

ART. XXI.—*Askam Iron: The Development of Askam-in-Furness, 1850-1920*. By ALAN HARRIS, M.A., Ph.D.

*Read at Kendal, April 4th, 1964.*

RELICS of the Low Furness iron industry are widely distributed throughout the haematite orefield in the vicinity of Dalton-in-Furness. Although the local iron industry is now almost extinct,<sup>1</sup> its legacy remains in the landscape in the form of spoil heaps, the crumbling stonework of mine buildings, and the embankments and cuttings of abandoned mineral railways. Several settlements situated on and close to the orefield owe their existence to iron-working, and these too form part of the extensive material remains of this once important local activity. Some of the iron-working settlements originated as miners' rows in close proximity to a mine, while others grew up near the site of blast furnaces. Askam-in-Furness, whose evolution forms the subject of this paper, owes its origin and subsequent development to the mining and smelting of iron ore, both of which activities were at one time carried on there; the smelting in Askam itself and the mining just beyond the confines of the village.

Askam is essentially a product of the nineteenth century. In 1865 its site lay in open country; then an ironworks was established, houses were built nearby, and within a few years a large village had come into being. The story of Askam's growth is fairly well documented, and it is possible to trace the evolution of the village from its foundation almost one hundred years ago down to the end of the 1914-1918 war, when the ironworks were

<sup>1</sup> Within south Cumberland and north Lancashire iron is now (1963) smelted only at Millom and at the tiny Backbarrow ironworks. Steel-making survives at Barrow.

finally closed and a chapter in the industrial history of Furness thus brought to an end.

Askam and the neighbouring village of Ireleth together form a community of about 2,500 persons within the Urban District of Dalton-in-Furness. Although Askam and Ireleth occupy adjacent sites and form virtually a single large village, they are not alike. With its several ancient stone-built houses, village farmsteads and irregular plan, Ireleth is obviously much the older of the two settlements, though the growth of its neighbour has been such as to make Ireleth now the smaller place, with some 700 inhabitants compared with Askam's 1,800.<sup>2</sup>

Askam bears many signs of an origin quite different from that of Ireleth. Most of its terraced houses are constructed of brick, and some at least have changed little externally since the nineteenth century (Plate I). The rectilinear ground-plan of streets is interrupted by slag banks and derelict land, which mark the site of the Askam ironworks. These works were demolished during 1933 and 1934 after lying idle for fifteen years,<sup>3</sup> and their remains occupy a large area of land in the heart of the village. The tracks of several mineral tramways, the silted beds of reservoirs, and a considerable extent of derelict and semi-derelict land combine to give Askam the appearance of a place that has long outlived the purpose for which it was created. Indeed, Askam's economy is now so closely linked with Barrow's that the village has become a dormitory settlement from which many industrial workers travel daily to the nearby County Borough. A shoe factory and old-established brick-making and quarrying industries provide some employment locally, but this is less important to Askam's inhabitants than work in Barrow. Such a situation has

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Mr A. W. Charity, Engineer and Surveyor to the Dalton U.D.C., for these figures, which do not appear separately in the published Census of Population.

<sup>3</sup> *Barrow News*, 18 November 1933, 10 February 1934; *Iron and Coal Trades Review*, 20 September 1935, p. 446.

not always prevailed, however, and for many years the greater part of Askam's working population found employment within the village and at the iron mines nearby.

In the middle of the nineteenth century the site of Askam formed part of a rural and still largely agricultural district (fig. 1). The largest village in the area was Ireleth, which occupied a commanding position on the flanks of a ridge of hills overlooking the Duddon estuary. The ancient route across the Duddon Sands diverged from the Lindal and Broughton highway at Ireleth, and together with several minor trackways traversed a narrow strip of coastal lowland below Ireleth village. In its natural state much of the land by the side of the estuary must have formed part of an extensive belt of marshes and sand dunes. By 1850, however, although the place-name Ireleth Marsh was still in use, the coastal marshes in Ireleth had been enclosed and in part drained.<sup>4</sup> The dune belt remained in its old condition, however, and about 100 acres of dune country, together with a piece of unreclaimed marsh, was occupied as rabbit warren.<sup>5</sup>

In later years, when the buildings of Askam covered much of the area, some local residents no doubt still remembered with pleasure the sandy warren and the expanses of golden furze which had once occupied the Ireleth coastline.<sup>6</sup> But the great majority of those who committed their recollections to print appear to have accepted the change of scene without regret; indeed, several emphasise the previously barren nature of the district. Ireleth was said by one local writer to be "on the side of a vast and barren valley", while the coastal strip itself was described as a "barren waste".<sup>7</sup> Speaking of the same area in 1878, Lord Edward Cavendish noted

<sup>4</sup> Ireleth Marsh was enclosed in 1831 under the terms of an Act of 1821. The enclosure award and plan are in the Lancs. Record Office (AE/4/9).

<sup>5</sup> Details from the Dalton Tithe Award (Ireleth section), dated 1842. The award is in the Lancs. Record Office (DRC/1/12c).

<sup>6</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 14 July 1866.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

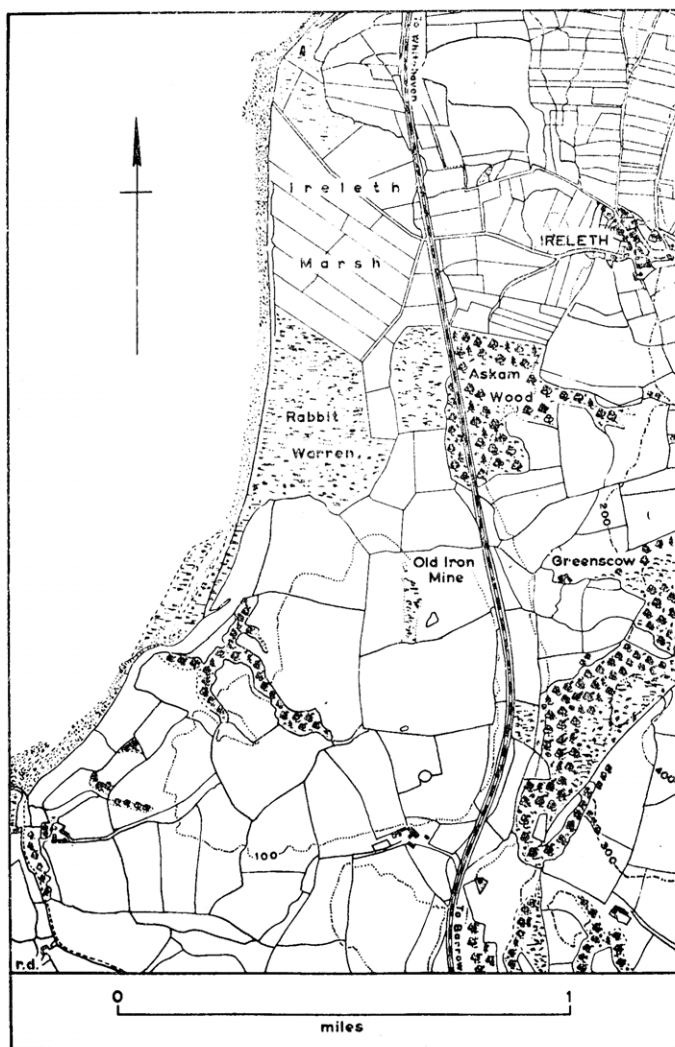


FIG. 1.—The Ireleth district in 1850 (Reproduced from the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1850 with the permission of the Director General, Ordnance Survey).

with satisfaction that “an industrious and energetic population” had replaced “barren sandhills”.<sup>8</sup> A closer

<sup>8</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 27 July 1878.



examination of the evidence, however, indicates that the Ireleth district was much more highly developed about 1850 than these remarks might at first suggest.

When the Tithe survey of Ireleth was made in 1842 some parts of the Marsh were under the plough, despite the presence of the warren, whilst others were occupied by improved grass-land. Although bleak and in places agriculturally unproductive, the strip of land along the Duddon was evidently far from being a useless waste. Moreover, the area shown on fig. 1 contained, in addition to Ireleth itself, a considerable number of isolated farmsteads and cottages, which together housed a substantial population. In 1851 two hundred persons lived in Ireleth village and there were approximately one hundred others living in hamlets and farmsteads in the surrounding district.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the local residents gained a livelihood from the land, and both Ireleth and the outlying houses were occupied principally by farmers and farm workers. There were, however, also many iron miners in the district, including a number in Ireleth itself.<sup>10</sup> Iron ore had been won from the Carboniferous Limestone in the vicinity of Ireleth for many years, but in 1850 the full extent of the local ore deposits was still unknown and the scale of mining operations was small. But significant changes were even then affecting the local mining industry. H. W. Schneider's search for a rich mine of ore, which had extended over a decade, was rewarded in 1850 by the chance discovery of the main ore body at Park, near Ireleth.<sup>11</sup> The Park mine was quickly developed, and when the local census enumerator made his survey in

<sup>9</sup> Details from the manuscript Enumeration Returns, 1851 Census of Population, in the P.R.O. (H.O. 107/2275).

<sup>10</sup> Sixteen miners are listed in the Enumeration Return for Ireleth village in 1851. Twelve of these were heads of households.

<sup>11</sup> The discovery is discussed in *Select Committee on Rating of Mines* (1857), Minutes of Evidence, Questions 2041, 2108-9. For a thorough account of the economic climate of the period see J. D. Marshall, *Furness and the Industrial Revolution* (1958). Iron mining in the mid-19th century is discussed in chapter xi.

the spring of 1851 he found a small community of iron miners at Park Cottages, close to the mine. Not far away, at Thwaite Flat, there was another and larger mining community.

Rail links too were being actively promoted in the district at this period. The line of the Furness Railway had been carried through the Ireleth lowland in 1846, and in the autumn of 1850 a connection was effected at Broughton between this line and the Whitehaven and Furness Junction Company's line, thus linking by rail the Furness peninsula and the industrial areas of Cumberland. For more than twenty years after the opening of the Furness line, however, Ireleth was without a railway station, and rail passengers to and from that place first made their way either to Dalton or Kirkby, which were provided with a station long before Ireleth.

The district was thus changing during the middle years of the nineteenth century, but as yet Ireleth lay on the periphery of the principal industrial area of Furness, which began a mile or so nearer Dalton and Barrow. More dramatic changes were soon to transform the Ireleth coastline and bring it firmly within the boundary of an expanded industrial area.

Between 1860 and 1870 several new ironworks were established in Cumberland and north Lancashire, and included in their number was a works at Ireleth. The promoters of the Ireleth venture were John Harris; a Darlington ironmaster, and Edward Thomas Wakefield and John Shapter, both of whom were barristers.<sup>12</sup> In 1864 these three men formed a partnership under the style of the Furness Iron and Steel Company for the purpose of carrying on business as manufacturers of iron and steel. Thirty-two acres of land were purchased on Ireleth

<sup>12</sup> Wakefield was described in 1866 as a Barrister-at-Law of Pembridge Villas, Bayswater, Middlesex. Shapter's address at this time was Clarendon Place, Hyde Park, Middlesex. These and a number of other details relating to the iron company are derived from the company papers in the P.R.O. (B.T. 31/1242).

Marsh to provide a site for an ironworks, and in March 1865 work began on the construction of blast furnaces and ancillary plant.<sup>13</sup>

The promoters selected Ireleth as the site of their works principally on account of its proximity to a highly productive and rapidly expanding part of the orefield.<sup>14</sup> Haematite ore of high quality was already being raised nearby at Park, and work was actively in progress in an attempt to find further ore bodies in the same area.<sup>15</sup> Thus an ironworks at Ireleth would have deposits of iron ore on its doorstep and would be within sight of some of the most productive mines in Furness. It is likely that the partners were also hoping that the plan to bridge the Duddon by rail, first proposed many years earlier but never implemented, would soon become a reality, for this scheme was again under consideration by the directors of the Whitehaven and Furness Junction Railway in 1864.<sup>16</sup> Had the bridge been constructed it would have placed Ireleth in direct rail communication with the great Hodbarrow iron mine on the Cumberland side of the Duddon estuary.

The precise site of the ironworks was evidently selected with considerable care. Clay for brick-making was available nearby,<sup>17</sup> as was a supply of water from the hills above Ireleth.<sup>18</sup> The site afforded ample space in which to lay out the works and there was room too for the disposal of iron slag. Good rail communications were available by means of the Furness Railway and its connections. One of the early tasks of the partners was to take advantage of the proximity of this line by building a short branch railway into the works, a task which

<sup>13</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 1 April 1865.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Richardson, *Furness Past and Present*, ii (1880) 164-168.

<sup>15</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 1 April 1865.

<sup>16</sup> J. Melville and J. L. Hobbs, *Early Railway History in Furness*, this Society's Tract Series xiii (1951) 54-60.

<sup>17</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 27 May and 14 July 1866.

<sup>18</sup> Reservoirs were constructed close to the works. Though no longer in use, the sites of these are still clearly visible.

was completed successfully by the spring of 1866.<sup>19</sup> Although contemporary evidence on the matter is wanting, it is not unlikely that the physical attributes of the Ireleth site also influenced the promoters' choice. The surface of the sandy warren where the works was built was not flat but it could readily be levelled for building purposes; moreover, the land in question lay immediately beyond the limit of the worked orefield and was therefore less likely to occupy ore-bearing property than land of a similar superficial character further south.

It was the promoters' intention that the works should be equipped with both blast furnaces and Bessemer converters for making steel. The foundations of a Bessemer plant were actually laid down before work on this part of the project was suspended in 1867 pending a trial of the blast furnaces, of which there were to be four.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the Askam works started operations in the summer of 1867 with only one furnace completed: a second was blown-in two years later and a third in 1871.<sup>21</sup> The full iron-making capacity of the works was achieved only in 1873, when a fourth furnace was commissioned. Behind this rather slow progress there lies a story of economic and technical difficulties. According to Joseph Richardson, the company found it necessary to curtail their activities between 1866 and 1869 because of dull conditions in the iron trade.<sup>22</sup> The delay in completing the works was probably also influenced by the fact that the "Askam furnaces did not work well when first built . . . owing to the smallness of the bell in proportion to the width of the furnace".<sup>23</sup> It seems reasonable to infer

<sup>19</sup> B.T. 31/1242. The branch was in existence by March 1866. It is of course possible that it had been finished some time before.

<sup>20</sup> Details of the works are given in *Barrow Herald*, 14 July 1866; *The Engineer*, 28 July 1871; *Ulverston Mirror*, 3 May 1873.

<sup>21</sup> The opening of the works is reported briefly in the *Ulverston Advertiser*, 1 August 1867.

<sup>22</sup> Richardson, *op. cit.*, has a good account of Askam, although the date given for the formation of the company (August 1867) is clearly incorrect.

<sup>23</sup> W. Crossley, "The manufacture of iron in the Hematite district", *Journ. Iron and Steel Inst.* (1871), pt. ii, 154 ff.

that the decision to defer steel-making followed from the failure to achieve satisfactory results with the early blast furnaces.<sup>24</sup>

Long before the first pig iron flowed from the Askam furnace, the original partnership had been modified.<sup>25</sup> In March 1866 a new company, the Furness Iron and Steel Company Ltd., was incorporated to take over the assets of the partners and complete the ironworks. Harris, Wakefield and Shapter, who had each contributed £5,000 to the original venture, were now joined by four members of the Mackinnon family; William Alexander Mackinnon, father and son, Lauchlan Bellingham Mackinnon and Daniel Henry Mackinnon.<sup>26</sup> The new company had an authorised capital of £70,000 in shares of £1,000. Sixty-five shares were taken up immediately and were distributed between the original partners, who took thirty-five, and the Mackinnons, who also provided the company with a chairman in the person of the elder W. A. Mackinnon.<sup>27</sup>

The association of the Mackinnon family with the Askam concern is explained by their previous interests in Ireleth, where the elder W. A. Mackinnon had owned land for some years.<sup>28</sup> At the time of the Tithe survey Mackinnon owned nearly 500 acres of land there, principally in the Greenscoe and Green Haume districts. His property included a number of fields along the land-

<sup>24</sup> The Bessemer scheme was revived from time to time, but the necessary equipment was never installed and the Askam works remained a producer only of pig iron. In 1871 Askam pig was sent principally to Sheffield for making into steel, but some went as far afield as Essen and Bochum in the Ruhr (*The Engineer*, 28 July 1871).

<sup>25</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all details about the Furness Iron and Steel Co. Ltd. are taken from B.T. 31/1242.

<sup>26</sup> Notices of the elder W. A. Mackinnon and D. H. Mackinnon appear in *DNB*. xii 615-617. The elder W. A. Mackinnon was a well-known legislator in his day and at different times represented Dunwich, Lymington and Rye in the House of Commons. His obituary notice appeared in *The Times*, 3 May 1870. The younger W. A. Mackinnon was Member of Parliament for Lymington in 1866: L. B. Mackinnon was the Member for Rye in the same year.

<sup>27</sup> The composition of the board of directors is given in the *Barrow Herald*, 28 April 1866.

<sup>28</sup> An Edward Wakefield was another substantial property owner in Ireleth in the 1840's.

ward side of the warren, and it was over part of this land that the rail link between the ironworks and the Furness Railway was later constructed (fig. 2). The Mackinnon

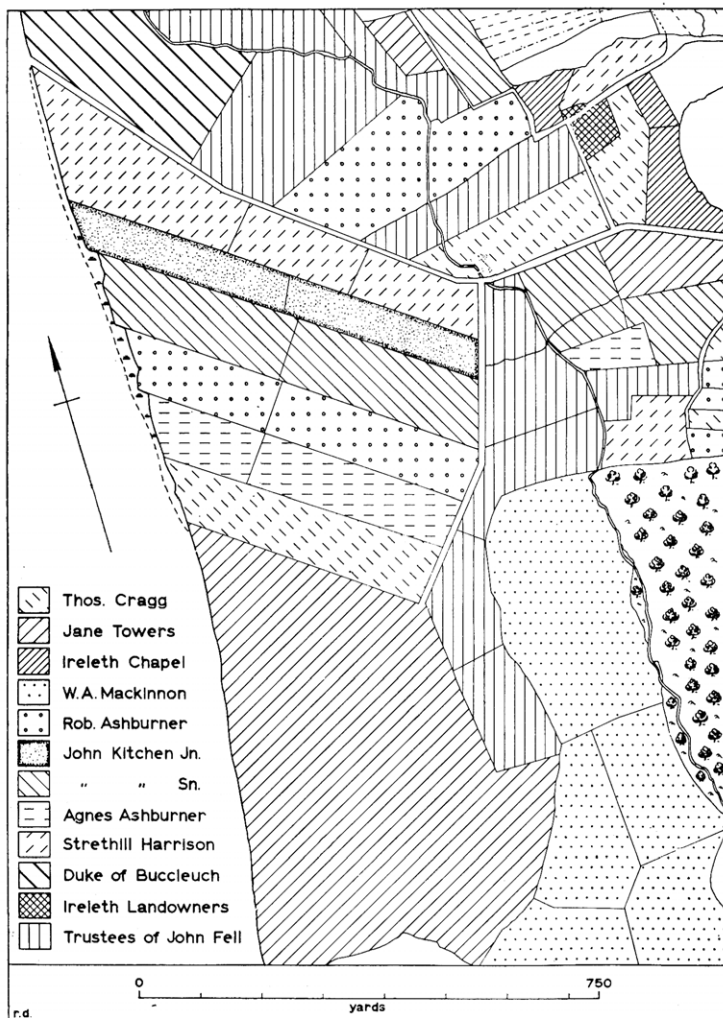


FIG. 2.—The Ireleth coastlands about 1840, showing the ownership of land. (Redrawn from the Tithe map of Dalton-in-Furness, 1842).

interest in the area was also bound up with iron ore. Some years before he joined the board of the iron company, the elder W. A. Mackinnon was receiving royalty payments on iron ore raised from his Furness properties.<sup>29</sup> Ore and smelting interests were eventually brought together: in 1865 Myles Kennedy, of the firm of Kennedy Brothers, discovered ore on Mackinnon's land at Ireleth and mined it until 1868, when Mackinnon took over the Askam mines himself and leased them to the Furness Iron and Steel Company.<sup>30</sup>

The company later acquired other mines in Furness, including Goldmire and Plumpton, which were purchased in 1871 from Joseph Rawlinson, a prominent Dalton ironmaster and a shareholder in the Askam firm.<sup>31</sup> Useful though they were, these and other local sources of ore controlled by the company were insufficient to meet the needs of the Askam works, and further supplies of ore were purchased from Hodbarrow, Park and Roanhead mines, which lay outside the company's control, as well as from Antrim and Spain.<sup>32</sup> The company also depended upon outside sources for coke. Most of the coke used at Askam was purchased in Durham and was carried across the Pennines to Furness by way of the South Durham and Lancashire Union Railway.<sup>33</sup> The Askam company's operations thus extended well beyond the confines of the Ireleth district.

The building of the ironworks and increased activity at local iron mines affected Ireleth profoundly. As early as March 1865 rumours were circulating in the district

<sup>29</sup> *Select Committee on Rating of Mines* (1857), Mins. of Ev., Question 2301.

<sup>30</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 5 December 1868; Richardson, *op. cit.*, ii 166; Lease, Mackinnon to Furness Iron and Steel Co., original deed in the offices of Messrs Hart Jackson & Sons, Solicitors, Ulverston.

<sup>31</sup> The purchase is recorded in B.T. 31/1242 and in an Abstract of Title relating to the Askam and Mouzell Iron Co. in the offices of Messrs Hart Jackson & Sons. In 1873 the Furness Iron and Steel Co. owned or leased, in addition to Goldmire and Plumpton, mines at Thwaite Flat, Marton, Lindal Moor, Dalton and Pennington (*Ulverston Mirror*, 3 May 1873).

<sup>32</sup> *The Engineer*, 28 July 1871; *Journ. Iron and Steel Inst.* (1902), 482-484.

<sup>33</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 15 May 1869; *Iron*, 22 February 1873.

that 100 cottages were to be built on the Marsh to house the iron company's workers. The construction of these houses, the *Barrow Herald* predicted, would quickly turn Ireleth into a "flourishing place". No less important, their erection foreshadowed the arrival there of about as many newcomers as there were residents in 1865.<sup>34</sup> The precise date at which work began on the village of Askam (or Askham, as it was frequently spelled in its infancy), is not known, but it cannot have been later than the summer of 1865, when it was reported that cottages were being built on Ireleth Marsh. Building operations evidently proceeded fairly rapidly, for in July 1866 a correspondent of the *Barrow Herald* saw many "beautiful houses and streets" on the Marsh, and estimated that the new village in course of erection there already contained more houses than Ireleth. The same writer observed that in anticipation of further growth, land had been "laid out for a large town".<sup>35</sup> The place-name Askam, which had long been applied to certain lands near Ireleth village, was now used to describe the new community, although it was also known as Ireleth Marsh until well into the 'seventies.

The new settlement was planned on ambitious lines. A building plan dated 1865 shows a large piece of land on the south side of the ironworks laid out in streets, of which those in the area known as The Lots (fig. 3) are recognisable as one small element.<sup>36</sup> There were to have been a church, a school, a market hall, an imposing square and, to complete the town, a public park facing the Duddon estuary. The land on which this development was to take place belonged to E. T. Wakefield, and both he and his partners in the iron company were to be

<sup>34</sup> In 1873 the Rev. J. S. Padley, incumbent of Ireleth, estimated the population of the district in 1865 as 400 (*Barrow Herald*, 2 August 1873).

<sup>35</sup> This paragraph is based principally on material in the *Barrow Herald*, 1 April and 22 July 1865; 14 July 1866.

<sup>36</sup> Plan of Building Sites at Askam-in-Furness, 1865, in the plan-rack in the offices of Messrs Hart Jackson & Sons, Ulverston.





*Photograph by F. Strike.*

PLATE I.—Sharp Street, Askam, 1963. Sharp Street was formed about 1868 and was built up rapidly during the early years of the 1870's.



*Photograph by courtesy of Messrs. Sankeys (Barrow-in-Furness) Ltd.*

PLATE II.—Duke Street, Askam, in the early years of the present century. The photograph, which was probably taken in 1903, shows the principal shopping centre of Askam and part of the ironworks.

tcwaas\_002\_1965\_vol65\_0024

honoured in the names of streets and squares in the proposed town.<sup>37</sup>

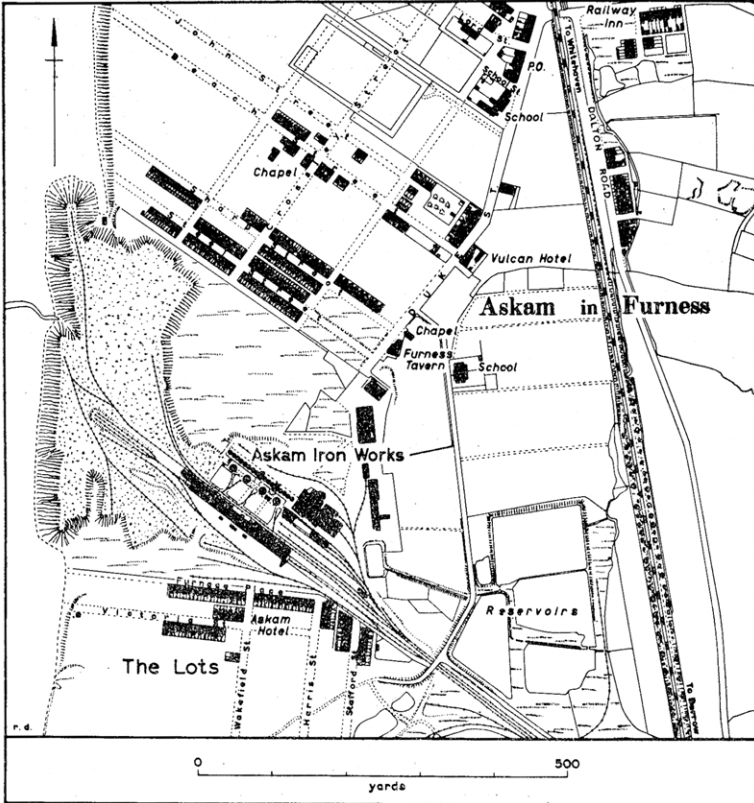


FIG. 3.—Askam in 1889 (Reproduced with permission from the O.S. 25-inch map Lancashire XV:8, surveyed 1889 and published in 1891).

Land was also developed for building purposes on the north side of the ironworks, and during the summer of 1865 notices offering land for sale there appeared with

<sup>37</sup> The main square was to be named after Wakefield, and both Harris and Shapter were to have streets bearing their names. Wakefield and Harris Streets only have emerged out of the plan of 1865. Wakefield's land is shown in an Abstract of Title of the Askam and Mouzell Iron Co. in the offices of Messrs Hart Jackson & Sons.

increasing regularity in local newspapers.<sup>38</sup> No plan has come to light for this area, but to judge from the advertisements it would appear that land on this part of the Marsh came on to the market piecemeal at this period and that both residents and outsiders were quick to take advantage of what one advertiser described hopefully as a "practically unlimited demand for dwelling-houses".<sup>39</sup> Some of those who wished to dispose of property for building purposes were landowners of long standing, whose connections with the district can be traced back many years before 1865. Joseph Sharp(e), for example, who was a party to the sale of the warren to the iron company and who owned land where Steel and Sharp Streets stand, appears in the 1851 census schedules as a landed proprietor in Ireleth;<sup>40</sup> and the Fell estate, part of which was offered for sale in 1866, occurs in the Tithe survey of 1842 (fig. 2).<sup>41</sup> Other vendors were apparently newcomers to Ireleth. Benjamin Fish, for example, who advertised nine acres of land for sale there in the autumn of 1865, was a Barrow building contractor;<sup>42</sup> as was James Carruthers, who was awarded the contract for the brickwork at the works of the iron company.<sup>43</sup>

The precise rôle of the iron company in the early building programme at Askam is difficult to determine. The company is said to have "offered every facility to builders" and to have placed some of its own land on the market for building purposes.<sup>44</sup> The records of the

<sup>38</sup> Examples occur in the advertising sections of the *Barrow Herald*, 27 May and 17 June 1865.

<sup>39</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 22 July 1865.

<sup>40</sup> H.O. 107/2275. Sharp's part in the transaction is mentioned in the records of the iron company.

<sup>41</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 23 June 1866.

<sup>42</sup> Fish offered the land for sale in the *Barrow Herald*, 30 September 1865. He is mentioned as one of Barrow's builders in Joseph Fisher, *Popular History of Barrow-in-Furness* (no date [c. 1891]), 107. See also Marshall, *op. cit.*, 285. The names of other well-known Barrow builders (e.g. William Gradwell) appear in the records of the Dalton Local Board after 1873 in connection with Askam.

<sup>43</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 14 July 1866, 6 April 1867.

<sup>44</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 15 July 1865, 1 December 1866.

Dalton Local Board show that some houses were owned by the company at a later date, but many were held on lease. In the absence of detailed evidence, the precise relationship between company and private builder must remain uncertain. Fragmentary references, however, suggest that the company relied principally on local enterprise, including that of individual shareholders, to meet the demand for new accommodation in the village.<sup>45</sup>

Askam quickly showed a tendency to expand northwards across the Marsh towards the sites of two projects of local railway companies, the Duddon viaduct and Ireleth railway station. Although the first of these schemes was eventually abandoned, its realisation was for some time confidently expected in the district, with the result that between 1865 and 1868, when the scheme was dropped, land in Ireleth was frequently advertised for sale with the recommendation that it lay close to the site of the intended viaduct, a situation, it was implied, which would in due course be greatly enhanced in value.<sup>46</sup> The second project did materialise, but only after considerable delay. Ireleth (Askam) station was opened in the spring of 1868,<sup>47</sup> but the site had been selected long before and was known in the district for at least eighteen months before the station was actually opened. Land nearby was offered for sale on the strength of its potentially strategic situation before the station itself became a reality.<sup>48</sup>

The effect of the first phase of Askam's development was thus to produce two groups of buildings; a large one, consisting of the ironworks and several rows of small terraced houses nearby; and a much smaller group,

<sup>45</sup> The names of Wakefield and Mackinnon appear amongst the owners of house property in Askam at a later date (*Barrow Herald*, 1 December 1883). A number of old Rate Books are preserved in the offices of the Dalton U.D.C. but unfortunately these do not cover the period under discussion.

<sup>46</sup> Notices in the *Barrow Herald*, 17 June 1865 and 3 August 1867 are typical of many.

<sup>47</sup> *Barrow Times*, 28 March 1868; *Ulverston Advertiser*, 2 April 1868.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, *Barrow Herald*, 10 November 1866.

which included the railway station and one or two buildings in its vicinity. This last group formed a link between Ireleth, farther up the hill, and the community at the gates of the ironworks. Station and ironworks were connected by Sandy Lane, one of the old tracks previously mentioned.<sup>49</sup> The lane had at one time given access only to the warren and the shore, but with the building of the ironworks and the railway station it assumed importance as the principal line of communication between the two groups of buildings which made up Askam at that time. Widened and improved, Sandy Lane became in the mid 'seventies the main thoroughfare of Askam and the site of most of the shops and public buildings (Plate II). The new status of the lane was eventually officially acknowledged by a change of name to Duke Street.<sup>50</sup> The "new town" on the south side of the ironworks thus became increasingly remote from the parts of Askam where growth was taking place most rapidly.

The shape of the growing village was influenced by still another feature of the old rural landscape. Before building operations started, the Marsh on the north side of the ironworks was occupied by a number of long and rather narrow fields (fig. 2). As building progressed the field boundaries, which formed in many cases property boundaries, influenced the angle at which streets were laid out. The main building lines ran parallel with the longer axis of each field, and rows of houses were built along streets which were formed off Sandy Lane (figs. 3 and 4). In the hope that the Marsh would eventually be fully occupied, the line of the new streets was projected almost to the shore and several cross streets were formed,

<sup>49</sup> On the enclosure plan of Ireleth Marsh (1831), Sandy Lane appears under the name of Drain Road, a reference to the fact that it was paralleled by a drainage ditch which served a large area of the Marsh.

<sup>50</sup> There are references to the improvement of Sandy Lane in *Letter Book (Letters Received) No. 1, sub. 8* November 1875 and 7 February 1876; and in *Official Reports No. 3, sub. March* 1890, amongst the records in the offices of the Dalton U.D.C. A letter dated 7 February 1876 speaks of "the new road now in the course of construction, called Duke Street at Askam".

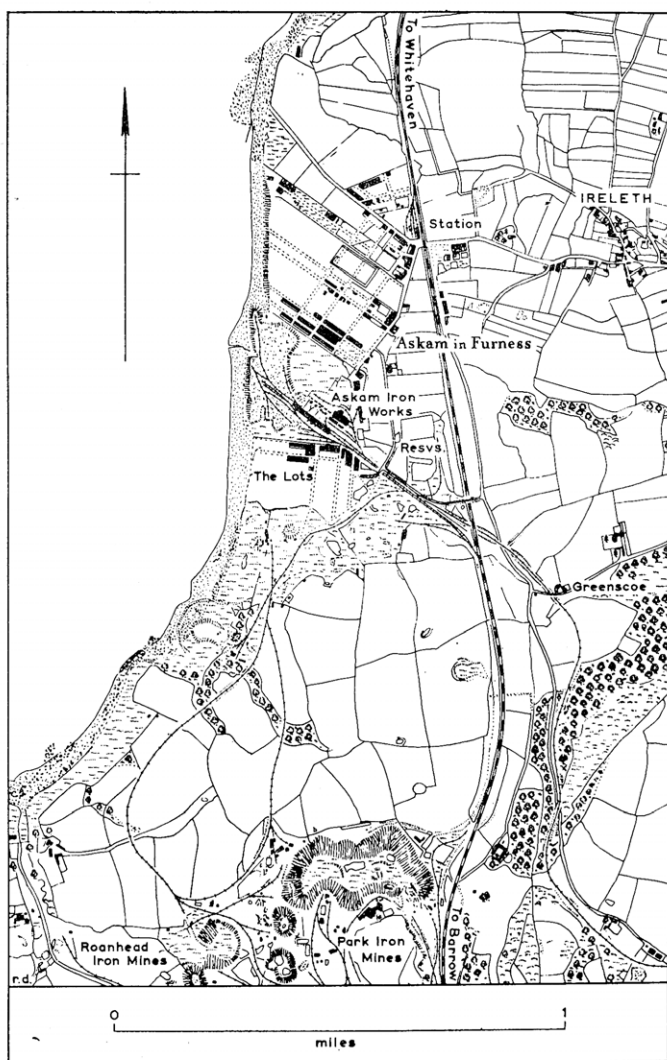


FIG. 4.—Askam and Ireleth in 1889 (Reproduced with permission from the O.S. 6-inch map Lancashire XV, revised 1889 and published in 1892).

thus providing a grid-iron plan for the whole area. The Marsh was never fully occupied by houses, however, and Askam remains to this day manifestly incomplete, the ambitious plans of its early builders still unfulfilled. Some of its streets contain only a handful of houses; others contain a large number of dwellings, but even in these streets the rows of buildings are frequently broken by the gaps of empty plots. The presence of a large open space where the ironworks stood adds to the unfinished appearance of the place, which on casual inspection gives the impression of having been laid out in an almost haphazard manner (fig. 5). Had the Marsh been fully occupied, however, closely-built rows of small terraced houses, similar to those in Plate I, would have covered the whole area.<sup>51</sup>

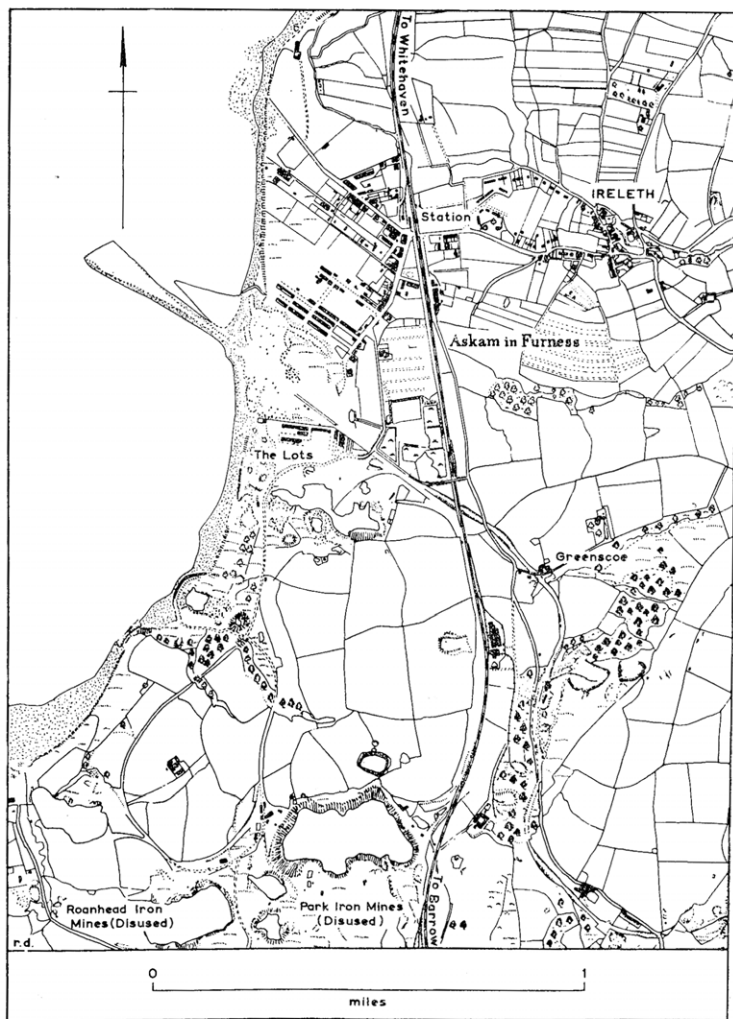
For some years Askam grew swiftly. By the end of 1870 the village contained about 170 houses,<sup>52</sup> and as the ironworks expanded after 1869 so did the demand for more accommodation. The demand was not met immediately, and in 1871 there appeared in the local press the first of many complaints about housing conditions in the village. It was alleged in July 1871 that the growth in size of the ironworks during the previous six months had led to a considerable increase in the population of Askam "without any increase in the number of houses".<sup>53</sup> "Many houses are fearfully overcrowded", the writer alleged, "and one yard connected with three houses has to serve for thirty-five people". The conditions described here may have been an extreme case, but they are cre-

<sup>51</sup> Few of the houses have gardens, but many Askamites keep poultry in small allotments on the sand-dunes. The houses have back-yards. A cursory inspection suggests that the majority of Askam's houses are certainly no worse, and in many cases are appreciably better, than the rows of miners' houses in Dalton that date from about this same period.

<sup>52</sup> Minute Book, Ulverston Board of Guardians, 29 December 1870 (Lancs. Record Office, PUU/1/11).

<sup>53</sup> *Barrow, Furness & North-Western Daily Times*, 21 July 1871. As long as the Enumeration Returns of 1871 remain inaccessible, it will be impossible to determine the origins of Askam's population at this period. The parish registers of Ireleth with Askam afford little assistance in this respect. In the 1880's a number of Irishmen were employed at the ironworks.





*Crown Copyright reserved.*

FIG. 5.—Askam and Ireleth at the present day (Reproduced from O.S. 6-inch map Lancashire SD 27N.W., published in 1956).

dible. The combined population of Askam and Ireleth, which was no more than about 400 in 1865, had risen by 1871 to 2,500 and by 1873 was 3,000.<sup>54</sup> Such a rapid increase not surprisingly strained the resources of the new village to the limit.

During the prosperous years of the early 'seventies many building plots were occupied in Steel, Sharp and Beach Streets and in Duddon Road, close to the station, and Askam assumed substantially its present dimensions. In 1873 there were 146 houses in "the vicinity" of Steel Street, where only two years before there had been 44: the sites of another 60 houses had been sold and were awaiting occupation.<sup>55</sup> Plans were prepared during the same year for the development of land along Sandy Lane, and though these were not executed immediately they formed the basis of later plans. Towards the end of the decade a scheme was drawn up by a local builder for laying out an estate on the northern part of the Marsh beyond John Street.<sup>56</sup>

It was at this period too that several new public buildings were added to the small number of those already in existence in Askam and Ireleth. Chapels were built for the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist congregations in 1870 and for the United Free Methodists later in the decade.<sup>57</sup> New Church Schools to supplement Ireleth school were opened in Askam in 1873, with financial assistance from the iron company, the Barrow Haematite Steel Company and the Dukes of Buccleuch and Devon-

<sup>54</sup> *Barrow, Furness & North-Western Daily Times*, 21 July 1871; *Barrow Herald*, 2 August 1873.

<sup>55</sup> *Barrow Daily Times*, 5 September 1873.

<sup>56</sup> Plan dated January 1878 in the offices of the Dalton U.D.C. The scheme was the work of Nicholas Mandall, who was described in 1872 as a plumber and glazier, of Askam. The plan was never carried out in its original form. Like many of Askam's builders, Mandall seems to have come from Barrow, where the firm of W. & N. Mandall, Plumbers, Builders and Joiners, occupied the Dalton Road Saw Mills in 1864 (*Barrow Herald*, 6 August 1864).

<sup>57</sup> *Ulverston Advertiser*, 21 April 1870; *Ulverston Mirror*, 25 June 1870; John Tyson, *Abstract of Accounts*, Dalton Local Board (1887), p. 167; B.T. 31/1242 (grant of land to the United Free Methodists by the iron company, 1876).

shire, representing the principal iron and railway interests in the district.<sup>58</sup> Several new shops made their appearance in Duke Street, which was becoming built up at its northern extremity. As Joseph Richardson observed, during the 'seventies Askam was "beginning to present the features of a thriving township." The transformation was acknowledged in 1873 by the inclusion of Askam and Ireleth within the North Ward of the newly formed Dalton Local Board District and by the creation in the following year of a new ecclesiastical parish of Ireleth-with-Askam.

Reference has already been made to the fact that this period of rapid population growth and physical expansion had some unhappy consequences. As early as 1870 the Ulverston Guardians, who were at that time responsible for the sanitary affairs of Askam, were told that the village had grown up "without any facilities whatever for sewerage" and that the house drains there were allowed to discharge their contents on to the still open parts of the Marsh.<sup>59</sup> The Medical Officer of the district informed the Guardians that Askam was "badly drained and in an unsatisfactory condition", and went on to say that in his opinion the sanitary state of the village was as bad as that of any place within his jurisdiction. Others used less restrained language in letters to the local press, and the subject of Askam's drains eventually reached the sombre pages of *The Lancet*.<sup>60</sup>

Despite widespread criticism of inadequate drainage and sewerage facilities, little appears to have been achieved until 1872, when a main sewer was laid on the Marsh at the expense of the property owners.<sup>61</sup> The

<sup>58</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 2 August 1873. See also J. L. Hobbs, "Notes on Ireleth school and chapel", CW2 xlviii.

<sup>59</sup> Minute Book, Ulverston Board of Guardians, 29 December 1870. Additional information will be found at 22 December 1870 and 11 April 1872.

<sup>60</sup> 29 July 1871. For local comment on conditions in Askam at this period see *Barrow, Furness & North-Western Daily Times*, 21 July and 2 August 1871; *Barrow Herald*, 27 August 1870.

<sup>61</sup> *Barrow, Furness & North-Western Daily Times*, 11 August 1871; Ulverston Board of Guardians, Minute Book, 11 April 1872.

Dalton Local Board later extended this sewer, but progress was slow and even the completed sewerage system proved inadequate.

A major cause of trouble was the tendency of sand to drift into the sewers and thus reduce their efficiency. Only too late was it realised that the site of Askam, though in many ways admirable for an ironworks, was unsatisfactory for dwellings. Not without reason was Ireleth situated on high ground well above the coastal marshes and dunes. As a result of trampling and building operations the grass cover of the dunes was in time destroyed, with the result that sand from the shore was blown in great quantities into the streets of Askam, where it readily choked the drains and sewers, which had only a very slight gradient to their outfall. Sand also drifted into the yards of the houses and frequently prevented access to these by way of the back streets. Sand dunes three or four feet in height occasionally formed even in the principal streets.<sup>62</sup>

To make matters worse, sand found its way into the domestic water supply. Many of the houses on the Marsh were supplied with water from taps placed at infrequent intervals in the streets. The spacing of the taps involved some householders in a round journey of several hundred yards to obtain water, and also provided an opportunity for sand to enter the cans and buckets used for conveying water indoors.<sup>63</sup> Askam's sand problem occupied a good deal of the time of the Dalton Local Board after 1873 and various remedies, including the construction of a wall of slag along the shore, were suggested.<sup>64</sup> The

<sup>62</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 28 February 1885; Dalton Local Board *Official Reports*, June 1880 and July 1882, in the offices of the Dalton U.D.C. Mr Tom Backhouse, formerly of Askam, informs me that pipes laid on the Marsh at a later date than that discussed above were sometimes disrupted by being thrown out of alignment as their peaty foundations shrank after drying out.

<sup>63</sup> The condition of Askam is described at length in the *Official Reports* of the Dalton L.B., July 1882. The houses lying to the south of the ironworks appear to have enjoyed the luxury of an individual supply of piped water.

<sup>64</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 28 February 1885.

nuisance was not easily prevented, however, and with the passage of time it appears to have become accepted as an unpleasant but inescapable feature of life in the village.

Nor was sand the only unpleasant feature. For many years Askam retained a raw, unfinished appearance as new streets were driven across the Marsh and rows of houses erected along them. "Askam presents the usual appearance of a new place", wrote a visitor in 1873, "recently erected houses, unfinished streets, and so on. Paving and flagging are luxuries which have not yet been introduced".<sup>65</sup> The writer concluded by expressing the opinion that the village was "not at first sight a very desirable spot to live in". The reports of the officials of the Dalton Local Board suggest that the attractiveness of Askam increased little, if at all, during the following decade. By 1883 some streets had been completed and sewers had been laid, but the water supply on the Marsh was still inadequate and the sand nuisance was as bad as ever.<sup>66</sup> As late as 1894 Askam was described as "little better than a penal settlement, dreaded by everybody, and hated by its inhabitants if only because of the sand nuisance".<sup>67</sup> But despite the sand and the unfinished state of the streets, Askam's bill of health compares not unfavourably at this period with that of older settlements in the district.<sup>68</sup> One reason for this relatively happy state of affairs was the possession of a supply of piped water

<sup>65</sup> *Ulverston Mirror*, 3 May 1873.

<sup>66</sup> These remarks are based on information contained in the books of *Official Reports* of the Dalton L.B. and on P. Mannex, *History & Directory of Furness and Cartmel* (no date [1882]), 187-188.

<sup>67</sup> *Barrow News*, 14 July 1894. This is obviously an overstatement, and it would hardly be worth quoting were it not for the fact that it illustrates the long-standing grievance of the villagers about the drift of sand into their streets and homes. Indirectly, the quotation suggests that Askam was regarded in some quarters as socially inferior to its neighbours. Traces of this point of view may be detected at the present day, though much less marked than in the past.

<sup>68</sup> The form in which the M.O.H. made his return precludes for most years at this period an analysis of disease in Askam itself. The conclusion advanced above is therefore tentative and is based principally on the M.O.H.'s comments rather than on his figures, which embrace a large area.

from the Barrow mains. The fact that Askam's population was predominantly in the younger age groups was also a contributory factor.<sup>69</sup>

Askam was too heavily dependent on the iron industry, and on one company in particular, for its progress to be assured. Over the years the Furness Iron and Steel Company built up the labour force at the works and local iron mines until in 1873 this numbered about 850.<sup>70</sup> At times the figure was even greater. Some of the consequences of an over-specialised economy were felt in Askam towards the end of the 1870's. Dull conditions in the local iron trade were reflected in the village by emigration, empty houses and falling rents.<sup>71</sup> Plans for further building on the Marsh were either quietly put aside or else were drastically curtailed. Worse was to follow. In August 1879 the Furness Iron and Steel Company suspended payment and shortly afterwards went into voluntary liquidation.<sup>72</sup> The event marked the end of an epoch in Askam, for although the works were kept going by the liquidators, the changes which followed upon the failure of the company were far reaching.

At the purely personal level they removed from the local scene individuals who had been closely associated with Askam since the early days of the ironworks. One of these was William Crossley, the managing director of the firm and an engineer of more than local standing. Crossley had joined the company in 1869 and after his arrival in Askam had played a conspicuous part in local affairs. He was one of the first members of the Dalton

<sup>69</sup> In 1876 Askam was described as "a very prolific place" (*Ulverston Mirror*, 23 September).

<sup>70</sup> *Ulverston Mirror*, 3 May 1873. Richardson mentions a labour force of 1,000.

<sup>71</sup> For Askam at this period see *Barrow Herald*, 22 February and 20 September 1879.

<sup>72</sup> The story may be followed in *The Iron and Coal Trades Review*, 29 August, 5 and 19 September 1879, and in the *Barrow Herald*, 23 August, 6 and 20 September 1879. The assets of the company amounted to £47,514. 2s. 8d., the liabilities to £98,335. 19s. 6d. The company owed the Furness Railway between £13,000 and £14,000 "on carriage account" (*Directors' Minutes*, F.R. 30 August 1879, B.T.C. Record Office, London). The Barrow Steel Co. was another large creditor.

Local Board and was elected Chairman of that body between 1877 and 1879. After acting for a time as joint liquidator of the Askam concern, Crossley was concerned in proceedings for bankruptcy, after which he disappears from the local records.<sup>73</sup>

The changes also prepared the way for the ultimate control of the Askam works by an outside firm. The assets of the Furness Iron and Steel Company were acquired by the Askam and Mouzell Iron Company Ltd., which was incorporated in February 1881. The new concern was one with which both local and Cumberland iron interests were associated. The Askam and Mouzell concern combined the resources of John Clegg, owner of the Mouzell iron mines at Dalton, with those of the Cumberland Iron Mining and Smelting Company, owners of the Millom ironworks.<sup>74</sup> Under the new company the Askam works were reconstructed and linked by tramway with the Mouzell mines, thus adding yet another mineral line to the already extensive network in the vicinity of the ironworks.<sup>75</sup> But the Askam and Mouzell company enjoyed only a short life as an independent concern. In 1891 its property was transferred to the Millom and Askam Hematite Iron Co. Ltd., which had been formed the previous year to take over as going concerns the Millom works of the Cumberland Iron Mining and Smelting Company and the works and mines of the Askam and Mouzell concern,<sup>76</sup> most of whose shares were already

<sup>73</sup> *Barrow Herald*, 15 September 1883. Crossley was also involved in an Irish mining concern at this time. He was an original member of the Iron and Steel Institute and a Member of The Institution of Mechanical Engineers between 1871 and 1893, when his membership was allowed to fall into abeyance. Crossley's death does not appear to have been recorded by either of these bodies. His last known address was in Glasgow. I am indebted to Mr J. P. Saville, of the Iron and Steel Institute, and to Mr F. H. Hearn, of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, for most of these details.

<sup>74</sup> Askam and Mouzell company records (P.R.O., B.T. 31/2750); *Iron*, 17 December 1880; *Barrow Times*, 26 February 1881.

<sup>75</sup> The line of the Mouzell tramway is still clearly visible close to the road between Dalton and Askam by way of Greenscoe. The line was built during the years 1881 and 1882.

<sup>76</sup> Information by courtesy of Mr J. Scott, Managing Director, The Millom Hematite Ore & Iron Co. Ltd.

held by the Millom company. The general effect of the changes after 1879 was to place control of the Askam works in the hands of the Millom company, and Askam's rôle was determined increasingly by the needs of the amalgamated concern of which it formed part.

The eventual fate of the works was foreshadowed some years later when they were "closed for some three or four years owing to the [Millom] company being able to execute all their orders at the Millom works".<sup>77</sup> Despite some modernisation early in the present century the Askam furnaces were in blast only intermittently between 1900 and 1914,<sup>78</sup> and when the exceptional demand for iron during the war years had passed they were shut down completely, so ending Askam's connection with iron smelting.<sup>79</sup> The haematite mines nearby continued to be worked on a diminishing scale until the Second World War, when that branch of the iron industry too finally came to an end.

No industry of comparable size took the place of the declining iron trade, and by the early years of the present century many local residents were already working in Barrow. For a time Askam and Ireleth enjoyed a modest summer residential holiday business, but this never reached large proportions and was certainly no substitute for the loss of a major industry.<sup>80</sup> Askam stands today as a reminder of the great age of the Furness iron industry. It would be difficult to argue a case for the village as a thing of beauty; but as a product of an important phase

<sup>77</sup> T. Bulmer & Co., *History, Topography, and Directory of Furness & Cartmel* (no date [c. 1911]), 266.

<sup>78</sup> Mr T. Backhouse, of Dalton, kindly contributed many useful items of information about Askam and the ironworks during the early years of the present century.

<sup>79</sup> The Askam furnaces went out of blast in 1919 (W. McGowan Gradon, *Furness Railway, its Rise and Development, 1846-1923* [1946], 29).

<sup>80</sup> There are references to the holiday trade in the two villages in the *Barrow News*, 4 and 18 August, 15 September 1894. Hastings, Leicester and Birmingham are mentioned as places from which visitors came, but the great majority appear to have originated within the northern counties of England. Since most of the visitors were accommodated in ordinary houses, the holiday trade in Askam and Ireleth has left few traces in the local scene.



in the development of the Furness district Askam is worthy of the attention of local historians.

---

### Acknowledgements.

This paper leans heavily on the files of local newspapers and its compilation would have been impossible without access to these. Most of the files consulted were in the Public Library, Barrow-in-Furness, and thanks are due to Mr F. Barnes, Chief Librarian, Barrow, and the staff of the Reference Library for assistance in making these available. Mr J. Gorman very kindly allowed me to consult the old newspaper files kept at the offices of the *North-Western Evening Mail*, Barrow, and the British Museum Newspaper Library was used to fill some of the gaps that remained after these local sources had been investigated. Mr Stanley J. Price, Clerk of the Dalton Urban District Council, and his staff made possible a search of the records of the Dalton Local Board. Mr T. Backhouse, of Dalton, furnished much useful information on Askam in the early part of the present century and helped in assigning a date to Plate II. Mrs M. E. Steel of Ireleth made several valuable local contacts on my behalf besides providing me with useful information. The Rev. W. Braithwaite, now of Lanercost and formerly of Ireleth, assisted in the early stages of the work, as did Mr H. C. Postlethwaite, Engineer and Manager of the Furness Water Board, and Mr J. L. Whitton, Acting Manager, Ministry of Labour Employment Exchange, Barrow. I am also indebted to Mr R. Sharpe France, County Archivist, Lancashire; Mr F. B. Hart Jackson, solicitor, Ulverston; Mr J. Scott, Managing Director, The Millom Hematite Ore and Iron Co. Ltd., and Mr R. A. Skelton, Superintendent of the British Museum Map Room, for their assistance. The source of the photographs is indicated below the prints.