

ART. V.—*The Port of Milnthorpe*. By W. T. McINTIRE,
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IT is a matter deeply to be regretted that our early local historians and antiquaries have devoted so small a share of their attention to the old port of Milnthorpe, Westmorland's sole point of contact with the sea. The statement to be found in the "Additions to Westmorland" in Camden's *Britannia* which runs—"On the south side lies *Milnthrop*, the only sea-town in this County: tho' the commodities which are imported, are brought hither only in small vessels from *Grange* in Lancashire," is repeated almost verbatim by Nicolson and Burn in 1777. Sir Daniel Fleming writing in 1671, certainly gives a better idea of the activities of the port, when he informs us that "Millthorp" is the only sea-town in this county, "whose fair is May-day. Here are wines and other commodities brought from beyond the sea, and brought in small vessels." This brief allusion, however, is Sir Daniel's sole contribution to the history of the port, and Daniel Defoe, whose lively commentaries upon the condition of many of our local ports in the eighteenth century add not a little to the value of his *Tour through the Island of Great Britain*, is silent with regard to Milnthorpe. He does, however, tell us something about the fisheries of the Kent estuary, informing us that "the southern parts of this county are pretty well furnished with sea-fish, caught near the *Kent* and *Leven* sands, and other places upon the sea-coast, which formerly were brought weekly to *Kendal* market, where there have been sometimes five and thirty different sorts of fish; but since the great improvement of the town and port

of Lancaster, the market for fish is considerably drawn that way." Defoe unfortunately omits to give us any details with regard to the boats engaged in this trade or to the places at which they landed their catches.

This lamentable reticence with regard to the port of Milnthorpe on the part of former writers has unfortunately been imitated by those of more recent years. Few records of the old port survive, and the fragmentary materials for the construction of its history have to be gathered from widely divergent and not always unimpeachable sources. It is indeed quite as much with a view to eliciting further information upon a subject which should be of deep interest to all students of our local history as in the hope of presenting any hitherto unpublished facts, that the present attempt is made to compile a connected account of what is known of our old Westmorland sea-port.

The wide and beautiful estuary formed by the river Kent and its tributary streams of Gilpin, Winster and Bela must have been an attractive harbour for primitive navigators, providing as it did convenient creeks and landing places, and bordered as it was by sandbanks upon which small vessels could rest safely at low water to be refloated with rising tides. Unfortunately we have no evidence that the estuary was thus used by the early inhabitants of the Grange shore who left traces of their occupation of such sites as Merlewood Cave or Castlehead, the curious hill between Lindale and Grange which appears formerly to have been an island and a place of refuge for successive generations of fugitive races ousted from their lands in times of invasion.

Lacking too is any evidence to prove the employment of the harbour at the mouth of the Kent during the time of the Roman occupation of the fort at Watercrock. One might have imagined that supplies for its garrison could conveniently have been landed in the estuary, or

indeed have been carried by boat some distance up the Kent for there are indications that the sea has receded some distance from the head of the estuary at a not very remote period. The falls at Sedgwick would always have been an obstacle, but for small loads portrages would have been possible. There is in fact a later tradition that boats were at one time unloaded near Kendal itself, but such a story must be treated with caution. The absence, moreover, of any trace of a Roman road in the vicinity of the port and the fact that no objects of Roman origin have hitherto been found in the parishes of Heversham and Milnthorpe tend to contradict any theory of the employment of the port by the Romans.

The Angles who in the seventh and eighth centuries forced their way into the district and established their farms in the fertile "Bottom of Westmorland" around the mouth of the Kent, leaving as tokens of their presence so many of the local place-names and the beautiful ninth century grave-cross at Heversham Church, did not come by sea. They were probably invading from Yorkshire, and came overland, though some may have approached the district by the time honoured route across Lancaster Sands and been tempted to turn aside up the Kent valley.* They were not sailors, nor is it probable that they used the harbour except perhaps for a few fishing vessels.

Far otherwise was it with the Norse vikings, who, coming over from Ireland and the Isle of Man in the ninth and tenth centuries, to escape the wrath of the kings of Norway, found at the mouth of the Kent a harbour after their own hearts. There they found a safe anchorage, an easy landing place and a wide valley leading up into the distant fells into whose seclusion they penetrated by this

* For the probable route of the Anglian settlers, see the article, "The Angles in Furness and Cartmel," by the late Mr. W. G. Collingwood, *Transactions*, N.S., xxiv, 288-294.

to them comparatively easy route, to establish their sheep farms with their "thwaites" and "ergs" and "saetr." All around the Kent estuary, we find scattered among the place-names of Anglian origin others of which one word-element at least is apparently Norse. Thus, to quote a few examples, Arnside looks like the saetr of some Norseman Arnulf, though the second word-element appears in early documents as heved or "head." Acken-thwaite is either Acca or Hakon's field; Meathop (in a Feet of Fines of 1255, Midhop) looks like the Norse mið-hopr, the middle small creek; Whasset is Hvatr's heved or hill; Leasgill, the gil or ravine of some Norseman; Ninesergh, perhaps Ninian's erg or "mountain pasture"; Haverbrack, perhaps the O.N. brekka or "slope" of the oat field; Holme Island is of course the Old Norse holmr, "an island." The name of Milnthorpe itself is of doubtful origin; it may be derived either from the O.E. mylen or the O.N. mylna both meaning a mill, while the second word-element may be either the O.E. or O.N. þorp, a "village." The above place-names and many others which might be quoted are a proof of how many Norse settlements sprang up among the Anglian population of the district, and if the abbot Tilred of Hefresham whom Bede describes as eager to be admitted as a monk at Lindisfarne at some time during the first quarter of the tenth century was the head of the little monastery of Heversham, it is quite understandable that the proximity of these new viking settlers made him anxious to quit their dangerous neighbourhood.* These numerous settlements of Norsemen in its neighbourhood and the constant arrivals and departures of their ships must have caused a considerable amount of activity in the harbour, and perhaps it is a not utterly unjustifiable piece of guess-work to ascribe to these viking sea-farers

* See the article on *Heversham Church*, by the late J. F. Curwen in *Transactions*, N.S., xxv, 28.

the origin of the port which was later to be known as that of Milnthorpe.

After their settlement upon our shores there is a gap of many centuries in the history of the district, and in order to follow the subsequent development of the port of Milnthorpe it is necessary briefly to summarise the well-known history of its manor.

The ancient manor of Heversham which included Milnthorpe was at the Norman conquest in the hands of Tostig, the powerful earl of Northumbria, but was granted to the lords, subsequently barons, of Kendale. About the year 1190, the manor was divided into two parts, one of which, comprising the village of Heversham and about a third of the lands of the manor, was given to the great abbey of St. Mary of York. Of this moiety of the original manor of Heversham, known as the Rectory Manor, the caput or chief house of which was Heversham Hall, all that need be mentioned here, is that after the dissolution of the religious houses it passed through the hands of various owners until it was conveyed by Jasper Buskill in 1613 to Edward Wilson of Nether Levens, with whose posterity it has remained ever since.

The other and larger moiety of the manor, which had its caput at the court or manor-house in Milnthorpe, remained with the lords of Kendale and was granted about 1160 by William de Lancaster, as a marriage portion with his daughter Agnes, to Alexander de Wyndesore. For five generations the powerful de Wyndesore family retained possession of the manor, until at the death of William de Wyndesore in 1385 it passed to his co-heiress, Marjorie Ducket. Her trustees sold it in 1398 to Ralph Nevil, earl of Westmorland, who granted it to his third son, George Nevil, created lord Latimer by Henry VI in 1432. His descendants retained Milnthorpe until 1577, when, on the death of John Nevil, lord Latimer, without male issue, the estate fell to the

pourparty of one of his four daughters, Dorothy, who married, Thomas Cecil, first earl of Exeter. In 1583 they conveyed the manor to William Bradley of Arnside, who in turn conveyed it to James Bellingham of Over Levens, since whose time it has descended with the manor of Levens.

The first of these families who held Milnthorpe, the de Wyndesores, during their long existence of over two hundred years as lords of the manor seem to have been energetic in developing the resources of the place, and as we shall see presently, of its port. In 1334, there was a grant to "Alexander de Wyndesore, lord of the two parts of the vill of Heversham and to the king's clerk, John de Wodehouse, parson of the church there and lord of the third part of the same vill, that Alexander and his heirs and John and successors, parsons of the said church, shall have a weekly market there on Wednesday, and a yearly fair on the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul the Apostle." (*Cal. of Chart. R. IV*, 312). Thus came into existence the once well-known market and fair of Milnthorpe, a place, the earliest known mention of which occurs under the date 1282 in the St. Bees register in connection with the renewal of a lease of land, the property of the priory. (*Reg. of St. Bees*, 409, 410, 604).

A circumstance which made the de Wyndsors employ the port of Milnthorpe was their possession of interests in Ireland, where they claimed lands in Kinsale, Inchiquin and Youghal (*King's Council in Ireland*, p. 326). More than one member of the family visited that country and took part in the fighting to reduce the Dublin border clans. For such expeditions and for the provisioning of their personal followers, they must have found the possession of a port of their own of great convenience to them. In 1331 protection was granted for Alexander de Wyndesore, knt., Matthew de Redemayne, John Daunay, Roger de Redemayne, Thomas, son of Walter de Stirke-

land, and others going to Ireland on the king's service *Cal. Pat. R.* 1331, p. 104). It is not improbable that some of these members of local families sailed for Ireland from Milnthorpe. It was the last of the de Wyndesores, Sir William de Wyndesore, of whom we hear most in connection with Ireland. This de Wyndesore was a man of considerable importance and the husband of Edward III's notorious favourite, Alice Perrers, for protecting whom when in not unmerited banishment and disgrace he incurred trouble with the king. In 1369 he held a command in Ireland under Lionel of Antwerp, and was subsequently viceroy of that country. In 1365 William de Wyndesore and his men were "retained for one whole year upon the king's service for furtherance of the war in Ireland, namely with 200 men at arms and 200 archers, etc." (*Cal. Close R.* 1365, p. 108).

Further, in 1368, there is an order for "Irish vessels between 20 and 200 tuns to be sent to Lyverpool, Co. Lancastre, in England by the feast of St. Hilary, ready for the passage of William de Wyndesore and his men at arms and archers for service in Ireland" (*Cal. Close R.* 1368, p. 453). Though in neither of these two orders is any mention to be found of Milnthorpe, it seems only reasonable to suppose that part of the food and munitions supplied to the troops employed in the Irish campaigns by a local leader passed through a port in his own territory, a district in which we have documentary proof he frequently resided and where he passed the last days of his life, for he died at Heversham in 1385.

Another fact which seems to illustrate the importance attached to the port of Milnthorpe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is the disposition of the numerous pele towers and fortified houses which protected the mouth of the Kent and the approach to Kendal up the valley of that river. Guarding the approaches to the harbour, were Wraysholme Tower on the north and Arnside Tower

on the south. A little further up the estuary was Hazel-slack Tower, while near Milnthorpe itself overlooking the bank of the Bela, where, as will be seen presently, ships probably discharged their cargoes, was the now vanished Dallam Tower. In the immediate neighbourhood were Beetham and Heversham Halls, and higher up the Kent, Over and Nether Levens. The route thence to Kendal was barred by Sizergh Castle.

Now it might be maintained that all these towers were built solely for the purpose of resisting Scottish invasions. Certainly the terrible inroad of Robert Bruce in 1322 would justify the erection of these strongholds, but at such a long distance from the border Scottish raids can but seldom have reached Milnthorpe. At all events, records of such invasions are lacking. It seems only reasonable to suppose that the foe whose onslaught this group of towers was intended to repulse was one who was expected to arrive by sea. It was from the attacks of pirates, not merely from those of Scottish raiders, that Milnthorpe and its port required protection. Evidence that piracy was rife in the Irish Sea is supplied by the appointment in 1565 of commissioners who were to superintend all ports, creeks and landing-places of the realm. In the warrant are recited the evils perpetrated by pirates, both English and foreign, upon the coasts.* Unfortunately the local commissioners do not deal in their report with Milnthorpe, but their account of the state of many of the minor ports of Cumberland, shows plainly how gravely the prosperity of our western harbours had suffered. A common ending to their description of a port is—"Item, there is no shippers, vesselles, ne any maryners." The appointment of the commission would seem to have been directed as much against smugglers as against pirates. The establishment of beacons at such

* See the article, *Cumberland Ports and Shipping in the reign of Elizabeth*, by P. H. Fox, *Transactions*, N.S., xxi, 74-80.

places as St. Bees Head upon our western coast would also suggest watchfulness against raids by pirates, and the gaunt ruins of the Piel of Foudray are a reminder of the anxiety of the abbots of Furness to protect their wool-laden vessels from the attacks of sea-rovers.

It seems strange that we possess so few definite allusions in local documents to the activities of these sea pests, but mentions of pirates or suspected pirates occur from time to time in official correspondence. Thus, Roger Piele, last abbot of Furness, in his correspondence with Thomas Cromwell before the dissolution of the abbey, tries to impress the latter with an idea of his zeal by telling him how he is retaining in custody one suspected of piracy. The alarm which was caused to dwellers on the coast by the enterprises of lawless adventurers is illustrated by a letter* addressed by Lord Scrope as warden of the Western March to Lord Burghley on Aug. 2nd, 1595. Scrope informs his correspondent that he has arrested "a vagrant passenger" calling himself Manington, travelling with forged papers. "At his taking," he adds, "he had another letter from one Asburne of the town of Ayr in Scotland to one Jefferey Cooke, fishmonger in West Chester—wherein among other things, it is said that Angus Maconell, lord of Kintyre in Scotland, had 'listed' 6,000 men and 'bonnen' for Ireland, which forces it seems from Nicholson's letter, are designed to spoil the isle of Man—for this lord of Kintyre and Donell and other rebels there, are at sea for that purpose. Besides certifying your lordship, I have sent notice to the deputy governor of Man to be on his guard. The passenger is impudent and arrogant and I can get nothing worth out of him. I pray your further instructions what to do with him."

Such trade as Milnthorpe was able to carry on amid these depressing surroundings was probably limited to

* *Cal. Borders Papers*, II, 43.

the occasional arrival or dispatch of a small "pickard" or "pickerde," a large sailing-boat or barge described in the commissioners' report referred to above as a vessel of from "vii to ix Tunnes." There were also as the report adds, "divers and sundrye fishermen, inhabiting in severall other small Towns and villages more distante from the Sea, which hath small Boates of the burden of one Tunne or thereabouts occupied by iii or vi men onely in fishing of herrings and killinges And doth not haunte the said Crekes or havens But doth loade at severall other places at their libertie alongst the Sea Coaste."

Probably there were a few of these small craft plying about the mouth of the Kent. As to the cargoes carried by the picards, these would consist largely of salt—salt remained one of the principal imports at Milnthorpe right down to the end of its career as a port in the mid nineteenth century—herrings and killinges or codfish.

That ships visited the port in the sixteenth century is shown by the record* that one "Barnabye Bennyson hath the collecon of all such groundage and wharfage and other duties as shall grow due to her Matie, for castinge Anker uppon her Maties soyle of the comon called Haverbrack or Milnethorpe haven and landinge of wares there."

Of the different places in the estuary at which ships at one time or another loaded or discharged their cargoes more will be written later; there does not appear to be any mention of ships unloading in the Bela until a date later than the sixteenth century.

During part of the seventeenth century, despite the statement made by Sir Daniel Fleming quoted at the beginning of this article, the fortunes of the port of Milnthorpe seem to have been under a cloud. In 1672, when the earl of Carlisle as Vice-Admiral asked for assistance to impress 400 able seamen and send them on board ship at

* *Duchy of Lancas. Index of Patents*, 31, Elizabeth.

Newcastle, Sir Daniel Fleming replied that the seamen who came to Milnthorpe were all Lancashire men living at Grange, while Edward Wilson of Dallam Tower, answered the same appeal to the magistrates by informing the earl that "there were no seamen at Milnthorpe only two brothers who are boat carpenters." Of course, the news that they might be seized by the press gang may have accounted for the disappearance from Milnthorpe of a few able-bodied seamen, but even allowing for such a possible explanation of their disappearance, the replies of the two justices show that the port at that time was in a derelict condition.

About the year 1700 there occurred a dispute between Colonel Jams Grahame who, in 1689, had acquired from Alan Bellingham the manor of Levens, and along with it that of Milnthorpe, and Edward Wilson of Dallam Tower a descendant of the Edward Wilson, who as shown in the brief account given above of the history of the Manor of Heversham, purchased the other moiety of that manor in 1613. The subject of the dispute was the claim made by the Wilsons as lords of part of the old manor of Heversham to a share in the fisheries and tolls for boats in the river Bela. A memorandum at Levens with regard to this dispute is of special interest in connection with the present subject as containing the earliest definite mention of the use of the Bela by boats, and deserves quotation in full:—

"Memoranda touching the claim of Edward Wilson of Dallam Tower, esq., to a third part of the manor of Heversham and to fishery rights and rents on new improvements there. Reciting that Sir James Bellingham, knt., kept his Court Leet at Milthropp at Michaelmas, 1598, and the Jury then sworn found, as of antiquity had been presented, that the said Sir James is chief lord of the water of Beethay from Staveley Stone to the Gray Stone below Beetham Bridge under St. John's Chapple, which verdict

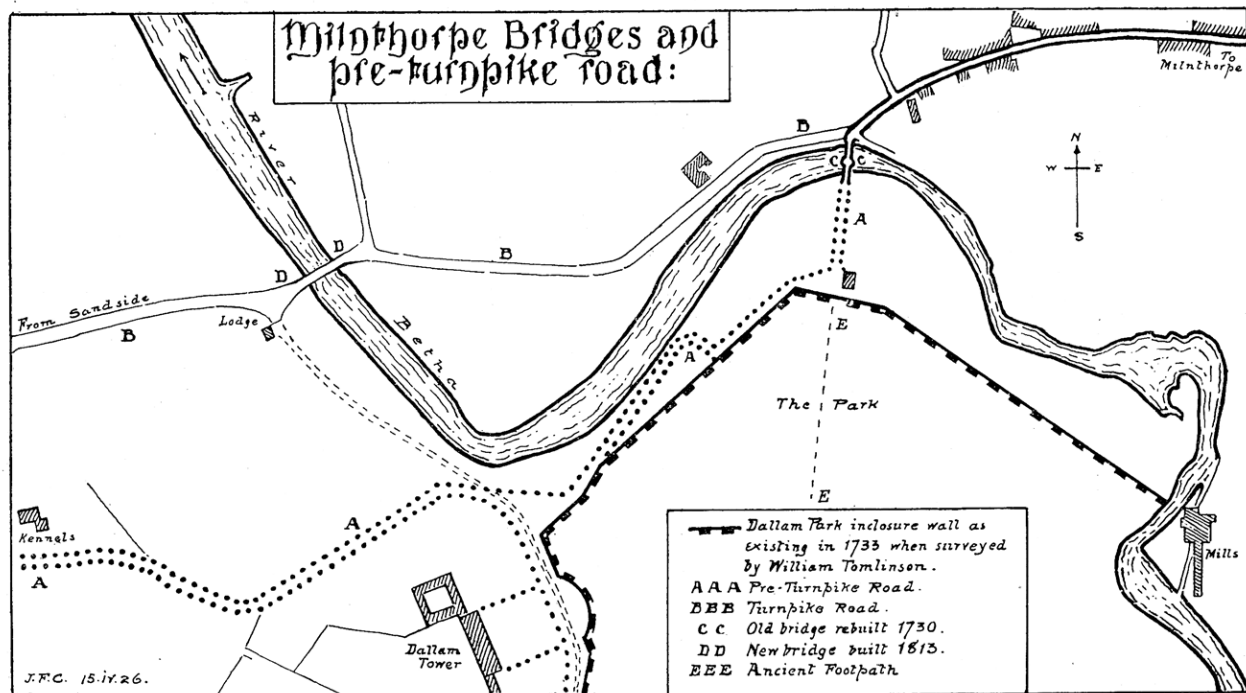
was at every court for 60 years after found and presented, and Staveley Stone and the Gray Stone are two boundary marks of the said manor; and on the 11 of June, 1607, the said Sir James Bellingham, attended by several inhabitants, did ride the boundaries of the said manor; within this manor there is a Fair kept every first day of May yearly, the tolls whereof were always paid to him, his heirs and assigns, and the Fair was always ridden by them, there was likewise a weekly market kept, but now not frequented likewise every boat that comes up the river pays fourpence for unloading.

* * * * *

Encroachments by Edward Wilson.—That in time to come it might appear he was lord of the waters of the Beethay aforesaid, he compelled two men that had been fishing in the said river to enter into bonds to him in some penal sum, with condition to forfeit their said bonds, if at any time they ever after should fish there without his leave; and likewise he caused the jury at his courts, whenever any of Mr. Bellingham's tenants had leave to inclose any small part of the waste grounds, to set a rent upon such inclosure to be paid to him, viz., a third part, i.e., if twopence to Mr. Bellingham, then a penny to himself, and now pretends to be joint lord of the same manor though neither he nor any of his ancestors ever pretended to ride any Boundary now that the mills upon the water called Beethay and the mill dams that quite cross the water belong to Mr. Grahame and were part of the purchase from Bradley."

As the lower course of the Bela to which reference is made in the above passage was for many years the principal place where ships entering the port of Milnthorpe loaded and discharged their cargoes, it would be as well here briefly to consider the topography of its neighbourhood and the changes which have taken place in the positions of its roads and bridges since the river ceased

to be used as a port. The map on p. 47, reproduced from the late Mr. J. F. Curwen's *Records of Kendale*, vol. III, makes it easy to follow these changes. It must be remembered that in the eighteenth century, before the construction of the railway viaduct at Arnside had interfered with the channel of the Kent and caused alterations in the deposition of its sandbanks, it was probably easier for vessels to make the mouth of the Bela, nor did the weir which now bars that stream between the turnpike bridge and the railway then exist to obstruct the navigation of its waters. Before the modern turnpike road was constructed in 1813, ships could ascend the Bela as far as the old bridge, marked CC on the map. This bridge, over which led the old road to Sandside and Arnside, seen on the map as a dotted line passing beneath the now vanished wall of Dallam Park, was built in 1730. It replaced, however, a still earlier stone bridge built some twenty yards higher up the stream in accordance with a bequest made by Edward Pereson, a tanner of Beetham, who in 1542, left money to "make the cost of mason work of the supportation and making of a bridge at the end of Milnthorpe". Stone steps leading down to the river still mark the position of Pereson's bridge, and up to the year 1730 ships must have been able to ascend the Bela as far as this point. It would be natural, therefore, to find traces of a wharf, if a wharf existed, on this part of the banks of the Bela or somewhere in its neighbourhood, but the present writer's search for any such traces has hitherto proved unsuccessful. It seems likely that tradition is correct in stating that there was no wharf on the Bela and that ships coming up the Bela with the tide—before the construction of the weir mentioned above, the river was tidal as far as Milnthorpe—were run aground opposite Dallam Park. They were then propped up with stakes driven into the mud to prevent them from careening when the tide fell, and their



cargoes were carried over planks to the shore on the Dallam side of the river, where wagons were ready to carry away the goods by the old road leading to Milnthorpe and Kendal. After reloading, the ships would descend the Bela on the ebb of another tide.

With regard to the approach from the sea to Milnthorpe and the other landing places upon the shores of the Kent estuary, interesting information may be gleaned from the perusal of two old charts of Morecambe Bay, now in the Lancaster Museum and presented to that institution by the Commissioners of the Port of Lancaster. The older of the two charts, of which the date is 1738, was prepared by S. Fearon and John Eyes and is dedicated to Sir Thomas Lowther, Bart.

In this chart the way into the mouth of the Kent is shown by a rhomb line from a buoy off a sandbank near Heysham, named Cherk's Wharf in this chart and Cherry Wharf in the later one of 1798. Between Cherk's Wharf and Heysham is depicted an anchor showing that ships might safely anchor there or rest on the sands between two tides. From the buoy the route is indicated as leading between Blackstone Print and "Cartmel Wharfs" (described as a high steep bank dry at Low Water), the channel here dividing into two branches which unite again a little above where the Arnside railway viaduct now crosses the Kent. The depth of water in these channels at low water at Spring tides is marked by figures, and it would seem that the eastern channel was slightly the deeper, the smallest depth noted being $\frac{1}{2}$ fathom, while the western channel has readings as low as $\frac{1}{4}$ fathom. Just inside the mouth of the river, near "Meedup Hall" as Meathop Hall is spelt on the map, another anchoring ground is shown. The road over the sands is marked in both charts, and in the later one is marked as the "Road over Priscar." Among the places named along the east bank of the estuary are Storth, Crosthwait's and Daw-

son's. There is no particular landmark shown at the mouth of the Bela. It has been suggested that a small building shown in a map of 1733 as standing on Summer-house point at the entrance to the river may have been a kind of customs house for the collection of harbour dues from skippers entering the port, but William Hutton is probably correct when he writes about 1770*—"A Quarter of a Mile below Dallam Tower stood formerly, a little House upon a Rock, with a good Bowling-Green near it. The Sea has now wash'd away most part of the Latter, but the former retains the name of Bowling-Green Point." Hutton adds the interesting information, "Tho' Dallam Tower be now surrounded with Wood, yet when the first Edwd. Wilson bought the place there was not a Tree about it, & they were obliged to hang an unruly Dog in the Bottom of Sunny How as the nearest place."

It is to be noted that Hutton, keen observer as he was and ever eager to mark any activity in connection with places in his parish of Beetham, although he notes many curious facts with regard to such places as Dixie's and Bummesha Bay does not record that these spots were in his day used as ports. He confines his remarks to an expression of thanks that his parish was blessed with access to the sea. It seems more than probable that Milnthorpe throughout most of the eighteenth century was the only port on the shores of the estuary. Nicolson and Burn in 1777 seem to confirm this supposition by stating of Milnthorpe:—"The river Betha coming from Beetham runs by this place; over which there is a good stone bridge; which river makes this a convenient little port, the only sea port in the county."

With the eighteenth century Milnthorpe and its port evidently entered upon a period of prosperity. Mr. John Somervell in his book, *Some Westmorland Wills*,† records

* *Beetham Repository*, p. 111.

† *Some Westmorland Wills*, p. 14.

that the will of Joseph Grigg, distiller of Milnthorpe, who died in 1701, shows that he was owner or part owner of three vessels. This must be the prominent Quaker, Joseph Grigg, or Gregg who on May 26th, 1682, was committed to Appleby Gaol for non-payment of tithes and kept a prisoner there until March, 1686-7. In the meantime his wife Jane was twice fined for attendance at meetings.

To Mr. Somervell we are also indebted for a very clear and concise account of the activities of the mills at Milnthorpe* during the later part of the eighteenth and the earlier years of the 19th century. It will be seen from this account that Milnthorpe was busily employed in the production of such commodities as twine, sacking and canvas linen thread and paper. He mentions, too an early iron forge as having existed a little above the bridge. This forge is mentioned by Machell in the 17th century. A small amount of iron was produced in the neighbourhood. John Lucas writing in his *History of Warton*† of the furnace at Leighton Park in the eighteenth century extols its merits at the expense of Milnthorpe, concluding:—"They found here (at Leighton) by Experience that turf which is here both very good and very cheap, doth not only spare Char Coal, but makes better Iron than Charcoal alone: upon which Account it is that Iron made at the Furnance is much preferable to that which was made some years since at *Milnthorpe* in this Neighbourhood, where Charcoal was the only Fuel they made Use of." Despite this alleged inferiority of the Milnthorpe iron, it continued for many years to swell the exports of the little Bela port, and in 1790, another industry was established in the neighbourhood which helped to provide cargoes for its ships. On April 16th of that year, license was granted‡ "to John Wakefield

* J. Somervell, *Water Power Mills of South Westmorland*, pp. 108-111.

† *History of Warton*, p. 59.

‡ Kendal Order and Indictment Book, 1786-98.

of Kendal, gent., to build a Gunpowder Mill on his property called Bassengill, at-or near the S.E. corner of Force Bridge in Sedgwick." The establishment of this industry brought a considerable amount of trade to the port.

We have evidence that a large quantity of coal was imported at Milnthorpe in a petition addressed to the Lords of the Treasury by the Corporation of Kendal, dated 13 March, 1729. The petitioners tell a woeful tale, stating that "Kendal has been a place of great trade by the manufacture of several sorts of woollen stuffs and tanning for leather; that the turf hitherto their fuel being exhausted, the expense of firing has caused the almost entire loss of their trade." They therefore plead for the remission of the duty of "cole" imported through Milnthorpe, their port. The Commissioners of Customs, however, proved obdurate and reported to the Lords that "there has been shipped at Whitehaven and discharged at Milnthorpe in five years past, upwards of 368 chaldrons of coal, and if coals landed at Milnthorpe be exempted from duty, Grange, Penny Bridge and Rampside may demand the same."

Salt, both for agricultural purposes and to supply the needs of the Kendal manufacturers, was always an important source of imports. At one time, some of this salt was procured from salt-pans at the mouth of the river, but the home product was unable to compete with that supplied by Liverpool and Northwich. Hutton writes*:—"Formerly along this South Side of the Sands (near Arnside), there were several Salt Steads, or small Salt-Works for Bay-Salt. These were ruin'd by the Great Works at Liverpool & Warrington."

Iron, too, was imported. Thomas Gray, the poet, during the course of his memorable visit to the Lake District in 1769 made an excursion to Force Falls near Sedgwick and thus describes the scene at the forge there:—

* *Beetham Repository*, p. 104.

"The calmness and brightness of the evening, the roar of the waters, and the thumping of huge hammers at an iron forge not far distant, made it a singular walk but as to the falls (for there are two) they are not four feet high. I went down to the forge and saw the demons at work by the light of their own fires; the iron is brought in pigs to Milnthorp by sea from Scotland, and is here beat into bars and plates."

A few fragments of the wall of this forge can still be traced a short distance below the present group of cottages near Force Falls, and masses of debris from the furnace are to be seen by the river bank.

The establishment of the marble mills at Helsington, near Kendal, about 1800, also brought business to the port of Milnthorpe. *The History, Directory and Gazetteer of Co. Westmorland*, 1829, mentions that along with the local marbles, Italian Marble was imported by sea and after manufacture re-shipped to most of the principal towns of England.*

There was also a considerable trade in grain, the prosperity of numerous water-mills in the neighbourhood contributing largely to this branch of the revenue of the port. In 1810 a corn market was established at Milnthorpe, when wheat was sold at 56s. per load of 14 score; oats at 28s. per load; and barley at 20s. per three Winchester bushels.† This market, however, had only a short existence, for it was closed soon after the opening of the Lancaster and Kendal canal in 1819, an event which, as we shall see shortly, led to a change in the history of the port of Milnthorpe.

Already in 1786 there had been an alarm when a scheme was mooted for the reclamation of the Kent Sands and the diversion of the river to Lancaster. This project is thus noticed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1786,

* See also Somervell, *Water Power Mills of South Westmorland*, p. 69.

† J. F. Curwen, *History of Heversham with Milnthorpe*, p. 49.

vol. lvi, ii, 1140:—A design is now under consideration to inclose the sands and to turn the course of the river Kent, and others of less note, which are to join the river Lune near Lancaster; and as it is the most essential advantage of a seaport to possess the largest quantity of water that can be obtained this addition will prove a benefit so considerable, that the most zealous support and assistance are expected from the town (Lancaster) and its neighbourhood. The business to be carried forward by a company united and incorporated on this great and laudable occasion. When the subscription amounts to £15,000 they will proceed to embark and recover from the sea as much of the sands as can with probability of success be maintained by which, among many other advantages, the passage from Whitehaven to Lancaster will be much more secure and commodious.”

Needless to add, nothing came of this very optimistic scheme; one wonders how many people were persuaded to put their money into it, and what were the comments of the mariners of Milnthorpe upon the threat to the existence of their port.

A lively picture of the trade of Milnthorpe is presented by a passage in John Robinson's *Guide to the Lakes*, published in 1819, the very year when the opening of the canal dealt the first blow to the prosperity of the port:—“Milnthorp. Vessels belonging to this port trade to Liverpool carrying hoops and casks, limestone, gunpowder, etc., and returning with wood, merchants' goods, etc. Others sail to Glasgow and Annan in Scotland, carrying thither leather, Kendal manufactures, etc., and bringing back grain, potatoes, etc.”

A possible relic of the port of Milnthorpe is the old barn in the village, near Owlet Ash. This building is known as the “Red Warehouse,” from the fact that its woodwork was always painted red, and it was thus described when it was put up for sale in 1840. It is

reputed to have been a warehouse for the storage of salt, grain and other commodities brought to Milnthorpe by sea.

It was during these later days of Milnthorpe's career as a port that a flourishing carrying trade developed, the best known of these carriers being the Foxcrofts and the Berrys, of whom four generations in succession carried on the business. All these Berrys bore the christian name of Walter, but it was the second Walter Berry, who died in 1840, who with the assistance of his son, Walter Berry the third, brought the Milnthorpe carrying trade to its highest pitch of prosperity. At first, the goods were carried from the Bela port and from Glasson, but with the opening of the Kendal and Lancaster canal in 1819, this traffic dwindled and gradually disappeared. It was carried on, however, with renewed vigour when the Sandside ports, which will presently be mentioned, replaced the old Bela port as a place of call for coasting vessels. Living at Birkett's farm, not far from Dixie's, the second and third Walter Berrys were so actively employed by the brisk trade existing between Liverpool and the ports of the Kent mouth that they maintained a stable of some twenty-five horses to cope with the traffic. Even the advent of the Furness railway in 1857 did not at first put an end to their activities, for during its construction they found ample employment in transporting the girders and ironwork for the building of the viaduct. When the completion of this obstacle to the navigation of the estuary dealt a final blow to the use of its wharves, the Berrys were still able to carry on their trade at Blackstone Point, below Arnsidê. The route across Arnside marshes proved, however, too treacherous for the safety of their carts, and their carrying business came shortly to an end. Walter Berry, the fourth, and last of the dynasty, died at Birkett's farm in October, 1906.

Though, as has been mentioned above, the opening of the canal between Lancaster and Kendal dealt the old port of Milnthorpe a staggering blow, it by no means put an end to its career. Somewhere about this time, however, the use of the landing place on the Bela was abandoned. Perhaps the channel may have become obstructed; but more probably the reason for the abandonment of the stream was the necessity of employing vessels of a tonnage too large to allow of their entering its mouth. Such larger vessels only could compete economically with the canal for the local trade, and such vessels had perforce to load and unload at one or another of the Sandside wharves.

Evidence of this is supplied by the *History, Directory and Gazetteer of Cumberland and Westmorland* for 1829, which describes Milnthorpe as "a dependent sea port of Lancaster and has belonging to it 4 to 5 vessels of nearly 100 tons burden each, but they seldom can get nearer to the town than Arnside or Haverbrack." In the same directory we find the name of Richard Greenwood of Beetham, described as a ship owner and constant trader to Liverpool. It is evident that within ten years some partial recovery, at all events, had been made from the slump caused in the trade of Milnthorpe by the construction of the canal.

Further evidence of a considerable amount of trade is shown by a search through the items of shipping intelligence in the files of local newspapers. The arrivals and departures of ships are here given for Lancaster and Ulverston only, but I find that throughout the decade 1820-30, there are on the average from three to four sailings monthly for Milnthorpe from these two ports alone. The ships most frequently mentioned are the Thomas (owner Brockbank), The Dee (Taylor), The Kent (Rigby), The Lune (Blackborough), The Slack (Sumner), The Isabella (of Ulverston) and The Bailiff of Milnthorpe.

Among the cargoes mentioned are coals, ballast, slates, gunpowder, salt and "general cargo."

Occasionally some arrival at Milnthorpe of a vessel of unusual size is more fully reported. Thus, in April, 1842, "three fine vessels" are recorded to have arrived at "Milnthorpe Sandside near Dixe's Inn." The vessels, the report goes on to add were laden with St. Helen's coal and there was great competition in the coal trade at Milnthorpe and coals were selling at 7d. per hundred-weight.

As an example to show the size of the ships employed in this trade one might quote a report of August, 1824, of the death of one Thomas North who was drowned in crossing the sands. His horse and cart, we are told, were saved by the boats of a sloop of nearly 100 tons burthen.

There were at least three wharves at Sandside, of which the highest up the river was that at Dixie's, near the mouth of the Bela. Dixie's is conjecturally identified by William Hutton with the place where in 1307 King Edward III confirmed to the priory of Conishead "the Privelege of grinding their corn at his Miln, Multure Free, with as much Sand as they pleased, and a House for erecting a Salt Work betwixt the two Roads below the Wood."*

Hutton also tries to explain the name of the place:—"Another Quarter of a Mile below this point (Bowling Green or Summerhouse Point) is Dixie's; so call'd from a Person who liv'd there. . . . Mr. Richd. Simpson curate of Mount Sorrel, Leicestershire, was born at Dixie's."†

This wharf was of course the nearest of the three to Milnthorpe and would naturally be employed whenever the draught of a vessel permitted its ascent as far up the channel as this little group of houses. Mr. Hudson of

* *Beetham Repository*, p. 109.

† *Ibid.*, p. 111.

Dixie's may be said to be a connecting link between the old days of the ports of the Kent estuary and present times, for his father was in his youth a sailor on the "Old John," a ship owned by the well-known Bush family of Arnside and finally wrecked at Garston.

Lower down the Kent, just below the Ship Inn is the site of the second wharf. Its shipping warehouse still stands a short distance below Kellet Cottage, Sandside. At this point upon the estuary the Wilsons of Dallam Tower have been under an obligation for many generations to maintain a ferry. Before the construction of the Arnside viaduct, the tidal bore, which now seldom exceeds the height of eighteen inches frequently attained that of three-and-a-half feet, if there was a strong wind behind it. As recently as 1905, there was a terrible disaster, when a boat containing ten people was upset by the bore and several of them were drowned. The peril of crossing the sands at low water is illustrated by the culminating episode of Miss Constance Holme's local novel *The Splendid Fairing*. A steel engraving of Sandside by T. Allom, of a date about 1820, shows the old wharf and houses behind it. A small vessel is lying upon the sandbank a little lower down the stream and a group of carts are busily employed in unloading her cargo.

An interesting relic of the old wharf and ferry at the Ship Inn is the fog horn formerly used to guide boats to the wharf or passengers crossing the ferry when, as frequently happened, conditions of visibility rendered such an aid absolutely indispensable. This horn which has been handed down in the same family for generations and has an authentic history of more than a century, consists of a big African shell, one end of which has been smoothed and shaped to form a mouthpiece. When properly blown, this horn yields a note not altogether dissimilar to that of a modern steam siren.

The third wharf, still lower down the river, was at

St. John's Cross near Storth. Here, William Hutton informs us, "was an Attempt made some Yeares agoe, to get Copper Ore. It was renewed lately & what they did find was very good, but it lies in Small Veins, & the Shafts go below the Level of the Tides, so that the Expense was great & the Scheme frustrated."* In the flat land now lying between the shore and the railway was formerly a creek, known as Bummesha or Bommershire Bay, mentioned by Hutton as a place for catching shrimps and as having in its neighbourhood a stream of petrifying water, "more full of Matter than that in Levens Park mentioned by Cambden."†

Bummesha Bay was reputed to offer the best anchorage in the neighbourhood, and Mr. John Somervell provides us with a few interesting facts with regard to its history.‡ It appears that the landlord of the inn which at one time flourished at St. John's Cross was the collector of port dues at the wharf, and for this purpose had the following verse printed upon his sign:—

" Pay me down your anchorage,
Or else I tell you plain
You'll never cast your anchor down
In Bommershire Bay again."

This sign, Mr. Somervell tells us, was removed by Mr. Arnold when St. John's Cross was altered. It appears that the poetic landlord was not above increasing his revenue from his share of the port dues and his inn by practising a little discreet smuggling, for during the course of the above-mentioned alterations an underground cave was found in the rocks behind the house.

Of the last days of the activities of the port of Milnthorpe I have gleaned recently some interesting information from the "salt books" of Walter Berry, probably

* *Ibid.*, p. 100.

† *Ibid.*, p. 104.

‡ *Water Power Mills of South Westmorland*, p. 108.

the third principal representative of the house of Berry referred to above. By the courtesy of Mr. H. B. Greenwood, the Clerk to the Westmorland County Council, I have been given facilities for the inspection of these records which comprise four small memorandum books covering a long series of transactions with customers between the years 1848 and 1852. These entries reveal a considerable number of dealings, mostly on a small scale, with local users of salt chiefly for agricultural purposes, though some of the Kendal manufacturers are purchasers upon a somewhat larger scale.

Fortunately in many cases the arrivals of cargoes have been recorded, thus against the date Jan. 10th 1848 is the entry:—

The Hope arrived here with 47½ tons of Handed Square Lump Salt, and 10 tons of Dirty Salt and 2 tons of Salt Rock from Northwich."

Further arrivals of "The Hope" from Liverpool with salt are recorded on April 17th, August 16th and November 15th of the same year. In 1849 only two such arrivals, (on January 20th and June 21st) are mentioned, but in this and the following years not all the arrivals of cargoes appear to have been recorded. The cargoes of salt of various qualities seem to range from about 45 to 65 tons.

In 1851 "The Elizabeth" is mentioned as arriving from Liverpool, on December 8th, with 15 tons of Lump Stowed Salt.

On March 23rd, 1852, comes the ominous entry "5 tons of Lump Salt by railway" and after that date there are no more names of ships mentioned.

The list of customers is interesting not only as containing the names of many well-known local families, but also as showing the wideness of the district served by the port of Milnthorpe. Among the buyers of salt mentioned in the books are Isaac Handley, Thomas Stainton, Joseph Atkinson, Christopher Dobson, Michael Nelson,

James Ellis, Benjamin Tattersall, Mrs. Hudson, Robert Ion, Ann Mashiter, James Strickland, Joseph Gibson, Edward Holme, Edward Faint, William Bush and John Lancaster—all representatives of families still in the Milnthorpe neighbourhood—or connected with it—and Titus Wilson, George Whittaker and Sons and William Airey of Kendal.

Among the places to which salt was delivered from the port are Kendal, Sedbergh, Kirkby Lonsdale, Hincaster, Burton, Natland, Levens, Holme, Long Sleddale, Brigsteer, Witherslack, Orton, Lambrigg, Underbarrow, Ravenstonedale, Kirkby Stephen, Killington, Helsington, Preston Patrick, Whassett, Lupton and Appleby.

It will thus be apparent that up to the days when the old "Hope" and her sister ship the "Resolution" landed their last cargoes at Blackstone Point and the old port of Milnthorpe became a thing of the past, that port fulfilled a useful purpose in the economic life of Westmorland. It is to be hoped that future research may enable us to fill in the somewhat meagre outline of its history which it is attempted to sketch in the present article.