

ART. XI – *A location for Dorothy Wordsworth’s “Bristol Prison”*

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IN her journal, Dorothy Wordsworth recorded a week in August 1800 when she and her brother William went to visit Samuel Taylor Coleridge who had just moved to Keswick.¹ At the end of their stay, on Sunday 17 August, she “Came home. Dined in Borrowdale . . . saw the Bristol prison and Bassenthwaite at the same time. . .”.² In a footnote the editor of her journal wrote that Bristol prison had not been identified and suggested that it might be “a nickname for a rock or possibly a building”. To make a case for its likely location, it is essential to study more detail of the Wordsworths’ whereabouts. On Friday 8 August they had left Grasmere for Keswick, walking “over the mountains by Watendlath”. The next day Dorothy walked with Coleridge in Windy Brow woods. On Sunday “the C.s went to church. We sailed upon Derwent in the evening”. On Monday and Wednesday she was again at Windy Brow. On Tuesday the Wordsworths walked along the Cockermouth road and on Thursday visited the Speddings at Mirehouse beside Bassenthwaite lake and in the evening “walked in the wood” probably at Windy Brow. William was also “in the wood” on Friday morning. That evening they walked to Water End and “feasted on gooseberries at Silver Hill”.³ On Saturday Dorothy “Worked for Mrs. C.”, perhaps helping her to tidy up and settle into the new home in Greta Hall, which was later to become the home of the Southey family also.⁴

Crosthwaite’s late-eighteenth-century map of Derwent Water (note 3) shows Windy Brow as if it was the property of “Wm. Calverts Esq.” between Keswick and Latrigg. However Parson and White’s *Directory*,⁵ notes William Calvert’s address as Greta Bank at a location now known as “Windebrowe” used as the Calvert Trust Riding Centre. Nearby, Greta Bank Farm is a veterinary centre. The 1st Edition (1869) 1: 10,560 (6 in. = 1 mile) O.S. map shows Calvert’s Bridge crossing the river Greta at NY 274 238 about 300 yards south-east of Greta Bank Farm. Just north of the farm, Windy Brow is shown as if it was an open scrubby woodland, containing a few conifers, and rising from below the 500 foot contour into Whinny Brow⁶ that continued high up the southwest slope of Latrigg (1,202 ft). The site would offer extensive views over Keswick, Derwent Water and Borrowdale and clockwise to Bassenthwaite. The Wordsworths no doubt stayed with the Coleridges at Greta Hall, set impressively on top of a low hill inside a sweeping meander of the river Greta. As the house was just over half-a-mile from Windy Brow, the woods were within easy walking distance but the river would have to be crossed. Two possibilities were to walk on the town side of the river to Brigham and over Calvert’s bridge; or over the Greta bridge and round the meander past Monk Hall to a lane leading towards Greta Bank Farm (Figure 1).

As the Wordsworths were going home by way of Borrowdale and Watendlath, it would have been natural for them to look back towards where they had stayed, to gain lasting landscape impressions. If they saw both “Bristol prison and Bassenthwaite at the same time” they were probably at a vantage point on the east side of Derwent Water, possibly at Surprise View or a lesser eminence nearer to

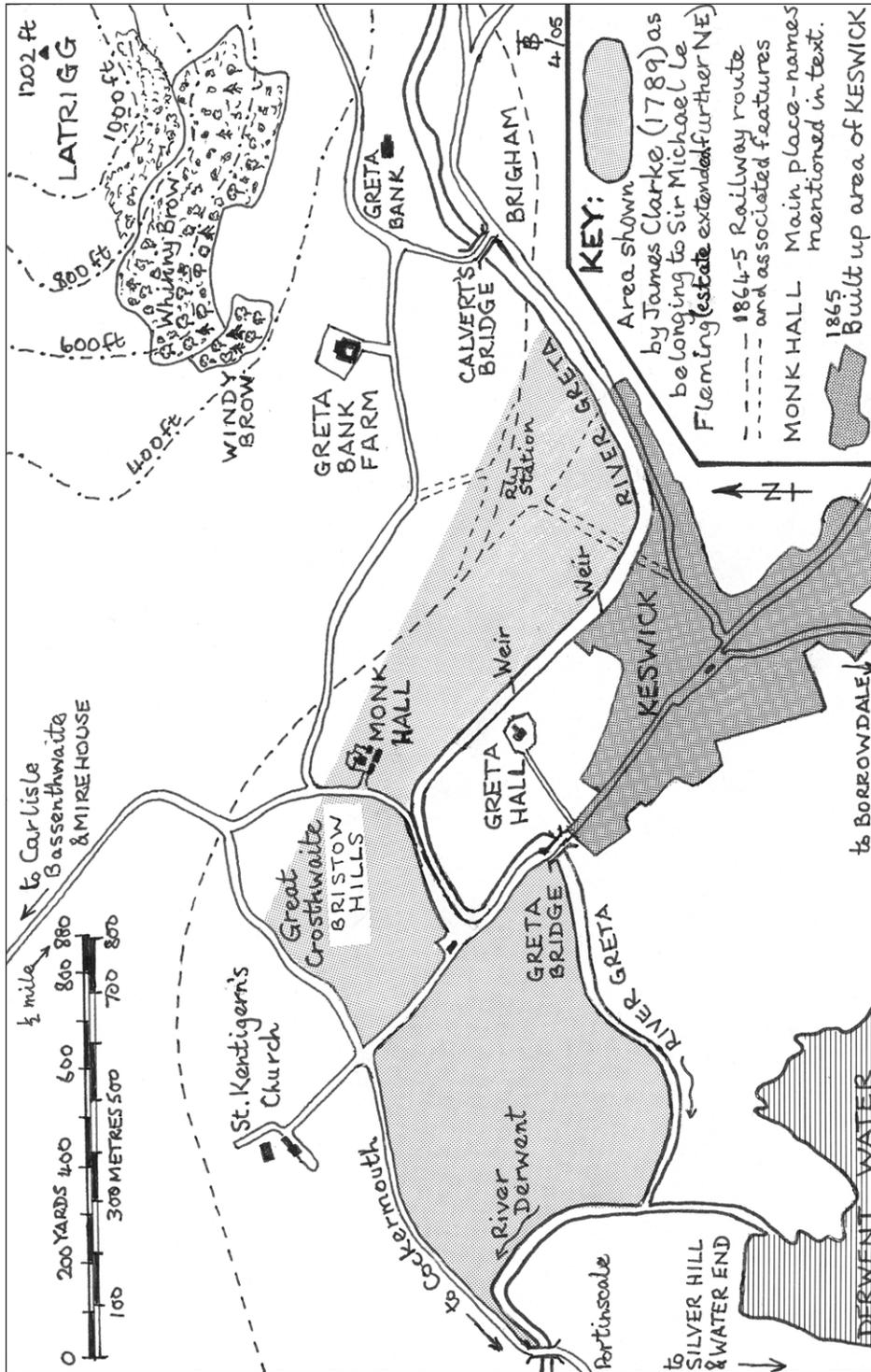


Fig. 1. Sketch map of the Keswick area to show locations mentioned in the text.

Keswick. This would seem to place the "prison" in the middle distance beyond Derwent Water. Even if Dorothy had found Greta Hall less comfortable than her own home, since she had had to "Pack up the matrass" to send it to Keswick (see note 1) by the carrier the day before she left Grasmere,⁷ as if there were not enough beds for both she and William, it is unlikely that she would have been so discourteous as to use such a derogatory term for Greta Hall. A nearby property seems to offer possible alternatives. From where they would be viewing, Monk Hall⁸ (owned by the Flemings of Rydal Hall) stood just beyond the river Greta almost directly behind Greta Hall.

The second account book of Sir Daniel Fleming of Rydal⁹ contains some significant entries. On 8 November 1690, 2s. 6d. was paid "unto Will. Sharpe of Langdale waller for goeing along with my son Dan. F. to view the breach in *Bristow* Water-garth made by the last Flood". Five days later Fleming reimbursed 2s. 0d. "spent at Monkhall and Keswick Nov. 7. 90. with the Workmen who viewed *Bristo*-Water-Garth that was burst" (my italics). The latter sum was probably for ale drunk when workmen were persuaded to carry out the necessary work. As the Wordsworths had lived at Alfoxden, about five miles from Watchet in Somerset, and the town of Bristol is often referred to as Bristow in documents,¹⁰ Dorothy may well have found the place-name inter-changeability both interesting and natural. Thus, it is worth pursuing other entries about the repairs. On 30 January 1690/1, a shilling was paid "to Will. Sharp of Langdale to drink" and, on 20 February a similar sum was "spent with the workmen at Monkhal", no doubt for ale to encourage the men in their labours. On 24 February, they were paid as follows:

Paid unto Will. Sharp of Langdale waller for 39 dayes work,	
at 6d. the day, in mending Bristo-water-were near Monkhall	19s. 6d.
It. unto Robert Hawkrigg waller for the like	19s. 6d.
It. unto Edward Hird Waller for the like being 24 dayes	12s. 0d.
It. unto Will Park Waller for the like being 29 dayes	14s. 6d.
It. paid to the aforesaid Will. Sharp for the repair of his great Hammer	2s. 6d.
It. given him for his care over the work	2s. 6d.
It. given the 4 wallers abovesaid to Drink	2s. 6d.

Clearly each man received just 6d. a day so they were probably fed and perhaps billeted at Monk Hall at Sir Daniel's expense. Sharp's bonus was worth five day's pay, plus the equivalent of a day-and-a-quarter for his share of the drinks allowance. The total of 131 man-days was followed by more work, for on 5 November 1692, Will. Sharpe was paid "for working at Monkhall-Mill-Dam & Hoghouse"¹¹ with the same three men together with Stephen Hawkrigg. As the work amounted to about 70 man-days the flood damage to Fleming's mill dam had been considerable. Fleming used trusted workmen from near his Rydal estate. For example, on the same day as William Sharp was paid for viewing the dam "Edward Hird of Gresmere waller" was paid 12s. "for mossaing the Houses" and walling at Rydal, while Robert Hawkrigg was paid 7s. 8d. "in full of all work and other demands" probably on the same work. As the pair were again working together in 1698 when they were paid 25s. for "repairing two Publick Bridges in Gres[mere]", Hawkrigg was probably from there. Hird certainly was. In 1682 he was aged 45 and married, with three children baptised: Jane (5 December 1675), John (29 March 1678) and Margaret (19 February 1681/ 2).¹² Edward Hird and William Sharp were jointly

paid 9s., on 22 October 1699, for "mossing of Rydal-Hall", a yearly contract to stuff moss between the slates to reduce the penetration of wind and rain. As a Stephen Hawkrigg (son of John Hawkrigg) was baptised at Grasmere in September 1671, the fifth workman seems to have been 21 in November 1692. William Park has not been traced.¹³

Some further account entries are of interest. On 11 March 1697/8, Sir Daniel recorded 1s. 6d. spent by his son Daniel with "Wil. Sharp in viewing Monkhall-Barn", no doubt with repairs in mind. Five days later 5s. was "Allowed to Thos. Williamson [since 1696 the tenant] of Monk-Hall for Glaseing the House" and he had 10s. more "given him back by reason of his great charge for a New Milston".¹⁴ Clearly Monk Hall had a mill and farm buildings kept in good working order. Sir Daniel had obtained meal from the mill on several occasions. On 7 October 1691 he allowed £39 19s. 0d. to the previous tenant "Anthony Atkinson of Monkhall for meal, Assessments [taxes], water weares &c" and, on 9 August 1694, Atkinson was paid £28 8s. 8d. "for meal, Bigg. & Malt".¹⁵ It will be shown that the mill dam probably got its name from a neighbouring Bristow Tenement.

Monk Hall had been bought for Sir Daniel Fleming's great-grandmother by her eldest son John Fleming in 1615, together with "Edmund Mill".¹⁶ For this transaction and buying other properties in Crosthwaite parish during the next few years, John's name "was made use of . . . by his mother", widow Agnes Fleming. She died at Rydal in August 1631. In 1627, Sir Edward Radcliff agreed for her "to bind over her Mill-Dam unto his Grounds, and to get stones &c. in the Water". He was to pay her 6s. 8d. per year, with security for payment, and Sir Edward likewise was "to bind over unto Monk-Hall Grounds & to get stones &c. in the Water, so as He can make a Barr[er] that there can be no Footway over his Dam".¹⁷ This and the payment seem to suggest that they had agreed to make a joint weir across the river Greta to supply Monk Hall's mill pond (or water-garth) on Agnes's land and that Radcliff also gained benefit from the weir. In 1618 Agnes's grandson (Sir Daniel's father, William) bought Bristow Tenement for £111 and was granted admittance to parts of it in 1623 and 1627¹⁸ before he married Sir Daniel's mother, Agnes Kirkby of Kirkby-in-Furness in 1632. These transactions appear to have led to the consolidation of Bristow Tenement with Monk Hall so that by the late-seventeenth century Sir Daniel was treating them as parts of the same property. James Clarke's survey¹⁹ of the area notes Sir Michael le Fleming (1748-1806), 4th baronet, Sir Daniel's great-grandson,²⁰ as owner of all the land along the north bank of the river Greta from near to Calvert's bridge to below the Greta's confluence with the river Derwent, but his representations of the buildings at Monk Hall on his two maps of Derwent Water do not agree with each other.

As Dorothy Wordsworth would be able to see the Monk Hall buildings from Greta Hall and probably passed them several times on the way to Windy Brow, she could have taken a dislike to a building there, perhaps because it looked rather severe. If Monk Hall had looked like the Flemings' old manor house at Skirwith Hall before it was demolished in 1775,²¹ Dorothy's comment could have been justified. William Hutchinson described the latter in 1794 as having been "a miserable mansion [with] narrow and low doors, and loup-holes rather than windows . . ." ²² In fact the drawing of Monk Hall made in 1819 by William Green, the Ambleside artist, (Fig. 2A)²³ shows an attractive traditional farmhouse. An older rear wing with



FIG. 2A. Monk Hall farmhouse drawn by William Green, 1819 (original size 21 x 15 cm)

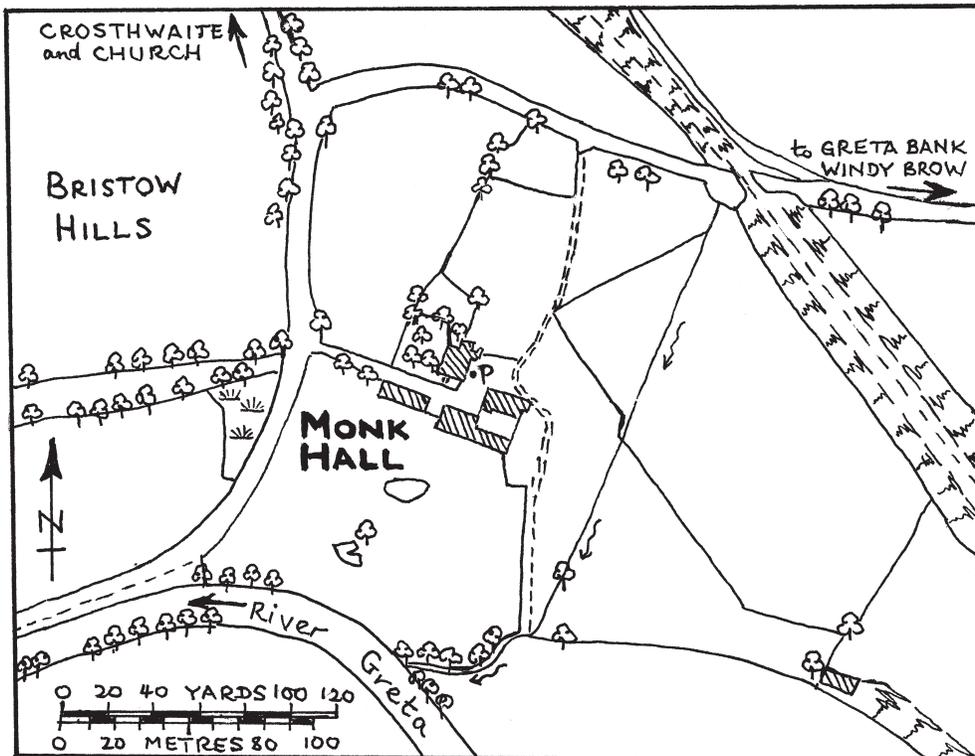


FIG. 2B. Extract of the Monk Hall site, based on the Ordnance Survey 1: 2,500 plan sheet LXIV, 2 (1869) and the 1840 tithe map and schedule for Underskiddaw township (CRO(C) DRC 8/55/3).

small windows and a simple (insecure ?) porch probably housed the farm's working kitchen. A pleasant main wing of the house facing south-south-west²⁴ looks as if it was built not earlier than late in the seventeenth century, with a simple ridge roof and a chimney at either gable. The roof over the front door and the larger windows seem to suggest a slightly improved social status compared to the rear wing. Near the east end of the front wall a small projecting pent roof probably covered a bee shelter.²⁵ By no stretch of the imagination could this house be likened to a "prison". James Clarke's 1789 description of Monk Hall was simply "a small farmhouse, but there are vestiges of a moat and a square building". Even if the square building's remains had once been the base for a defensive structure and if Dorothy believed it was like a prison, it is unlikely that she could have seen it from a distance, but she might have been able to distinguish its site. It is feasible to suggest, therefore, that a more likely candidate for "Bristol prison" could be a building associated with Bristow Tenement and its "water garth", perhaps the mill itself near Monk Hall. No illustration has been found to confirm this suggestion and surviving landscape features do little to help determine its likely position, except that the low lying meadow between the farmhouse site and the river Greta looks as if it could have been the site of the water garth and in 1840 the field immediately west of the driveway into Monk Hall was named Bristow Hills (Fig. 2B).²⁶

Unfortunately urban development of Keswick over the past two centuries has destroyed evidence which might have allowed a more certain identity for Bristol prison. Though the Monk Hall estate suffered from the same process, it would be difficult to discover a better candidate than Bristow Tenement. In 1829 and 1847, the Monk Hall farmer was Jonathan Crosthwaite.²⁷ Henry Hewetson, who was born in Keswick in 1821 and made a fortune in London dealing in leather, sail-cloth, sacking and linen, gave Monk Hall to trustees in 1889 to provide the site for a cottage hospital in memory of his devoted sister Mary.²⁸ Monk Hall, on a low rise above the flood plain was demolished in 1890 and the hospital that replaced it continues to serve the community as a worthy successor.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank the staff of Carlisle Record Office for providing copies of old maps; Carlisle Library for providing a good copy of William Green's drawing of Monk Hall; Keswick Library for details of Green's career and copies of his work; and the staff of Keswick Hospital who kindly provided a copy of George Bott's history of the hospital.

Notes and References

¹ Coleridge's first arrival in the Lake District was "fully expected" on 19 June but he, his wife and young son Hartley finally arrived on 29 July and stayed with the Wordsworths for three weeks before leaving for Keswick via Wythburn. Coleridge came back on 31 July and returned to Keswick on 2 August with William, who wrote to Dorothy "desiring us to go to Keswick". William returned to Grasmere late on Wednesday 6 August and the next morning Dorothy recorded "Packed up the matress, and sent [it] to Keswick". Next day (Friday) "excessive heat" delayed the Wordsworths' departure. Mary Moorman (ed.), *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* (OUP paperback 2nd edition, 1971), 28-33.

² *Journals*, 34.

- ³ Silver Hill at NY 253 220 is at the west side of Derwent Water. Peter Crosthwaite's map of Derwent Water (1783 with additions to 1794, publ. by Frank Graham in 1968 with an introduction and notes by William Rollinson) identifies Water End as "L[or]d William Gordon's" house about 500 yards further south where the modern O.S. map names the property "Derwent Bay". For Lord William Gordon (1744-1823) see C. R. Hudleston & R. S. Boumphrey, *Cumberland Families and Heraldry* (1978)(CWAAS Extra Series XXIII), 69.
- ⁴ Hunter Davies, *A Walk Around the Lakes* (1979), 147-158 and plate 18. Norman Nicholson, *The Lakiers . . .*, (1955), 114-5.
- ⁵ Parson and White's *Directory . . .* (1829), 332
- ⁶ Whin is gorse (furze).
- ⁷ F. Jollie, *Cumberland Guide & Directory* (1811), 116 notes that carriers left Kendal for Keswick, and *vice versa*, on Mondays and Thursdays.
- ⁸ Monk Hall, at NY 264 241, became the site for Keswick Hospital.
- ⁹ B. Tyson (ed.), *Estate and Household Accounts of Sir Daniel Fleming of Rydal Hall . . .*, 1688-1701 (2001)(CWAAS, Record Series, XIII).
- ¹⁰ An old form of Bristol's place-name was *Bricg stowe*. E. McClure, *Place-names in their Historical Setting* (1910, reprinted 1972 by EP Publishing, Wakefield), 294.
- ¹¹ Hoghouse: a small barn used partly to over-winter sheep that could gain access to its shelter through a low doorway (little larger than hog holes in field walls) usually in the rear wall. B. Tyson, "Physical evidence associated with housing sheep in barns", *Vernacular Architecture* 29 (1998), 98-9.
- ¹² Fleming's *Estate & Household Accounts*, 48 and Grasmere parish registers CRO(K) WPR/91/1.
- ¹³ His surname was more common nearer to Fleming's Coniston estate.
- ¹⁴ In addition, on 21 November 1698, Williamson was allowed £6 18s. 0d. "for Assessments, Slateing the Barn &c at Monk-Hall" and on 9 November 1699 £2 9s. 6d. "for the Repairing of the Hog-house & Byer at Monkhall see his note of particulars". (*Estate & Household Accounts*, 254, 272, 284).
- ¹⁵ *Estate & Household Accounts*, 137, 194 and also 119, 125.
- ¹⁶ W. G. Collingwood, *Memoirs of Sir Daniel Fleming* (1928)(CWAAS Tract Series, XI), 60. Edmund mill may have derived its name from Edmund Radcliff of Monk Hall whose daughter Mabel married Thomas Fleming of New-field, Lancashire in the 16th century (*Memoirs*, 46).
- ¹⁷ *Memoirs*, 60-63.
- ¹⁸ *Memoirs*, 69.
- ¹⁹ J. Clarke, *A Survey of the Lakes of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire*, (2nd ed., 1789), 100.
- ²⁰ Pedigree in C. R. Hudleston, "The Fleming family, the first and third baronets...", *CW2*, lxiv, 305.
- ²¹ For details see B. Tyson, "Skirwith Hall and Wilton Tenement...", *CW2*, lxxxii, 93-112.
- ²² W. Hutchinson, *History and Antiquities of Cumberland* (1794), i, 260.
- ²³ Copy kindly supplied by Carlisle Library. Keswick Library copy reference CA-KES/728.83.
- ²⁴ Orientation determined from the 1st Edition O.S. 1: 2,500 plan of 1869 (Fig. 2B).
- ²⁵ By comparing Green's drawing with the 1: 2,500 O.S. plan (1869), some artistic licence is seen. For example the plan shows a water pump close to the house wall rather than with a track between. If the house plan was not altered in the fifty year interval, the artist must have simplified the shape of the east wall for artistic effect.
- ²⁶ CRO(C) DRC 8/55/3. Tithe map and schedule for Underskiddaw Township (1840).
- ²⁷ Parson & White, *Directory of Cumberland & Westmorland . . .* (1829), 336 and Mannix & Whellan, *Directory of Cumberland* (1847), 566.
- ²⁸ George Bott, *The Mary Hewetson Cottage Hospital, Keswick: a brief history 1892-1992*. Booklet kindly supplied by the hospital.

