

Rooms with a view: The Low Wood Hotel, Windermere, c.1700-1914

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The evolution of tourist accommodation in all its forms, and an in-depth analysis of the various stages of that progression, has only recently been the subject of academic study.¹ The aim of this article is to single out one of the oldest ‘hotels’ in Cumbria, the Low Wood, and to use its history to demonstrate an evolutionary trend that to varying degrees was replicated among other Lakeland inns of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century date. Some, like the Low Wood, arose from the simplest origins, but at each stage – from serving the packhorse trade, through improvement in road conditions, the development of coaching services, the arrival of the railways and, later, the motor car – the Low Wood responded positively to change and the increase in the number of tourists.

THE ‘Low Wood’² – it was not always so named – has been on the Lakeland scene, at the edge of Windermere for over 300 years. At that time, Lakeland was isolated, unknown and seen as an unwelcoming mountainous wilderness. Conditions for travel were not easy: few roads penetrated the area; few inns catered for those who came along them.

In the seventeenth century, the main southerly ‘commercial’ road to Ambleside, a market town since 1650 and of much earlier provenance, is believed to have been a packhorse trail along the course of a Roman road high on the fellside above the lake, not run along the lake shore as the present highway does.³ It has been suggested⁴ that, weary from journeying, some travellers would divert from the trail to importune for refreshment and rest at a single farmstead that stood overlooking the head of the lake above Low Wood Bay. This is highly doubtful: with a mere 2½ miles remaining to Ambleside, where as long ago as 1686 there were at least three inns providing 18 guest beds and 31 stabling places⁵. It is unlikely that even the most fatigued would have lengthened their journey by diverting downhill to a farm beside the lake, unless a clear trail then continued northwards to Ambleside – and there is no extant evidence of one at the end of the seventeenth century.

Low Wood in the eighteenth century

Although the early history of the ‘Low Wood Hotel’ is bedevilled by the almost complete lack of documentary evidence, what this study shows is that the Low Wood experienced an archetypal evolution from yeoman or peasant origins to profitably managed hostelry that might well be a template with correspondence in the development of hotels elsewhere in Lakeland; certainly the Pheasant Inn at Bassenthwaite followed a similar pattern.

What becomes clear on studying the Low Wood Papers, however, is that there is no support for Michael Berry’s specific link to 1702 – a date that appears as the sub-

title to *A Sunlit Intimate Gift...*. The possibility exists that the date is a misreading for 1762, the year when the turnpike road opened past Low Wood, or 1720 when, as documents in the Low Wood Papers suggest, the inn was moved to the lake shore.

Berry⁶ comments that the Ambleside parish registers reveal that in 1718, there was a farmstead at Low Wood that was being enlarged, recording ‘...a builder family there, Birketts, and the death of William Grigge, a ‘Slayter’ in 1719.’⁷ However, there is no evidence to suggest that the enlargement was to provide accommodation for travellers, it may simply have been to better serve the tenant’s trade. Nor is there any evidence that it was being carried out at the site of the Low Wood Hotel (see below for an explanation of the discrepancy). Michael Davies-Shiel nevertheless suggests that in 1718-19, Low Wood ‘...was being enlarged from a small farmstead to a well-built hostelry [sic] for Carriers plus waggons and teams of horses.’⁸

In a list of those who managed Low Wood, Berry puts William Birkett as the first tenant, in c.1715,⁹ a date that does not accord with his suggested ‘start’ date of 1702 for the hotel. Moreover, William Birkett died in late 1715 or early 1716, his will being found among the papers of the Browne estate of Town End, Troutbeck.¹⁰ Also among the papers is an Inventory of the Goods and Chattels of William Birkett of Lowwood in Troutbeck, yeoman, apprized 21st March 1716 by John Langmire, Robert Robinson and George Wilson, which contains the following information (Table 1):

TABLE 1: Inventory of William Birkett, Low Wood, 1716.¹¹

His apparel and Money in purse	£5	0	0
Bedstocks, Bedcloths, Linnen and Woollen	£1	10	0
Chists, Arks, Tables, Chairs and fformes	£2	0	0
Girdle, Brandrith, An Iron pott, pann, ffrying pann, &c	£1	0	0
Brass, pewter, and Earthen Vessell	£1	0	0
Wood vessel, and Trenchers, &c	£1	0	0
Meal, Malt, Sacks and all provision in ye House	£1	10	0
Sadles, Roapes, plows and all the rest of ye Husbandry gear	£1	10	0
A Clock, and Case	£1	10	0
Vestures	£1	0	0
A Beast	£1	10	0
Fuel, Ashes and Dung		5	0
Timber, Boards, &c.: other Loose wood	£1	0	0
	£19	15	0

Nothing in Birkett’s inventory is indicative either of an alehouse or an inn, or, for that matter, the trade of a carrier, but is consistent with the management of a farm. The error is exposed by studying the map of the locality provided in James Clarke’s ‘Survey of the Lakes’, dated 1787-9, which shows the Low Wood [Hotel], under the name of James Wilson (Gentleman of Lambrigg, Kendal, and joint owner of Low Wood with his widowed sister, Catherine – see below; the tenants at this time were John and Mary

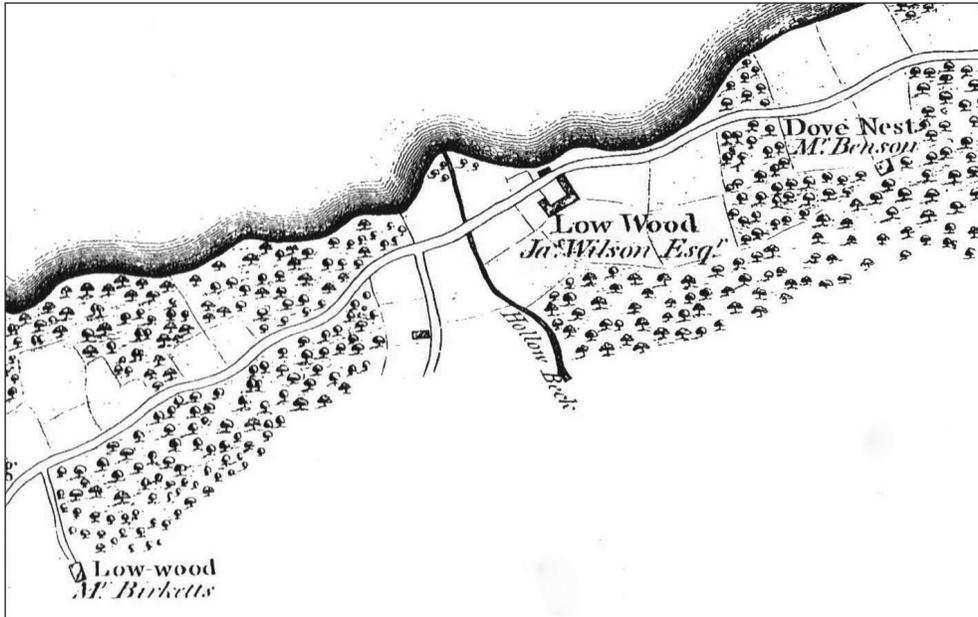


FIG. 1. Extract from map in Clarke's *Survey of the Lakes*, 1797, showing the location of Low Wood Hotel (top right), and Low-wood Farm (centre).

Wright¹²), and another Low Wood (the farm), a short distance to the south, occupied by Mr Birkett¹³ (Fig. 1), suggesting that William Birkett was simply the tenant of Low Wood farm, not of the inn on the lakeshore.

Following William Birkett's death, the new occupier at the farm was a carrier, George Walker, who died in December 1725; a new carrier, Christopher Gill, took over within little more than a month. The Gill family were still carriers in 1754.

Yuen describes Low Wood as a '...jumped-up ale-house built in the year dot for passing Mule-Jaggers and Chapmen', adding that

'...Before it became the Low Wood Inn, the little, single-building, ale-house was known as "The Packhorse Inn". Its trade was in serving the many hard-drinking and hard-swearing Jaggers and Chapmen who regularly came through Low Wood with their packhorse teams in the days before Lakeland had any roads fit for wheeled traffic.'¹⁴

Yuen adds that '*...it is anyone's guess as to exactly when the original Packhorse Inn was first established. Certainly before 1760. It could, conceivably, have been established centuries earlier.*'¹⁵ However, between Yuen's comments and those of Berry there is a discrepancy. Yuen makes much of the location of the packhorse inn on the shores of Windermere; yet Berry points out that until the early years of the eighteenth century there was no direct track down to Low Wood Bay from the packhorse trail higher on the fell slopes, adding that 'The old "Packhorse Inn" (if indeed it was so called) was at Low Skelghyll on the Roman highway.'¹⁶ But at some date pre-1750, as well as the long-established route into Ambleside along the higher packhorse trail, an alternative route developed,

descending to Low Wood Bay and thence around the Windermere shoreline towards the town.

Michael Davies-Shiel suggests that the lakeside track passing Low Wood evolved c.1718-1720, at which time the innkeeper of the inn at Low Skelghyll (whom he identifies – without supporting evidence – as a man named Harrison) moved his inn and staff down to Low Wood Bay to ‘...maintain the packmen’s hostelry and stables, etc.’¹⁷ Once the lakeshore route between Low Wood and Ambleside was opened, this would be the sensible option.¹⁸

Berry suggests that this became an ‘...essential detour for folk with heavy goods to be transported, cutting out the old High Skelghyll packtrail so that the ancient Low Skelghyll inn and its clientele moved down to Low Wood’s stables, waggon sheds and storage barns.’

Support for a track passing Low Wood Inn and for the name ‘packhorse inn’ comes from Yuen’s research in which he refers to a booklet – *Lake Windermere by A Local Boatman* – written and published c.1960 by Walter Lees¹⁹, in which the author, without stated authority, writes (p.17):– ‘...A little further on is the Low Wood Hotel, originally the Pack Horse Inn, its main purpose in the old coaching days having been to replenish man and horse with food and drink, prior to tackling the arduous climb to Troutbeck up the steep Holbeck Lane.’

There are problems with this: Holbeck Lane is indeed an arduous climb, but the Low Wood Hotel did not become a coaching inn until after the opening of the turnpike.²⁰ There would have been no reason for coaches to take the Holbeck Lane rather than the gentler turnpike to Ings.

Yuen suggests that the packhorse inn was renamed the Low Wood Inn, but at an uncertain date. The index to documents in the Cumbria Record Office, however, contains four references to a ‘Holbeck Inn (now called Low Wood Inn)’ dated 1775 and 1776.²¹ Hol Beck is the stream issuing into Windermere at Low Wood, and if a change of name was needed for the relocated packhorse inn, it seems not improbable that the name Holbeck would have been chosen. However, the actual documents – an indenture and accounts book appertaining to the Browne Estate at Town Head, Troutbeck – simply mention the location – Holbeck, or Holbeck in Ambleside – not that there was an inn there. Nor is it clear to what period the ‘now’ in the index entry relates; whether it is part of the original eighteenth-century description, or a twentieth-century addition made by the compiler of the index. The latter is thought to be more probable.

John and Mary Wright were the innkeepers at ‘Low-wood Inn’ between 1782 and 1803;²² the inn is depicted on Peter Crosthwaite’s 1783 map (Fig. 2). It is debatable how realistic this sketch is. The style and layout of this multi-winged block of buildings seems to have nothing in common with Thomas Allom’s more rustic engraving of Low Wood, published in Allom and Rose *Picturesque Illustrations of Westmorland*, in 1832 (see Fig. 3). Even allowing for a measure of artistic licence, Allom’s drawing is much

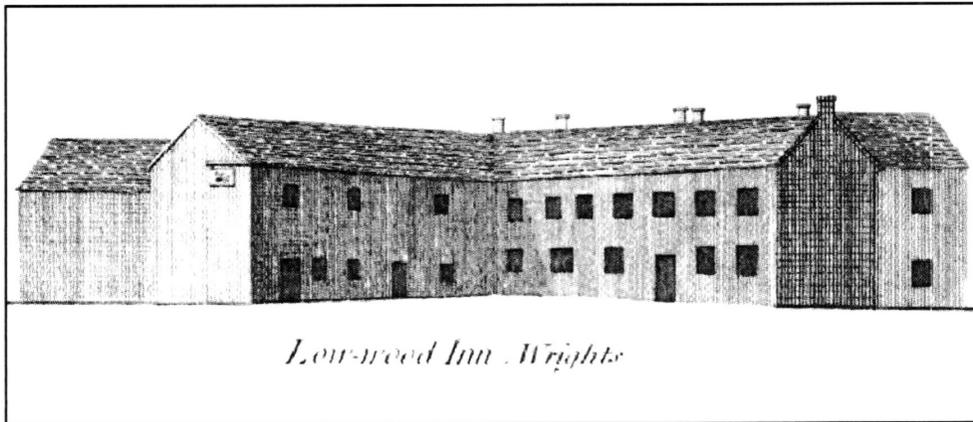


FIG. 2. Wright's Low-wood Inn as depicted on Peter Crosthwaite's 'Accurate map of the Grand Lake of Windermere' (1783-1794).

more akin to a complex of buildings that has evolved around an older, central core. Moreover, the 1838 Kendal tithe map for Ambleside below Stock shows a ground plan of the inn that bears little relationship to Crosthwaite's drawing, but something more in accord with Allom's illustration.²³

However crude Crosthwaite's depiction of the inn may be, it nevertheless shows a substantial building, and must represent a sizeable improvement from the humble inn of earlier years. This depiction does, however, put it at odds with contemporary descriptions of Low Wood as a simple country house.



FIG. 3. Thomas Allom's engraving of Low Wood, c. 1832.

Berry identifies Thomas Jackson as the tenant of Low Wood from an uncertain date until his death in 1747²⁴, when he willed his tenancy to his son, also Thomas. In a lease to Thomas Jackson (the younger, described as ‘yeoman’) for seven years, dated 1773, the joint owners of Low Wood are James Wilson, and his sister Catherine of Low Nook, Ambleside (now part of Charlotte Mason College).²⁵ This is the first clear reference to ownership of the Low Wood. It is probable that it was Wilson who financed the first major development of the inn leading to its appearance on Crosthwaite’s map,²⁶ and in Thomas Allom’s 1832 illustration. As a result, when this happened can be pinned down quite accurately, i.e. between 1773 (the date of the lease to Thomas Jackson Jnr.) and 1783 (the date by which the inn, now tenanted by the Wrights, was enlarged), and may serve to discredit an assertion by Yuen that by 1841 the Low Wood owners had ‘...done nothing to expand its original pre-1760 accommodation.’²⁷ Nevertheless, in the absence of extant documentary evidence of building works at Low Wood, the possibility exists that the Crosthwaite illustration may not in fact portray an enlarged and improved inn, but the original, unimproved building, the tenancy of which the Wrights acquired, probably around 1782.

The younger Thomas Jackson is credited with being the tenant of the original inn at Low Wood during the critical years following the opening of the turnpike. But whether he was ever the tenant of the new Low Wood Inn is unlikely. Jackson the Younger died in 1783, but as John and Mary Wright held the tenancy from 1782, it is probable that they had taken over the tenancy because of retirement or ill health experienced by Jackson.

On Crosthwaite’s 1783 map, Low Wood is described as under the control of the ‘Wrights’, and if the premise is accepted that it was indeed a rebuilt structure, it points to a building programme during 1782 under the direction of the Wrights. Around this period, ownership of Low Wood estate passed by inheritance or settlement to James Wilson’s daughter, Catherine, who later married Christopher Wilson Junior, of Kendal, son of a successful businessman and ex-Mayor of Kendal, and to whom the properties passed on marriage.²⁸

Berry suggests²⁹ that it may have been the death of Thomas Jackson the younger that inspired the owner to consider enlarging and renaming the inn. But chronologically this may be inaccurate as the Wrights were tenants before Jackson died. If Berry is correct, then the improvements at the hotel took place post-1782. One thing remains certain: at some stage the Low Wood was significantly improved, and its redevelopment was a forward-looking step, one that must have been taken in the expectation of more lucrative lease terms from tenants. Whether that expectation was ever realised is unclear, but the Wrights remained as tenants at the Low Wood only until 1803.

In anticipation of Wright’s retirement, Christopher Wilson advertised the tenancy in the *Lancaster Gazetteer* on the 31st July and 7th August, 1802 (Fig. 4).

The opening of the Ambleside to Kendal section of the turnpike in 1762 was, not surprisingly, a watershed, instantly improving communication and travel, and ending the relative isolation of the central Lake District. Above all else, the new accessibility

LOW - WOOD INN,
NEAR AMBLESIDE.
TO BE LET TO FARM,
FOR A TERM OF YEARS,
To enter upon at the usual times in the Spring, 1803;
ALL that commodious and well-accus-
tomed INN, called *LOW-WOOD*, adjoining
the Lake of Windermere, two miles from the town
of Ambleside, and twelve from Kendal; with all the
stables, coach houses, and other offices, as they are
now occupied by Mr. John Wright, who has for
many years carried on the business of an innkeeper
there in an extensive way
Also, upwards of fifty customary acres of LAND,
in high cultivation; and a FISHERY upon the
LAKE.
* * * For particulars apply to CHRISTOPHER WIL-
SON, jun Esq. Kendal, who will let the same

FIG. 4. Advertisement in the *Lancaster Gazetteer*, 31 July and 7 August 1802.

was also a key component in the infrastructure on which the imminent era of tourism was to be founded. That the turnpike passed the front door of the 'Low Wood' was providential, and served only to bring wider renown.

Yuen takes the view that:

'...the new name did nothing to ease the problems of successfully carrying-off the part of a sophisticated coaching-inn from a tiny one-time chapmens [sic] ale-house...Nothing could disguise the fact that the place was ancient, poky and in every way handicapped by its size and humble birth. With no more than eight or nine overnight guests in the house – out went the "Full-up" sign.'

Yuen adds a comment that this represented the true condition of the Low Wood Inn at the time Wordsworth wrote about the place in his guide (1811): 'Low-wood Inn, a mile from the head of Windermere, is a most pleasant halting-place.'³⁰

For reasons that are unclear, Yuen contrives to demean the Low Wood management of later years and the pride they took in Wordsworth's mention, by decrying that 'They see it as being as good as a Routier's award or a mention by Egon Ronay,' adding that 'They can't see that Wordsworth never said anything much about the actual Inn.' In itself, that is true, but Wordsworth found it 'pleasant' based on experience. He had dined there on 26 August 1807 with an aristocratic party led by Lord Holland,³¹ and breakfasted there in 1817.³²

Certain it is that long before Wordsworth had any view on this or any other matter, the inn was renamed the 'Low Wood', its humble origins were concealed behind the façade of the larger inn depicted by Crosthwaite and Allom, and by 1790 had

developed to a standard ‘...where post-chaises and pleasure boats are kept to entertain and accommodate travellers.’³³ This last issue alone is a clear indication of the extent to which the Low Wood had gone in attracting the wealthier end of Georgian society, and how the opening of the turnpike had made this possible. Two years before the Wrights took over in 1782, a bill head read ‘Neat Post Chaises, Gigs and Cars. Pleasure Boats. Potted Char.’

James Clarke, writing in 1787, found the Low Wood, ‘...a convenient inn, where boats are kept for the use of the curious traveller.’³⁴ Adam Walker, who toured Westmorland and Cumberland in 1791 also points out the readiness of the Low Wood to provide facilities for their guests: ‘...boats, lines, and baits are always ready for fishing, and the game are Perch (called Bass here).’³⁵

By the end of the eighteenth century, with the Wrights in occupation, the Low Wood was in the opinion of the Hon Mrs Murray ‘...a very neat comfortable house.’³⁶

The Low Wood as a Coaching Inn

During the Wrights’ tenure, the Low Wood experienced another significant transformation from that of an inn serving the packhorse trade and such gentrified visitors as passed by, to one capable of responding to the demands of the coaching traffic that increasingly made use of the turnpike road.

The extent to which the tenant or owner of Low Wood foresaw increased trade is not recorded, but the involvement of local landlords in agitating for road improvements is a notable feature of Cumbria road history.³⁷ Some of the more prominent Cumbrian families, notably the Lowthers and those of Senhouse, Curwen and Graham, are known to have invested in the various turnpike trusts³⁸, and it is not inconceivable that James Wilson, the then owner, may have done the same. Having already invested in the development of the inn it was in their financial interests to ensure a ready flow of customers.

The date when the Low Wood became a coaching inn and posting house is not recorded, but it is consistent with the new ethos that would have pervaded the improved inn and the need to recoup investment. A date of 1775-1782 – post-turnpike and coincidental with the renaming of the inn and the appointment of new tenants – is highly probable.

As a posting inn, Low Wood had to be in a state of constant readiness to provide fresh horses for the passing coaches and, if coach passengers required, an early form of ‘fast food’ service. Organisation of this standard required particularly adept managers capable of arranging the change of horses as well as seeing to the needs of transient guests.

Very little is known about Low Wood’s role as a coaching inn, but it becomes clear that it enjoyed a long and successful period as such, and one that continued long after the arrival of the railways.

Low Wood in the early 1800s

The history of Low Wood Inn into the nineteenth century is markedly easier to trace, not least because of the availability of census returns. But the period begins with uncertainty. Wilson's advertisement for a new tenant from 1803 has no recorded resolution, although Berry identifies Joseph Ladyman as the new tenant from 1803 until c.1824. Inconsistent with this is Crosthwaite's map, this time for the year 1809, which still depicts the Low Wood Inn as being the 'Wrights'. If Ladyman was indeed the tenant, then the map is inaccurate; if the map is correct, then the Wrights secured another period as tenants 'for a term of years', although it seems that seven years was the norm. There is, however, no corresponding advertisement in the *Lancaster Gazetteer* for 1809, in anticipation of the tenancy becoming available.

A search of the Quarter Sessions Records of Licensees in Westmorland and their Sureties reveals four references³⁹ to Joseph Ladyman in the context of Low Wood, but none is earlier than 1814. This may be consistent with the Wrights having stayed longer at Low Wood than generally thought, and Ladyman not appearing there until 1809 or later. The entry for 1822 shows 'Jos. Ladyman, Ambleside, innkeeper.' All the earlier entries had specified that Ladyman was at Low Wood; the 1822 entry does not, but states simply 'Ambleside'. In the 1829 Parson and White Directory, the licensee at Low Wood is Thomas Jackson, while Joseph Ladyman is now at the Salutation in Ambleside.⁴⁰ Pigot's 1829 Directory of Westmorland shows Thomas Robinson as the licensee at the Low Wood.⁴¹

In 1818, the Low Wood was visited by the Rev. John Barwis of Langrigg, who provides some insight into costs at the Low Wood and along the turnpike road, by recording in his *Journals*,

'Dined at Low-wood upon a Char and lamb chops and pint of sherry. The weather delightful and the views of Winandermere in the highest perfection. The stillness of the Lake made the reflexion from its surface an exact duplicate of the surrounding scenery. The snow tip the tops of the mountains showed its reflexion from the water as smooth as a mirror. Richard Sharpe, Esq. M.P. seems to be well known at Low-wood, & use made of his name for the purpose of recommending certain walks & stations from which the beauties of the Lake are most discernable. Here trees of every description seem to flourish particularly the larch introduced & planted in hundreds of thousand [sic] by the late Dr. Watson Bishop of Landaff...

<i>Dinner for selves</i>			
<i>Servants</i>			
<i>and Horses with breakfast</i>			
<i>in the morning</i>	1.	19.	2
<i>Servants of Inn</i>		4.	6
<i>Turnpikes</i>		1.	11
<i>Total</i>	2.	5.	7

'Did not leave Low-wood Inn kept by Ladyman a tolerably good house till one in the afternoon.'

In an advertisement in the *Westmorland Advertiser* in 1825⁴², Thomas Robinson indicates that the inn's facilities had recently been improved. Previously they '...were inadequate to his anxious desire to afford every comfort to the numerous visitors.' But he went on to add '...that the Low Wood Inn is now fitted up in the first style of

elegance, having had new stables erected equal to any in the kingdom, with every other corresponding accommodation which can be found in the first houses on the road.’⁴³

Thomas Robinson did not stay at the Low Wood for long; by 1829 Thomas Jackson was the incumbent, and the inn described as a ‘posting inn’. Jackson was at the inn little longer than Robinson, but his tenancy ended for quite different reasons – he fell from an apple tree and was killed. The accident was commemorated by Hartley Coleridge, who seems to have been a frequent visitor to Low Wood, in a poem ‘On the death of Thomas Jackson’.

The 1802 advertisement placed by Christopher Wilson, even allowing for a measure of hyperbole, nevertheless depicts the Low Wood as a thriving business managed by John Wright, who was also the manager of 50 acres of farm land. So, it appears that whatever its size and extent the Low Wood was tolerably successful, but not sufficiently so for the landlord to cease employment as a farmer, although the farm will almost certainly have supplied produce to the hotel. Moreover, the link between inn and farm was to continue for many more years. The census records show the inn/hotel keeper also as a farmer up to and including the 1881 census, while Berry points out that ‘the home farm remained integral with the inn and later hotel until 1944.’⁴⁴

By 1861, the 50 acres offered as a tenancy by Christopher Wilson had increased to 370 acres, and the innkeeper (Robert Logan) also described as ‘Farmer ... employing 8 labourers and 2 boys.’ By 1871, the land holding was down to 70 acres, increasing by 1881 to 100 acres, when the farmer and ‘Hotel keeper’, John Thomas Logan, employed four men. Thereafter, none of the census returns makes any mention either of the farm, or of the hotel keeper also being a farmer. The suggestion is that although the farm remained as the home farm for the estate, managerial links with the hotel had now been severed.

That the tourist trade was gathering pace is evidenced by an increasing number of favourable comments in the press. The Low Wood – that ‘solitary house by the water side’ – was not excluded from this, and some idea of the progress being made can be gained from comment and correspondence appearing in various sources. John Briggs, writing under the pseudonym Leonard Atkins in *Lonsdale Magazine*, commented: ‘... we had previously resolved to spend the night at the Low Wood Inn, near Ambleside; as my uncle had frequently heard the accommodation praised by the Lakers with whom he had conversed.’⁴⁵

During the nineteenth century, the Low Wood was becoming well known and enjoying a good reputation. Briggs commented about an ‘...elegant upper room, furnished with a piano⁴⁶ and organ’, which clearly points to the provision of a residents’ parlour set apart from the comings and goings of the posting house below.

The food at the Low Wood also earned praise from Briggs:⁴⁷ In one of his *Letters*, he writes,

‘You will remember, Tom, the glowing description, which Mr. Benfield gave of the Low Wood puddings when he paid us a visit, on his return from a lake tour. And my uncle, though no epicure,



FIG. 5. The view over Low Wood to the Langdale Pikes
(Source: LWP, no other identification).

thought we might as well taste them, since opportunity was so favourable. You know, brother, that curiosity is inseparable from a tourist; we therefore all agreed to my uncle's proposal, and some Low Wood puddings were ordered in as a part of the supper.⁷

But, as much as good wine, good food and elegant rooms, Low Wood was renowned for its view across the lake to the Langdale Pikes (see Fig. 5). Before, and certainly after, the opening of the turnpike, the route past the Low Wood was the main arterial route through central Lakeland. Hence, it '...has, of necessity, been traversed by virtually every traveller through Central Lakeland in history.'⁴⁸ Commerce and trade would have accounted for many of those travellers, but many visitors were drawn by the view, the setting and the lake: 'We found ourselves here, as it were by magic, transported into a habitable country, which contrasted the desert we had left most agreeably; and an excellent road on the banks of the beautiful lake, brought us back through several charming groves to our pleasant inn at Low-wood.'⁴⁹

Ruskin visited the Low Wood in 1867, but found that the hotel had changed from an earlier visit he made. Writing to his mother on 30 June 1867, he says, '...This place is in *view* quite unchanged, but the Inn is rebuilt—and as full of not fashionable—but *rich* people flaunting about...It is all painful and saddening to me.' A few days later he had moved to Bowness, and wrote again to his mother saying that 'Low Wood was too noisy and fashionable—(Manchester fashion) for me.'⁵⁰

John Stuart Mill stopped for lunch at the Low Wood in 1831, and made notes on the view of the lake, ‘...alternately of a deep lead colour; a beautiful iron grey; a lightish blue; a glittering white sparkling with the rays of the sun...’.⁵¹

The Low Wood after the arrival of the railway

Thomas Jackson’s fatal fall from an apple tree in 1845 brought to the Low Wood, Robert Bruce Aeneas Logan, the first of a long line of Logans to manage the inn, a succession that continued until 1941. The year also marked the death of owner Christopher Wilson, from whom the hotel passed to his fifth son, James Christopher Wilson. The longevity of the Logan years, 96 in all, was surpassed only by the Wilson ownership, which was to continue for a further 113 years, until 1958, when the freehold was acquired by Norman Buckley.

All that is known about Robert Logan is that he was involved with coaching in Scotland, and is described as ‘Clerk on the “Comet”’.⁵² Whether Logan’s arrival at Low Wood was as a result of good planning or chance is unclear. Two years after his arrival, the Kendal to Windermere railway opened. There had been much publicity and advance administration, not least in the form of a campaign to build a branch line from Oxenholme to Kendal, and then to Low Wood, and Logan may have been astute enough to recognise the possibilities for a hotel in such a commanding position as the Low Wood. But, originally intended to have its terminus at Low Wood,⁵³ the failure of the railway to reach so far because of engineering difficulties must have been a source of grievance for Robert Logan.

That Logan overcame any disappointment is prompted by the 1851 census return which reveals that, four years after the opening of the railway, he was still employing an ostler, a post boy and a blacksmith. At this stage, Ambleside was being served both by steamer and by the Keswick and Windermere coach operated by William Rigg, who also managed the Keswick Hotel and, later, the Grange Hotel at Grange-over-Sands. The coach service would unavoidably run past the Low Wood, which may have lost out on the potential of being an end-of-railroad hotel, and, presumably any ‘normal’ coach trade that passed its doors, but have gained from the passage of Riggs’ coaches.

It is difficult to quantify the volume of traffic that passed by the Low Wood; few diaries, guide books and directories of the period give specific information of this nature, nor is there any useful information among the Low Wood papers. What available figures do reveal is a gradual increase in coaching traffic, before and certainly after, the arrival of the railway at Windermere, most if not all of which must have passed the Low Wood doors.

With the arrival of the railway the economic influences for tourism growth were intensified. In 1855, some 21,480 carriages passed and re-passed the nearby Troutbeck Bridge conveying visitors from Riggs’ Windermere Hotel and those of other hoteliers in the new town who began operating their own coaching services.⁵⁴ Little of this would have generated profit-earning overnight stays for the Low Wood, but the demand for transient services, notably refreshment, alongside the customary coaching

requirements, must have proven a significant element in the financial accountancy of the hotel.

The main beneficiaries of the railways were the hotels close to the railhead, and the growth of settlements more distant, like Ambleside, was slow in comparison.⁵⁵ Whether the benefits extended throughout the year, however, is doubtful, in spite of a generous staffing of hotels. Low Wood at the time of the 1841 census (taken on 12 June) records, in addition to the innkeeper and his family, some eight female servants, seven male servants and 16 other guests or visitors, plus a child of five years (born in Malta) and possibly the daughter of one of the male servants. Not all of the servants may necessarily have been employed by the Low Wood; some may have been servants of guests. But the details of the census are insufficient to be certain.

An ostler and post boy were still at the Low Wood in 1861, although by then the blacksmith seems to have gone. Ten years later, the ostler, too, is absent from the census return, although the post boy is still listed among seven male servants and twelve female servants. As elsewhere, the Low Wood census returns show only the domiciled household, and an accurate picture of staffing levels requires account to be taken of locally-resident employees who came to the hotel on a daily basis.

In summary, the census returns for Low Wood reveal a consistently high number of servants who were retained 'out of season' (Table 2):

TABLE 2: Summary of census returns for Low Wood Inn/Hotel, 1841-1911.

Status	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Family	4	5	3	6	2	5	5	2
Servants	15	15	20	19	17	24	25	22
Guests	16	2	2	1	0	7	0	3
Other	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The significant disparity between the number of guests at the Low Wood in 1841 compared with later years is because in 1841 the census was taken on 6 June;⁵⁶ but in subsequent census years it was taken either late in March or early April. The period of the census returns covers an era that both pre-dates the Windermere railway and continues into the twentieth century, when the Low Wood was experiencing considerable prosperity. But these figures can be misleading. From 1871 onwards, no farm servants are included in the census returns, and there remains no indication of the numbers of daily staff employed at the hotel. Adjusted figures to exclude those engaged on farming activity show (Table 3):

TABLE 3: Summary of census returns for Low Wood Inn/Hotel, 1841-1901, adjusted to show employees engaged solely on hotel activities [NOTE: * The census returns for 1841 do not give detailed information about the nature of employment.]

Status	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Family	*	4	3	6	2	5	5	2
Servants	*	10	14	19	17	24	25	22

If the 150 per cent increase in resident staffing levels between 1851 and 1901 are matched by commensurate increases in day staff, it is to be supposed that trade increased likewise during this period.

What the census returns reveal is that as social mobility across Britain developed, the catchment area of staff employed at the Low Wood remained resolutely parochial. In 1851, of ten hotel servants, two came from Yorkshire. In 1861 there were 13 local-born employees, and just one from Yorkshire. From 1871 onwards, the trend widens little: 15 local-born employees compared with three from Yorkshire and one from Ireland. In 1881, twelve local-born and five non-local, yet again including one from Ireland, where the Logans appear to have had family connections. The 1891 census reflects a much wider spread with 13 local-born employees, but eleven others from such diverse places as Swansea, Ireland, Lincolnshire, Glasgow, Suffolk and London. The census for 1901 shows 14 local-born employees working alongside one from Germany⁵⁷, three from Ireland, two from Staffordshire and others from Hereford, Yorkshire, Sheffield and Manchester. By 1911, however, the trend appears to have reversed: 20 were born with the area of present-day Cumbria, supported only by one from Hereford and one from Derbyshire.

Robert Logan may have missed out on the railway, but he did see steam of a different kind in the form of the first steamboat passenger service on the lake, the 'Lady of the Lake', which heralded the service between Lakeside, Bowness, Low Wood and Ambleside in 1845. Another boat, the 'Lord of the Isles' came along the next year, but neither were to enjoy a monopoly for long. Within two years, the rival Windermere Iron Steamboat Company had commissioned two steel-hulled steam paddlers that were assembled at Holbeck Point and the first, the 'Fire Fly', launched at Low Wood in August 1849. A sister boat, the 'Dragon Fly' was launched the next year, having similarly been assembled at Low Wood.

The Low Wood was a regular stopping point for the steamers, and guests at the hotel appear to have appreciated the novel mode of arrival. The noted American writer Nathaniel Hawthorne came in 1850 by such means and wrote: 'On Saturday, we left Newby Bridge, and came by steamboat up Windermere Lake to Lowwood Hotel, where we now are ... As we approached the head of the lake, the congregation of great hills in the distance became very striking.'⁵⁸

What is informative about Hawthorne's comments is his use of the term 'hotel'. Although it is not certain that Robert Logan had at this time adopted the style of

'hotel', or whether this was simply an Americanism, the census returns for 1851 and 1861 both describe Low Wood as a 'Hotel', although Logan is still described as 'Innkeeper'. Not until 1871 does the tenant become listed as 'Hotelkeeper'. The Mannex Directory for 1851 lists Low Wood as a 'hotel'.⁵⁹ It seems probable, therefore, that Robert Logan restyled the Low Wood as a hotel between 1845 and 1851, possibly to form an association with the Royal and Crown hotels in nearby Bowness, which were using the term at the time of the 1841 census, and the new Windermere 'Hotel' opened in May 1847, but certainly in keeping with vogue as the term 'hotel' became more fashionable.

The New Low Wood Hotel

The significant increase in coaching traffic, mainly tourist, that passed the door of Low Wood following the arrival of the railway at Windermere may well have been an incentive to invest further in the hotel that James Christopher Wilson needed. Certainly his shrewd business sense was not misplaced. If the older inn, depicted in Thomas Allom's engraving, was already seeing the benefit of the railway, then the new Low Wood began in earnest to consolidate its reputation as one of the leading hotels in Lakeland, and more than capable of meeting Victorian expectations.⁶⁰

Opened in 1859, the new hotel was the largest and grandest Lakeland hotel of its day, the last word in Victorian luxury, comprising 36 bedrooms, offering accommodation for 72 overnight guests along with gracious and lavishly equipped public rooms, billiards room, lakeside gardens, summer houses, boat houses, jetties, bowling green, pleasure boats and post-chaises for excursions. There is a suggestion that towards the end of the nineteenth century the hotel, making the most of its standing as a coaching inn, sent coaches to meet clients arriving by train at Windermere.⁶¹

Quite what led to the rebuilding of the Low Wood is unrecorded. There are oral traditions that the old hotel succumbed to an extensive fire at this time, but there is no evidence to sustain this view. In the Notes to Dearden's edited version of Ruskin's *Ileriad* there is reference to an 1855 'engraving by W. Banks [which] shows that the inn had been much enlarged and the central part facing the lake was then three-storeyed.' He goes on to add, 'This central part of the hotel was subsequently destroyed by fire and was rebuilt in 1859.' There is, however, no reference for this, and it may be that Dearden was merely repeating the oral history of a fire.

During alterations in 1989, three charred ceiling beams on the ground floor of the hotel were exposed, suggesting a fire at some time. But for these to have originated in the old hotel means accepting that when it was entirely demolished, the new hotel recycled some of the timbers and building material. Such a step displays a degree of frugality inconsistent with the plans of opulence and new design. Among the Low Wood Papers is correspondence with (William) Bruce Logan who mentions a small fire '...around 1890 – when my father was a small boy at the hotel.'⁶² This is the more likely scenario, namely that there was a fire in the new hotel.

Part of the 'up-market' nature of the hotel was the use of gas lighting. The 1871 and 1881 census returns show a resident 'Gas man' and 'Gasmaker' respectively, indicating that the hotel had installed an independent gas-making plant that required the constant availability of a specialist gas engineer.

By the end of the nineteenth century the Low Wood's scenic setting, refinement, seclusion and privacy earned the hotel a reputation as a honeymoon destination. Among the Low Wood Papers is a letter and attachment from Dr C.J. Matthews, then Head of Chemistry at the British School of Brussels, whose great-great-grandfather had stayed at the Low Wood in September 1840, while on honeymoon, and had kept a diary of his journey. He travelled from Kendal to the '...Low Wood Inn on the Banks of Windermere' which he felt was a '...quite nice little place with lovely view of the lake.' The next day, the couple visited Rydal where they had a '...glimpse of Wordsworth as he drove past.' Having moved on to Ambleside, where they stayed at the Salutation, he later added the comment, 'Low Wood Better Inn than Salutation – & a little cheaper, but not quite so convenient for some of the excursions. Wine good at Low Wood. Attendance very bad at Salutation & cookery very indifferent.'⁶³

Marital relationships were to be an on-going feature of the Low Wood. In the late 1870s, many of the Lakeland hotels, including the Low Wood, collaborated to form the Lake District Hotels Association⁶⁴ to advertise the attractions of the hotels on a national basis. But around this time, two sons of Robert Logan married two daughters of Richard Rigg: John Thomas, the eldest son of Robert Logan first married Mary Rigg, and then William Bruce Logan, John's younger brother, married Sarah Rigg, Mary's sister. Both brothers were of the Low Wood 'School of Hotel Management', and when their father retired in 1878, John and Mary assumed the Low Wood lease, while William and Sarah acquired the tenancy of the Ferry Inn on the Lancashire side of Windermere. The Logan training regime at the Low Wood was clearly a respected one: John Barrow, who in 1861 was the landlord of the Sun Hotel at Pooley Bridge, was pleased to advertise the fact that he was for 'Many years with Mr. Logan, Low Wood Hotel, Windermere.'⁶⁵ John Logan, who had co-operated with Stanley Weyman on his novel,⁶⁶ died in 1909, and for the first time the Low Wood had a woman at the helm, when his widow Mary took over the tenancy. Assisted by her son, Robert, Mary Logan managed the hotel until 1920, when Robert took over. At this time the Low Wood was still setting standards of excellence, advertising 'Motors Cars for Hire', and as many as eleven 'Excursions and Drives from the Hotel' (Fig. 7).

The dates of the Low Wood tariff cards are uncertain. There is a note in the Low Wood Papers from Cumbrian publisher Michael Moon, who considered that the first was c.1875. The second of these is later, but contains one small detail which highlights, once more, the enterprise and initiative that has hallmarked the development of the hotel over the years – a telephone number, one of the first in Ambleside.⁶⁷

Low Wood in a social context

The enterprising band of Lakeland innkeepers has long recognised the need to provide some form of 'entertainment' for their guests. As long ago as 1774, Hutchinson

THE ENGLISH LAKES.

LOGAN'S

Low-wood Hotel,

WINDERMERE.

LOW-WOOD HOTEL, one of the oldest-established of the Lake Hotels, is pleasantly situated on the banks of Windermere, within fifty yards of the Lake; is centrally situated for making Excursions, and of easy access from all parts of the district. The Steamboat Landing is directly opposite the door, and Steamers call to land and take up passengers every trip; and Coaches and Omnibuses to the Railway Terminus attend the arrival and departure of every train.

CARRIAGES, PLEASURE BOATS, &c.
Handsome Drawing & Dining Rooms.

THE HOTEL TERMS.

Substantial Breakfast, 2s. to 3s. 6d.; Dinner, 3s. 6d. to 5s. 6d.; Tea, 2s. 6d. to 3s. 6d.; Plain Tea, 1s. 6d.; Bedrooms, 2s. 6d. to 4s. 6d.; Sitting Rooms, 4s. 6d. to 7s.; and attendance, 1s. 6d. per day each.

Visitors leaving the Hotel are desired to give notice as early in the day as possible.

TABLE D'HOTE DAILY.

Parties preferring to dine in their own Rooms on Sundays, are requested to do so before 6-9 p.m.

Coach or Char-a-bancs leaves the Hotel Daily at 10 a.m. for Keswick, Ullswater, Coniston, or Langdales.

POST OFFICE REGULATIONS.

Letters arrive at the Hotel from North and South at 7-30 in the Morning, and 3-15 in the Afternoon. Despatched to North, Kendal, and Liverpool at 11-40 a.m., and to all parts at 7-30 p.m.

EXCURSIONS AND DRIVES FROM THE HOTEL.

DAY EXCURSIONS.

- 1.—From Low-wood by Waterhead, Brathay, and Tarn Hows, to Coniston, returning by way of Hawkshead and Wray Castle; or by Esthwaite Lake, the Ferry, and Bowness. (26 miles).
- 2.—By Waterhead, Clappersgate, Brathay, Colwith, Blea Tarn, Wall End, Mill Beck, Dungeon Ghyll, Elterwater, and back to Low-wood. (26 miles).
- 3.—By Clappersgate, Brathay Church, Loughrigg Tarn, Red Bank, Grasmere Lake and Church, the graves of Wordsworth, Hartley, Coleridge, &c.; thence to Easdale; returning by Nab Cottage (once the residence of Hartley Coleridge), Rydal Hall, Wordsworth's residence at Rydal Mount; the residence of the late Miss Martineau, Ambleside, and back to Low-wood. (18 miles).
- 4.—By Briery Close, Troutbeck Church and Valley, Kirkstone Pass, the highest house in England, Brothers' Water, Patterdale, Ullswater, and back by way of Ambleside. (25 miles).
- 5.—**DRIVE ROUND WINDERMERE.**—By Bowness and the east side of Windermere to Newby Bridge, thence up the west side to the Ferry, by Wray Castle, Clappersgate, Waterhead, and back to Low-wood. (32 miles). Or after Newby Bridge by west side of Esthwaite Water, Hawkshead, &c., and back to Lowwood. (32 miles).
- 6.—From Low-wood, through Ambleside, Rydal, and Grasmere, over Dunmail Raise, past Wythburn Church, along the foot of Helvellyn, and the banks of Thirlmere, to Keswick, returning by the Vale of St. John. (40 miles).
- 7.—**GRANGE-OVER-SANDS.**—By Hammerbank, Bowness, the eastern side of Windermere, and Cartmel Priory Church, returning by Lindal and the Vale of Crosthwaite. (36 miles).

SHORT DRIVES.

- 8.—By Miller Ground, Bowness, the Railway Terminus, along the Vale of Troutbeck, by Briery Close, and back to Low-wood. (13 miles).
- 9.—Up the Vale of Troutbeck to top of Kirkstone, where is the highest inhabited house in England, returning by Ambleside. The Waterfalls of Stock Ghyll may also be visited in this excursion.
- 10.—By Clappersgate to Tarn Hows, from whence is a splendid view of Coniston Lake, returning by Tilberthwaite, Oxentell, and Skelwith Bridge.
- 11.—Windermere, Bannerizg, to Ings, Moor How, through the Vale of Troutbeck, to Cook's House, and back to Low-wood. (12 miles).

Fig. 6. Tariff card from the Low Wood Hotel, date uncertain but possibly c.1875. (Source: LWP)

THE ENGLISH LAKES.

LOGAN'S

LOWWOOD HOTEL,

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LOW-WOOD HOTEL, one of the oldest-established of the Lake Hotels, is pleasantly situated on the banks of Windermere, within fifty yards of the Lake; is centrally situated for making Excursions, and of easy access from all parts of the district. The Steamboat Landing is directly opposite the door, and Steamers call to land and take up passengers every trip; and Coaches and Motor Omnibuses to the Railway Terminus attend the arrival and departure of all trains.

PLEASURE BOATS, CROQUET LAWN,
HANDSOME DRAWING AND DINING ROOMS.

TABLE D'HOTE TERMS.

	each	per day.
Breakfast at 9 a.m. ...	3/0	Double Bedrooms with
Lunch, 1 p.m. till 4 p.m. ...	3/6	Dressing Room from 8/6 to 10/6
Dinner, 7-45 p.m. ...	5/0	Bedrooms with two
Afternoon Tea ...	1/0	Beds 6/6 to 0/6
Single Bedrooms from 3/6 to 4/6		Sitting Rooms 6/- to 10/6
Double Bedrooms .. 5/6 to 8/6		Services' Board & Bedroom 7/6

Telephone No. 11, Ambleside. Telegrams: Lowwood, Ambleside.
Postal Address, Lowwood, Windermere.

POST OFFICE REGULATIONS.

Letters arrive at the Hotel from the North and South at 7-10 in the morning, and 3-15 in the afternoon. Despatched to North, Kendal, and Liverpool at 9-40 a.m., and to all parts at 7-30 p.m.

MOTOR GARAGE—MOTOR CARS FOR HIRE.

Excursions and Drives from the Hotel.

DAY EXCURSIONS.

- 1.—From Lowwood by Waterhead, Brathay, and Tarn Hows, to Coniston, returning by way of Hawkshead and Wray Castle; or by Esthwaite Lake, the Ferry and Bowness.—26 miles.
- 2.—By Waterhead, Clappersgate, Brathay, Colwith, Blea Tarn, Wall End, Mill Beck, Dungeon Ghyll, Elterwater, and back to Lowwood.—26 miles.
- 3.—By Clappersgate, Brathay Church, Loughrigg Tarn, Red Bank, Grasmere Lake and Church, the graves of Wordsworth, Hartley Coleridge, &c.; thence to Easdale; returning to Nab Cottage [once the residence of Hartley Coleridge], Rydal Hall, Wordsworth's residence at Rydal Mount; the residence of the late Miss Martineau, Ambleside, and back to Lowwood.—18 miles.
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- 11.—Windermere, Bannerizg, to Ings, Moor How, through the Vale of Troutbeck, to Cook's House, back to Lowwood.—12 miles.

Fig. 7. Tariff card from the Low Wood Hotel, date uncertain. (Source: LWP)

described, in a much-quoted passage, the echoes of cannon being fired on Ullswater for the amusement of tourists, a sound that ‘re-echoed seven times distinctly’.⁶⁸ Evidently, by the time of Hutchinson’s visit there was already an established trade in amusing visitors in this way. The romantic and sublime effects of ‘Echo’ were widely encouraged, at first by the resident landowners, and then as a tourist attraction.⁶⁹ The Low Wood was no exception, and it also had cannon ‘...to gratify visitors with the surprising reverberations of sound that are produced amongst the mountains by its discharge.’⁷⁰ Housman, too, reported that a small cannon was kept at the Low Wood ‘...for the purpose of gratifying the curious in exciting those surprising echoes for which this vale is so remarkable.’^{71 72}

But the speciality of Low Wood was the famous Windermere Autumn Regatta, which became and remained a popular annual event throughout the nineteenth century. The Ferry House Inn was the base for the regatta at the west side of the lake, and the Low Wood for the north-eastern side. The festivities spread over a period of days.

Writing in 1820, John Briggs (alias ‘Leonard Atkins’) says, ‘The only rational part of this aquatic amusement consists in a race of barges on the water—this you would naturally expect. But you would scarcely suppose that all the fashion and beauty in the country, would be invited to witness the children’s play which constitutes the principal part of a Windermere Regatta.’

In 1831, the *Westmorland Gazette* reports:

‘The Regatta – the programme of the Regatta, at the Low Wood Inn, Windermere, on Tuesday next is out, and rich in variety; the rowing and sailing matches are numerous, besides which, the amusements of the day will be diversified by a trail hunt, a foot race, and we hope a good muster of the athletae in the ring (not pugilistic).’⁷³

What is not clear from existing documents is how frequently the regatta was held at Low Wood. Among the papers in the Cumbria Record Office (Kendal) is a typed document – ‘Ambleside before 1854’⁷⁴ – compiled in May 1954. The document mentions that: ‘Early in the nineteenth century regattas were held on Windermere, and were extremely fashionable occasions; at least two of these, in 1809 and 1810, were at Ambleside end of the lake but more commonly they were at Bowness or the Ferry.’

But the regatta was not the only ‘entertainment’ hosted by the Low Wood. It was not unusual for wrestling matches to be staged, and for balls to be held at the inn (see poster dated 1839: Fig. 8). There is a suggestion among the Low Wood Papers that a circular mound at the rear of the present day hotel is the possible site of a cock-fighting pit, although there is no evidence to substantiate this.

A Summary of the Low Wood’s history

In summary, the most probable scenario (only those sections underlined are documented) concerning the development of the ‘Low Wood’ is:

WRESTLING
 WILL TAKE PLACE
On Tuesday Morning, September 17th,
AT LOW-WOOD INN,
Windermere,
 WHEN
Twenty Pounds
 AND
TWO HANDSOME BELTS
 WILL BE WRESTLED FOR.
 TO COMMENCE PRECISELY AT TEN O'CLOCK.

Stewards, } JAMES BRANCKER, Esq.
 GEORGE WARDEN, Esq.
 THOMAS DAWSON, Esq.

N.B. The distribution of the Prizes and the arrangement of all Disputes to be settled by the Stewards, or those they may appoint.

A BALL
 WILL TAKE PLACE
AT LOW-WOOD INN,
On the Evening of WEDNESDAY, September the 18th,
DANCING to commence at NINE O'CLOCK.
 Lady Patroness, Mrs. DAWSON, Allan Bank.

Stewards, } JAMES BRANCKER, Esq.
 GEORGE WARDEN, Esq.
 THOMAS DAWSON, Esq.

TICKETS to be had at the Low Wood Inn, and at the Post-Office, Ambleside.
Low-Wood, Sept. 6, 1839.

HUDSON & NICHOLSON, PRINTERS, KENDAL.

FIG. 8. Poster advertising wrestling and a ball to be held at the Low Wood Inn.

- from a date pre-1715 a farmstead existed at Low Wood Bay; within a decade it was being used for the business of a 'carrier';
- the main pre-turnpike route between Kendal and Ambleside followed the course of the Roman road, sections of which, at this period, were in use as a packhorse trail;
- an inn existed at Low Skelghyll, serving the packhorse trade; this inn may have been called 'The Packhorse Inn', but no record of it remains. Berry is clear that 'The old "Pack Horse Inn" was at Low Skelghyll on the old Roman packhorse highway',⁷⁵ but less than clear six pages later when he refers to 'The old farm cum Champens rest at Low Wood, which developed into the original "Pack Horse Inn"...'; this is a clear suggestion that the pre-1715 farm later became an inn serving the packhorse trade;

- the business of carrier at the farmstead on Low Wood Bay, which was said to be in the process of being enlarged around the year 1718, could not have been commercially successful without a link to Ambleside that was more direct than a one-mile climb in an easterly direction to join the packhorse trail, and that such a link, a lane wider than a packhorse trail, took a line northwards roughly parallel with the lake shore to Waterhead – in other words, a route capable of taking waggons existed along the future course of the 1762 turnpike;
- the Low Skelghyll inn (if it ever existed⁷⁶) was moved to Low Wood, and named the Holbeck Inn, being renamed the ‘Low Wood Inn’ not later than 1775;
- Around 1782, the Low Wood became a posting house. It is still listed as such in the 1855 Mannex Directory;
- in the early part of the nineteenth century the Low Wood is improved, and in 1809 saw the arrival of the first of the Logan family;
- the old hotel is demolished and a new hotel opened in 1859. At this time, it changes its description to ‘hotel’.

Conclusion

The story of the Low Wood Hotel is remarkable; it spans 300 years of Lakeland history, witnessing the arrival of turnpikes, coaches, tourists and the railways. At each significant step in this evolution, the Low Wood has responded positively, and, as a result, moved from strength to strength. There is no question that strong-willed and astute businessmen have long been associated with the Low Wood, and invested in the hotel and its re-development, and possibly in the development of the eighteenth-century turnpike. Principal among these were the Wilson family, the owners of the hotel for over 100 years, and the Logan family, who were tenants from 1845 until 1941.

Arising from yeoman and/or peasant stock, the hotel is a model for hotel development that is scarcely matched elsewhere in Lakeland, in harmony with, and responsive to, the changes of time. Few hotels have enjoyed the good fortune of a commanding setting and location, the early construction of one of Lakeland’s principal arterial thoroughfares, the benefits of a coaching and posting inn, and the goodwill (latterly through marriage) of hotels at the nearby railhead. But at each new development, the Low Wood has responded (and continues to do so into the twenty-first century).

This study has revealed a number of progressive stages, some if not all of which will have been appropriate to other Lakeland hotels, especially those in rural areas or along the main thoroughfares. Like the Low Wood, several inns derived from a farming or peasant community and continued for many years to operate the two businesses – that of farming and inn-keeping – in parallel, the Royal Oak Hotel at Rosthwaite in Borrowdale, the Pheasant Inn, Bassenthwaite, and the Travellers’ Rest at Grasmere, for example, have very similar pedigrees in this regard. This farming/hostelry link is

not, of course, evident in urban areas, although a number of town- and village-centre inns became coaching and posting inns, like the Salutation in Ambleside and the Horse and Farrier in Threlkeld.

Few Lakeland hotels, however, had the opportunity to respond to the benefits of railway travel as the Low Wood did. The Low Wood was not a ‘railway hotel’, in the sense of the Windermere Hotel, the Keswick Hotel and the Grange Hotel, but its position along the main turnpike from the south, and its ability to provide for transient visitors brought from the railhead has parallels along the Windermere to Keswick corridor, and that which ran from Penrith, via Keswick to Cockermouth.

What is significant about the Low Wood, a feature that is common to all of the seventeenth and early eighteenth inns that survive today, is an ability to adapt and improve to meet the needs and expectations of visitors. Increasing staffing levels, and a raising of standards and staff skills by drawing employees from beyond the immediate catchment area have parallels across Lakeland.

One of the themes which this study addresses is the relative economic success of inns and hotels according to how they are managed. Urry suggests that what he describes as ‘owner controllers’ appear best able to survive in the hotel industry.⁷⁷ Such an arrangement is a hallmark of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and is true today of the Low Wood. But throughout the period of this study, the owner – for many years the Wilson family – had no direct involvement in the management of the Low Wood, leaving this responsibility to a succession of tenants.⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the Low Wood was, and remained, successful. Urry’s analogies, however, refer to a period much later than that of this study, and perhaps a category of ‘tenant-controller’, where the tenant has a financial obligation to be successful and full managerial control, is not too far removed from that of ‘owner-controller’.

Terry Marsh, *countrymatters@gmail.com*

Notes and references

- ¹ T. Marsh, ‘Rooms with a View: The development of tourist accommodation in the central Lake District, 1770-1914’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Lancaster, 2013).
- ² The history of the Low Wood Hotel is partially documented by Michael Berry OBE, who owned and ran the hotel from 1974 until his death in 2004, in conjunction with the late Reid Yuen, founder of the Ambleside Heritage Centre and noted local historian. *A Sunlit, Intimate Gift...Low Wood on Windermere: Three Hundred Years of Lakeland History* was published as a tribute to the tri-centenary of the Low Wood Hotel, 1702-2002. In the footnotes that follow, its use is identified by ‘SIG’. Research for this article is based partially on this publication, but primarily on a collection of documents and miscellaneous papers housed at the Low Wood Hotel, and collectively referred to as the Low Wood Papers (LWP).
- ³ Andrews and Andrews conducted research in the early 1990s into the route of this section of the Roman road, and concluded that a significant section of discernible road lay along the course of a packhorse route known as Skelghyll Lane, supplanted on the ancient Roman highway. Andrews, J.S. and J.A. ‘A Roman Road from Kendal to Ambleside: A Field Survey Part 2: Broadgate to Ambleside’ CW2, 92 (1992) XCII (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1992).
- ⁴ M. Berry and R. Yuen, *A Sunlit, Intimate Gift...*(English Lakes Hotels Ltd., 2002), xi.
- ⁵ National Archive WO 30/48: ‘Abstract of ... all the Inns, Alehouses &c. in England with their Stable Rooms and Bedding, 1686.
- ⁶ References such as this attributed to M. Berry, refer to information expressed in *A Sunlit, Intimate Gift*.

7. Quoted in SIG, 2, although the actual parish registers contain references only to the baptism of Mary, daughter of George Birkett of Low Wood on 14 September 1718, and to the death of William Grigge of Low-wood, a Slayter in June 7th, 1719. There is no reference to the farm being extended.
8. Letter in LWP, dated 28 November 1999 from M. Davies-Shiel to M. Berry.
9. SIG, 62.
10. CAS(K).WD TE 1716 IV 70.
11. CAS(K).WD TE 1716 IV 6.
12. SIG, 62.
13. J. Clarke, *A Survey of the Lakes of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire* (London: self-published, first edition, 1787); maps between pp 114 and 115. These maps are of doubtful reliability since they show the turnpike gate, post 1762, but Mr Parkett, who died c.1715, as the Low Wood farmer.
14. There is no evidence to support this name; Low Skelghyll also lies on Hol Beck, and there is no reason to suppose that an inn there might not also be called Holbeck Inn.
15. Article about Low Wood attached to letter from Reid Yuen to Michael Berry, 13th March 1989, in the 'Low Wood Papers' [LWP].
16. SIG, 2.
17. Letter in LWP, dated 28 November 1999 from Michael Davies-Shiel to Michael Berry.
18. But that was not to happen for another 42 years: statutory authority to set up a Turnpike Trust to develop and maintain the lakeside road past Low Wood was given in 1760, and the road built in 1762.
19. Quoted in LWP.
20. Coaches appeared around Lancaster in 1760, and are unlikely to have penetrated as far as Ambleside before the turnpike was completed.
21. CAS(K):WD TE/Bound manuscripts, 1775 XVI 260 and 1776 B 246.
22. SIG, 62.
23. CAS(K).WDRC/8/289.
24. SIG, 10.
25. Quoted in LWP Historical Notes, 13.
26. SIG, 10.
27. Yuen, LWP.
28. SIG, 11.
29. SIG, 11.
30. W. Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes* Fifth edition, 1835 (Oxford, 1906), 6. See also 'A Tour in the Lakes (1816)' in W. Knight, *Prose Writings of Wordsworth* (London: Walter Scott Ltd., n.d.) 107, in which the Low Wood is simply described as '...an excellent Inn.'
31. J. Barker, *Wordsworth: A Life* (London, 2000), 361.
32. *Ibid.*, 505.
33. P. Barfoot, *Universal British Directory of Trade and Commerce* (London, 1790) – entry for Ambleside, quoted in SIG, 8.
34. J. Clarke, *A Survey of the Lakes of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire* (London, 1789), 133.
35. A. Walker, *Remarks made in a Tour from London to the Lakes of Westmoreland and Cumberland in the summer of 1741*. (London, 1792), 67.
36. S. Murray, *A companion, and useful guide to the beauties of Scotland, to the lakes of Westmoreland, Cumberland, and Lancashire; and to the curiosities in the district of Craven, in ... Yorkshire. To which is added, a more particular description of Scotland, especially ... the highlands. ...* (London, 1799).
37. L.A. Williams, *Road Transport in Cumbria in the Nineteenth Century*. (London, 1975).
38. LWP Historical Notes. Williams, *Road Transport in Cumbria*. B.P. Hindle, *Roads and Trackways of the Lake District*.
39. 10 September 1814, 16 September 1815, 15 September 1821 and 16 September 1822. The records are incomplete, but the regularity of the entries points to the need to 'renew' the licence as being an annual requirement, although the final entry, for 1822, shows the date as [1822]-1825. Perhaps at this stage the licence was renewed for three years.
40. Parson and White. *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the Counties of Cumberland and Westmorland with that part of the Lake District in Lancashire, forming the Lordships of Furness and Cartmel, 1829*. (Leeds: Parson and White, 1829; facsimile reproduction, Michael Moon, Whitehaven, 1984), 618-9.
41. Berry takes the view that Joseph Ladyman moved to the Salutation c.1824, although Yuen's 'Historical Notes' gives the date 1822.

42. *Westmorland Advertiser*, 28 May 1825.
43. Quoted in the Notes to Ruskin John. *Ileriad, or Three Weeks among the Lakes*, James S. Dearden (ed.) (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Frank Graham, 1969), 44.
44. SIG, 12.
45. 'Atkins, Leonard' (John Briggs). *Letter from the Lakes* in *The Lonsdale Magazine*, No. 25, Vol. 2, (December 1821), 443.
46. In the index to Letter V of *Letters from the Lakes* as contained in *The Remains of John Briggs* (see below), the piano is described as 'Mrs Ladyman's Piano.' The letter was written in August 1820, when the Ladyman's were evidently in residence as landlords of the Low Wood.
47. *The Remains of John Briggs containing Letters from the Lakes* (published for the benefit of his widow and children: Kirkby Lonsdale, 1825), 69-70.
48. LWP: Historical Notes, 2.
49. H. Skrine, *Three successive tours in the North of England, and great part of Scotland. Interspersed with descriptions of the scenes they presented, and occasional observations on the state of society and the manners and customs of the people.* (London: W. Bulmer, 1795), quoted in SIG, 69.
50. Quoted in the Notes to Ruskin John. *Iteriad, or Three Weeks among the Lakes*, J.S. Dearden (ed.), 45.
51. Quoted in G. Lindop, *A Literary Guide to the Lake District.* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1994), 44.
52. LWP Historical Notes, 10. It is not clear what the 'Comet' is. Berry notes that in the early 1800s there had been a fast coach from London to Brighton that went under the name of 'The Comet'.
53. D. Joy, *A Regional History of the Railways of Great Britain* Volume 14: The Lake Counties: Newton Abbot (1983), 195.
54. L.A. Williams, 'The development of road transport in Cumberland, Westmoreland and the Furness district of Lancashire' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 1967), 268. (Copy available in CRO.)
55. J.D. Marshall and J.K. Walton, *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the mid-twentieth century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 180.
56. Marshall (*Old Lakeland*, 173) gives the date of the 1841 census as 12 June.
57. The Census Record actually says Cracaw, Germany. It is not clear whether this is the village of Krakow on the small German island in the Baltic Sea, which has always been part of Germany, or (more likely) the city state of Krakow, currently part of Poland, and which in 1867, the time when this Low Wood servant was born, was within the Austrian empire as part of the 1846 incorporation of the Republic of Kraków.
58. Quoted in SIG, 24.
59. Mannex and Co. *History, Topography, and Directory of Westmorland* (Beverly: printed for the authors, 1851, facsimile reproduction, (Whitehaven, 1978), 266.
60. SIG, 25.
61. SIG, 29.
62. LWP: Historical Notes, 14.
63. Letter and photocopy extracts from diary in LWP from Dr C.J. Matthews, with incomplete date – 24th January 1–.
64. See Chapter 6.
65. Morris, Harrison and Co., *Commercial Directory and Gazetteer of Cumberland* (Nottingham: printed for the proprietors, 1861), endpapers.
66. *Starvecrow Farm.* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1905).
67. It is not clear at what date telephones were first brought into use in Ambleside; the Lancaster telephone exchange opened in 1885 with just three lines, leading to the probability that telephones further afield appeared some years later. *Lancaster Observer* 19 May 1893.
68. W. Hutchinson (1774), *An Excursion to the Lakes, In Westmorland and Cumberland, August 1773* (London, 1774).
69. P. Bicknell, *The Picturesque Scenery of the Lake District 1752-1955: Observations on a book collection* (Cambridge, 1987), 20.
70. T. Rose, (illus. Allom, Thomas) *Westmorland, Cumberland, Durham & Northumberland* (London: Fisher, 1832).
71. J. Housman, *A Descriptive Tour and Guide to the Lakes, Caves, Mountains and other Natural Curiosities in Cumberland, Westmoreland, Lancashire and a part of the West Riding of Yorkshire* (Carlisle: n.p., 3rd edition, 1808), 232.

72. For some years the Low Wood cannon was silent, but in recent years has seen active service from the end of the jetty opposite the hotel, once again for the amusement of tourists. *Pers. Comm.* Tim Berry, Low Wood Hotel, 17 December 2007 and 15 January 2008.
73. *Westmorland Gazette*, 23 July 1831.
74. CAS(K).WD/BLT/134/6.
75. SIG, 2.
76. There is no reason to suggest that it did not exist, and much logic to it having existed, it being unlikely that overnight packhorse trains would be especially welcome in Ambleside even in the late seventeenth century. It makes more sense to keep noisy, drunken and quarrelsome jagers, chapmen and their mules at some distance from main centres of habitation.
77. J. Urry, *Tourist Gaze* (London, 2nd ed. 2002), 48.
78. Although there is no record of how closely the owner monitored and influenced decisions either of policy and investment, or day-to-day management.