William Field's death that his relatives decided to carry out his project. An eyewitness has described how the stone was taken from Cartmel to Hawkshead by road; on the following day, accompanied by the landlord of the Red Lion, "Fardie" Taylor, and relatives of William Field, it was dragged by a team of horses to the summit of the pass, where it was erected in its present position.

The original Three shire stones have long disappeared. The only known pictorial record on them is the drawing made by T. L. Aspland in 1852, now in the Armitage Library at Ambleside. I am indebted to the Trustees of that library for permission to reproduce the drawing in illustration of the present note.