

ART. XV.—*The Millbeck woollen industry.* By Brigadier
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Read at Penrith, 19th April, 1958.

ALTHOUGH it is little over seventy years since the Millbeck¹ woollen industry came to an end, there seemed to be, until four years ago, no local record nor recollection of its duration, achievements and scope. Frequent comment on the unusual appearance of the house, known for the last fifty-five years as Millbeck Towers, could only be met with the statement that the building had at one time been a woollen mill. At the end of 1953 the late Mr Ernest Banks of Liverpool, whose father had converted the mill into a house, kindly gave us all the records of the industry that he had; these include a mass of deeds, leases and conveyances of many dates from the middle of the 18th century onwards, old pictures and photographs, family records and, most important of all, the mill ledger of 1823-1856 and the day book of 1830-1841. From these records this account is written in the hope that it may interest the social historian; it follows the brief description given in CW2 lvi 162-163.

Before conversion in 1903 the house was known as the Old Carding Mill, to distinguish it from the new carding mill which will be mentioned later. There is no certainty as to the date of erection of the old mill but it probably lies late in the 18th century. The mill was working in 1796, but does not appear to have been built as early as 1760. A deed of 2 August 1797 shows that: "the trade or business of Buying, Carding, Spinning and Selling of wool hath for some time been established and carried on at Millbeck aforesaid in the Carding Mill". Six partners

¹ There can be little doubt that there was a mill at Millbeck in early times; the name Milnebek appears in 1260, Milbeke in 1526, Mylnebecke in 1563 and Millbeck in 1732. (*Place-names in Cumberland*, ed. A. M. Armstrong and others, ii 322.)

were then owners and proprietors in fee and tenants in common: Joseph Hodgson of Old Field Mill in the Parish of Brigham (flaxspinner), Jonathan Younghusband of Millbeck, Joseph Younghusband of Little Crosthwaite, Robert Hodgson of Dancing Gate (yeomen of Millbeck), Benjamin Sealby of Keswick (shopkeeper), John Gibson of Millbeck Hall (yeoman).

By this deed Joseph Hodgson sold his one-sixth share in the business for £170 to Daniel Dover of Under-skiddaw, manufacturer.

One of the finest tombstones in Crosthwaite churchyard is that, close to the main south door of the church, of Joseph Dover, woollen manufacturer of Keswick, who died in 1810 aged 85. It also records the names of his nine biblically-named children, the youngest of whom, this same Daniel Dover, erected the stone. For forty-five years, until his death in 1842, Daniel seems to have been the managing director of the industry, his son eventually becoming owner of all the mills and the surrounding property. Daniel lived at Skiddaw Bank (now known as Millbeck Place), the old house just above and to the east side of the mill; he drew a yearly salary through the mill accounts of £200, which had to include the provision of a saddle horse; he also received £20 a year allowance for a cart-horse. He was assisted by his nephew Joseph Dover of Low Grove nearby. Joseph received £52 a year (raised in 1852 to £72) and £4 a year in addition for house rent. A deed of 1834 gives the name of the company as Dover, Younghusband & Co. and it was still so named in 1847 according to Mannix and Whellan's Cumberland directory of that year.

The old carding mill was built in the lower portion of a close named Low Rudding; above this was High Rudding close. The mill-race, taken off the Millbeck river by a sluice, was cut through these two closes. At some time before 1805 a fulling mill and other buildings were erected in High Rudding. These buildings comprised

weaving-rooms, warehouse and press-room; also a pay office was built on the far side of the Millbeck river and connected with the fulling mill by a flying bridge across the stream, which here flows through a considerable chasm. In 1805 the New Carding Mill was built in Low Rudding—now the garden of the Towers—close to the lower of two mill-dams.

In 1796 there stood on one side of Low Rudding "some old houses and premises known by the name of Catherine Dixon's houses, late belonging to one Catherine Dixon deceased". We know nothing of her except that she died at the age of ninety-seven in December 1782 and was buried at Crosthwaite. Although she was born less than a hundred years after the destruction of the Spanish Armada, her name was still being recorded in flowing capitals in various Millbeck deeds of 1856. Her houses probably stood where Millbeck Village was built at about the same time as the two later mills. This was a row of five plain cottages put up to house some of the mill hands; it was the subject of "a remarkable diatribe by Lord Macaulay, of which the poet Southey was the victim. 'Here is wisdom!' thundered Macaulay; 'Here are the principles upon which nations are to be governed! Rose bushes and poor rates rather than steam-engines and independence'." And much more besides; but it may all be read on pages 106 and 108 of A. G. Bradley's *Highways and Byways in the Lake District*, from which this quotation was taken. The village was demolished in 1903, "the site ever thereafter to be left unbuilt upon". So Southey won in the end. An old photograph of the village survives.

Although he was by then an old man, Joseph Dover of the tombstone was concerned in the erection of the fulling and new carding mills; the earliest agreements concerning them are in his name. His connection with the old carding mill is not clear, but it seems reasonable to suppose that he was in fact the founder of the Millbeck woollen trade.

In 1805 the partners of the old mill granted to John Grave and John Ladyman, manufacturers of Keswick, the right—subject to certain provisions—to use the water of the already existing mill-race for the wheels of the fulling and new carding mills. This right was granted “for the payment of Five Shillings, a Piece of Lawful Money, for a term of Five thousand years”. It was not long before there was considerable change and intermixing in the partnerships; Daniel Dover was in on the new carding mill by 1810 and the fulling mill by 1817, in which year John Ladyman gave up the woollen trade to become a manufacturer of black lead pencils in Keswick. It is not clear from the records when the two later mills became the property of the company of the old mill; certainly by 1834 they owned the fulling mill and two years later the new carding mill belonged to them also. At all events, from the volume of trade disclosed by the mill books commencing in 1823, it is clear that the three mills must have been jointly responsible for the output of the Millbeck industry.

The ledger of 1823-56, which probably covers the peak period of the mills, and the day-book of 1830-41 give a wealth of detail and a good picture of what went on at Millbeck in those days. They show who were then the occupiers of many houses and farms in the district which are familiar names to-day; as payments were not infrequently made in kind the books shed light on the money values of the time; they give the names of all firms and private customers who dealt with the company, of numerous mill-workers, of local carriers and of many ships. The orders and accounts are beautifully written on paper that is now too expensive to be made except for the most exclusive purposes, and they contain numerous quaint personal touches. Much-used blotting-paper remains between some of the pages.

Before noting the goods produced by the mills and the customers who bought them, brief mention is made of

the principal purchases that were regularly carried out for the running of the industry. Naturally, first and foremost was wool. Of this, immense quantities were annually bought from farmers all over the Lake District, the area of purchase roughly extending from Caldbeck to Torver and from Seascale to Penruddock. In the eleven years recorded in the day-book, the lowest price mentioned for this wool is five shillings per stone in 1830; by 1834 it had risen to thirteen shillings, but it had dropped to ten shillings per stone four years later. In addition to these local purchases, many bales of various kinds of wool (including Greek, Russian and East India wools) were bought from brokers and skimmers at Carlisle, Cockermouth, Penrith, Kendal, Hexham, Glasgow, Liverpool and London. Other important purchases that appear on a large scale throughout the ledger are:

Pipes and casks of "Oill" from Liverpool, Whitehaven, Rochdale and London.

Soap from soap boilers at Carlisle, Whitehaven and other northern towns.

Teazles and king teazles from Rochdale, London and Paris, 12,000 teazles in a case.

Cards from Kendal, Cleckheaton and Halifax.

Yarn from Whitehaven and Halifax.

Twine from Cockermouth.

Paper from Egremont and Carlisle.

Wrappers (for baling) from Kendal workhouse and also from happen makers at Kendal.

Brimstone from Liverpool.

Sulphur and fuller's earth.

During the thirty-three years covered by the ledger, the following were all produced in greater or lesser quantities:

Blankets; all prices from 2/- to 9/- shillings each. "Fine" blankets were 10/6d. and "heavy" (9 ft. by 4 ft.) were 12/- shillings each. "Imitation French" blankets, introduced in 1836, were sold for 11/6d. each.

Horse blankets; 5/6d. to 9/6d. each.

Check; common, coarse, double and treble milled, in various combinations of colours.

Brattling check.

Pennistones, blue or indigo. A cheap coarse woollen cloth, $1\frac{1}{2}$ yards in width, made in lengths of 600 to 800 yards. It was exported in great quantities.

Flannel of various qualities.

Sagathie; a coarse mixed weave.

Serge; ordinary, saddler's, pannel and "seat".

Kersey; Cheap, coarse woollen cloth, less than a yard in width, in 40-yard lengths.

Horse sheeting and

Common sheeting, both in many combinations of colours.

Rugging.

Carpet weave.

Carpeting.

Drugget.

Ruggs.

Matts.

House cloth.

Bonnets. (1/8d. each.)

Caps. (7/- shillings
per dozen.)

Canvas.

Linsey.

Bagging.

Cart covers.

Collar cloth.

Show cloth.

White fearnought.

Brats.

Common flocks.

Bandages.

Crankie.

Happins.

Pladding.

Blue duffle.

Jersey cloth.

Blue flax.

Thrumbs.

Some of these materials we have not been able to identify. The blankets, pennistones, kerseys, checks and sheetings seem to have been the most important products, although farmers in the district bought many horse-blankets and cart-covers. The exports consisted almost entirely of blankets and pennistones, although druggets and bales of mixed goods were sometimes included; there was also a substantial demand for caps in the island of St. Thomas and, to a lesser extent in St. Croix. The dyeing of the coloured goods was carried out by Daniel's brother John Dover, father of Joseph of Low Grove, at the Forge, Keswick. His folios in the ledger show that his "dying" bills were paid annually and that they not infrequently amounted to £500 or £600. The only colours recorded in the case of blankets are brown and fawn; of pennistones, blue and indigo. The checks and sheetings were combinations of two or more colours—blue, brown, yellow and red.

The kersey, a staple produce of Yorkshire from at least

the 14th century onwards, was also made in various colours. It possessed admirable qualities for keeping out wet and cold and was, therefore, in great demand throughout many parts of Europe for the clothing of the poorer classes; it was used for overcoats, and large quantities were turned into garments for the armies of Europe. The pennistone was a similar fabric; it drew its name from the village of Pennistone near Barnsley, but by 1706 it was being made over a much wider area. For the information these two materials we are indebted to "The Letter books of Joseph Holroyd (cloth factor) and Sam Hill (clothier)" edited by Herbert Heaton, M.A., of the University of Minnesota and published by the Bankfield Museum of Halifax.

The company's products were supplied to local dealers and to a host of private customers in the district; great quantities went to saddlers, drapers and ironmongers throughout the British Isles; coachmakers, whip makers, upholsterers, colliers, shipbuilders and a couple of public houses figure amongst the buyers. The greatest surprise, however, that the mill books contained for us was the discovery that the hamlet of Millbeck had dealt in a large way with distant parts of the world. In the first twenty-four years from the opening of the ledger in 1823, goods were exported to Messrs. W. and R. Stubbs in the island of St. Thomas every year except two. During the same period there were exports to Jamaica in fourteen years and to various firms in New York in the same number. In ten of these years goods were sent to New Orleans and in nine of them to the island of St. Croix. During this time, too, there was trade with Baltimore and Philadelphia, with Quebec and Montreal, with the Cape of Good Hope and once-even with Monte Video in South America. We can only suppose that it was due to the energy of the company's Liverpool shippers and agents, Bowe and Bushby, later Bushby, Son and Foster, that so remote an industry as that at Millbeck was put into such enterprising touch with distant lands.

Local connections with America and the West Indies doubtless led to some of this trade. Commemorated in Crosthwaite church are J. W. Scott of New Orleans (1811) and his brother Henry of Baltimore (1817); and in Threlkeld church Isaac Edmondson, merchant of Baltimore (1822). In Threlkeld church may be read the names of six Plaskett brothers of Brundholmæ, all merchants of St. Croix, whose deaths occurred, mostly in that island, between 1810 and 1847.

It appears that this export trade was being built up in 1823, when the existing ledger opens; it reached its peak in 1834, rapidly declined during the next twelve years and came to an end in 1846. Once we find that exported goods realised at the other end a sum "more than invoice". More often than not, a "Loss in sale" is recorded and this was, not infrequently, a substantial one. presumably the goods did not, after export, fetch the prices put on them by the company and this perhaps accounts for the dying out of the overseas trade.

As an example, in June 1832 fifty-six bales were dispatched to Messrs. Curell and Kilshaw of New Orleans. Each bale contained one hundred blankets @ 6/- shillings each:

5,600 blankets	£1,680 0 0
56 wrappers @ 6/- shillings	16 16 0
Charges from Liverpool by the ships Adventure and Carraboo	57 13 10
	<hr/>
	£1,754 9 10
By loss in sale	124 19 6
	<hr/>
Paid by Curell & Kilshaw	£1,629 10 4
	<hr/>

In the day-book the bales for export are individually listed and serially numbered. The ledger records the name of every ship in which goods were dispatched; there are

many of them and they reveal how fashions in the naming of ships have changed since those days.

Some figures are given to indicate the rise and fall of the export trade between 1823 and 1846 and, in order to show the approximate total annual values of the mill products, the figures for trade in the British Isles are also given for the ten complete years covered by the day-book. These do not represent the total output of the company for a reason which we cannot explain; the most frequent customer was a Carlisle firm—Thomas Armstrong. Large quantities of goods for this firm are entered in the day-book up to thirty or more times a year; they are practically never priced and apparently were not paid for. They have, therefore, had to be excluded from the totals; what was the arrangement that existed for so long between Dover, Younghusband & Co. and Messrs. Thomas Armstrong, we do not know.

	Overseas Trade.	British Isles.	Total.
	£	£	£
1823	1219		
24	2675		
25	2503		
26	3718		
27	4059		
28	3497		
29	1521		
1830	2246	1272 (6 months only)	
31	3722	2313	6035
32	3528	1971	5499
33	4517	1756	6273
34	5677	2290	7967
35	4784	2166	6950
36	2192	5205	7397
37	1287	3951	5238
38	2920	4536	7456
39	2491	3103	5594
1840	378	2815	3193
41	—	1018 (8 months only)	
42	854		
43	1627		
44	330		
45	1245		
1846	95		

One other type of customer remains to be recorded—charities. In the autumn of every year from 1830 to 1855, the Carlisle Blanket Society bought blankets or blanket material for distribution. The smallest purchase was for £102 in 1832, the largest, £163. 4s. in 1853. The average annual expenditure was about £125. Miss Catherine Graham was the Society's secretary in 1837. This good work was assisted by means of a special discount as well as by a subscription from the company. Throughout the 1830's another organisation bought blankets or blanketting annually to the average tune of £14. These goods had to be marked F.V.S. before they left the mills; a chance entry in the day-book shows that they were purchased by the Female Visiting Society of Carlisle of which Mrs Hall, Mrs Nanson and Miss Ferguson acted in succession as secretaries. The trustees of the Sir John Bankes Charity in Keswick bought blankets and blue flannel; the latter material was also purchased by the Ladies' Charity, the whereabouts of which is not stated. For a good many years, John Hodgson, manager of the Keswick Poor House, made numerous purchases—mainly of blankets, blue duffle and stocking yarn.

Some bad debts are recorded in the ledger, but it is a pleasing reflection on the transactions of the times that the failures to pay are singularly few in relation to the volume of business that was done. A few firms are shown as having failed; a few individuals' accounts are marked as "bad" or "nothing". Curiously enough, two separate drapers and a saddler, all of Houghton le Spring failed at wide intervals of years to pay their small debts; as one of the drapers is shown as being dead, he was not, perhaps to be blamed. The worst case recorded is that of John and Thomas Eccles of the Betsey Jewel plantation in the island of St. Croix; they never paid up for a consignment of goods worth £48 sent to them in December 1839.

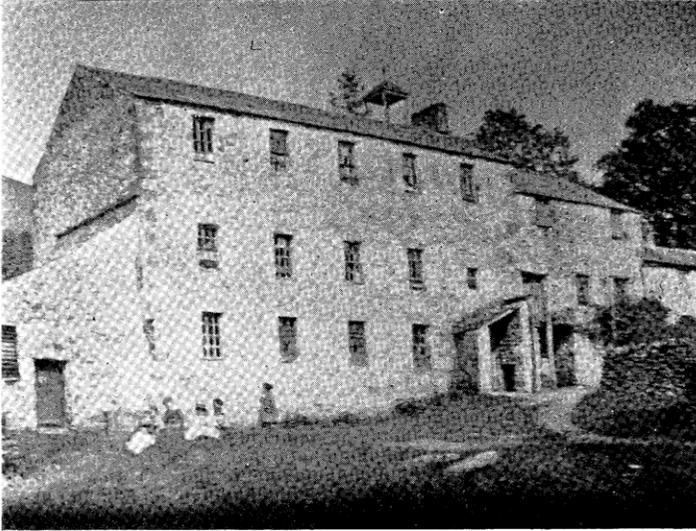
Payment to the company was not infrequently made

in kind, by rum, sugar and coffee from the West Indies and by casks of wine from the Cape of Good Hope. Local customers sometimes followed a similar procedure; Daniel's folios in the ledger record many such items as a ten-gallon cask of gin (double strength) £5; a quarter of mutton at 1/1½d. per pound; a 24½-lb. ham 16/- shillings; a firkin of butter 47/- shillings; one cowe (sic) £10. 15s. Potatoes seem to have come in, too, for throughout the 1830's Daniel sold quantities of them to mill-workers. It is due to this fact that the names of numerous mill-hands have survived in the day-book. The price of these potatoes was 2/6d. per bushel in 1831; from 1835 it was 4/- shillings per bushel or 16/- shillings per cart.

There was no railway at Keswick until 1865. Those goods which were not collected by their buyers were taken away by carriers, of whom the company employed five—Robert Deans of Ireby, Thomas Walker of Keswick, John Simonds of Wigton, John Robinson of Ambleside and John Robinson of Applethwaite. Goods for export were largely shipped from Liverpool, but some were sent from Whitehaven, Workington and Maryport. The incoming of wool and of other supplies for the industry and the outgoing of the mill products by carrier and by privately-owned transport must have presented scenes of great activity at Millbeck during the heyday of the trade.

The clerk who kept the books for many years had the interests of the company very properly at heart. Recording in the day-book in May 1836 the purchase of 105 stone 9 lb. of wool from William Martin of Patterdale, he notes "wett, to be weighed again when dry". In entering a payment made by Messrs. Bright, Martin & Co. of Birmingham in the ledger in 1828, he adds an indignant squeal—"they have deducted 25/- shillings, and this we cannot allow". There is no record of any further transaction with Messrs. Bright and Martin.

The earliest picture of the mills is an oil-painting done in July 1831 by Josh. Flintoft, then of Lyzzick, the maker



The Old Carding Mill before conversion, 1903.



The Old Carding Mill, 1956.

facing p. 168.

of the scale relief model of the Lake District that is to this day a feature of the Keswick museum. Flintoft bought three pairs of blankets from the company in October 1837, but it was May 1840 before he paid for them. A pleasing water-colour painted in August 1863 by Miss Lucy Gipps, daughter of the then Vicar of Crosthwaite, shows the three mills from a point behind them on the slopes of Skiddaw.

Daniel Dover who had been the mainspring of the business for so long died in 1842 and was succeeded by his son Arthur, also of Skiddaw Bank; but the end was not far off. We have heard it stated that one of the last big orders carried out at the mills was to supply blankets for the army in the Crimea in 1855. This may well be so, but we cannot confirm it, as the blankets would in any case have been ordered by and consigned to an agent. The entries in the great ledger peter out in 1856 although a few of its five hundred folios remain unused; but the writing must have been on the wall some years earlier. In 1852, in order to raise the salary of Joseph of Low Grove from £52 to £72, Arthur's was reduced by £20 to £180; in the following year it came down to £130. Conjecture wanders over the reasons for the decline of this once flourishing industry; perhaps steam at Bradford and Halifax was pushing the water-driven mills out of business; the lack of a railway, too, must have been a severe handicap by the 1850's when many mills in other parts of the country were able to use that quicker and more efficient means of transport.

We do not believe that the end of the industry was in any way brought about through the production of goods of bad quality; had that been so, the regular customers would have dropped out, but they did not do so. A noteworthy example of long business connection with the company was provided by Messrs. Ellis, later Ellis and Lound, ironmongers and saddlers of Peterborough. From 1824 to 1855 that firm bought £8,000 worth of goods

from the company, very evenly distributed throughout the years, and this connection was still going strong at the end. Such sums as this, and as those mentioned earlier in this note are small enough in terms of modern money; but they were very considerable at the period under review. Numerous folios in the ledger open with a balance "carried forward from old ledger". So far as we know, that book has not survived; had it done so it would doubtless have revealed the volume of trade during the last decade at least of the 18th century and the first twenty-two years of the 19th.

The company came to an end in 1856. In that year Sarah Younghusband (a "descendant" of Jonathan) and others sold to Arthur Dover their shares and interests in the fulling, new and old carding mills for £372, £325. 10s., £1,070 respectively. For another thirty years the mills continued to work, but only, we believe, in a small way; there are no records of the business done. Arthur Dover died in 1874; one of the Crosthwaite bells was given in his memory—inscribed with his name, with some lines by Southey and with a text added by Canon Rawsley. His widow Jane continued in the ownership; we have been told that she was not one for whom tenants or managers could easily work. Be that as it may, the wheels turned for the last time in 1886 and the mills then lay derelict for a number of years.

Daniel's daughter Sarah had married Thomas Banks of Shorley Croft (Shu le Crow) in Keswick, a house that was the home of the Banks family for more than a century. On Jane Dover's death in 1892, the ownership of the mills passed to Sarah's son, John Daniel Banks. In 1894, Skiddaw Bank, Rock Cottage, where the last works manager had lived, the three mills with water-wheels, pulling stocks and shafting, and twelve workers' cottages were put up for sale. The outcome of the sale is of no importance here except that it resulted in the demolition of the fulling and new carding mills and of Millbeck Village.

The old carding mill with its adjoining pair of cottages, however, were not sold and in, or shortly before, 1903 John Daniel Banks decided to convert the old mill into a dwelling-house. His first wish was that it should take the form of a Swiss chalet and his architect's drawing for this shows a fantastic edifice with outside wooden galleries and overhanging windows to embellish it. When it was found, however, that owing to the thickness of the walls the existing windows of the mill had to be retained, the Swiss chalet proposal was dropped. The wheel-house at one end of the mill and an annexe at the other were removed; the front corners of the building were taken down and the two "pepperpot" turrets built into them; this necessitated some alteration to the gable-ends and the removal of the bell from the roof. The large windows in the turrets have removed any dark, satanic properties that may well have affected the interior of the building when it was a mill. The north-west corner was pared off to give an angle window on each of the three floors; a staircase replaced the steep steps with their hand-ropes and rooms were partitioned off. These were the only structural alterations that were made. The oak beams, 28 ft. in length, that carried the machinery still support the two upper floors. The turret caps, on which the weathercocks are mounted were fashioned out of blocks of lead by one then known in Keswick as Tinman Tom. The mill bell, so prominent a feature in Miss Gipps's picture, now hangs under its canopy on the site of the mill-wheel. Such was the conversion of the old carding mill into its present form—a house unique, perhaps, in its appearance though not in its origin.

In addition to the old carding mill, there remain the two mill-dams and the mill-race; the lower walls and the wheel-trough of the fulling mill, the warehouse and the weaving-rooms. The ceiling and walls of at least one of these rooms are papered with newspapers of the 1830's, the print being clearly legible. The quaint pay-office still

stands, its basement room, cut out of the rock, stained a deep yellow from the storage of sulphur. There also remain the grass terraces of the tenter ground, and nearby on the Terrace road is the Underskiddaw Church Room which was built by Daniel Dover in 1829 as a Sunday school for the children of the mill-workers. These remains are little enough to indicate to those who do not know the story that there once flourished here an industry that had its interests all over these islands and in many distant parts of the world.

