

**W**HILST accounts of the ancient castles, old manorial halls and historic farmhouses of Cumbria have appeared in print<sup>1</sup> scant attention has been paid to the lesser country houses of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

A welcome start was made to remedy this situation by the publication in 1991 of *A guide to the country houses of the north-west* by John Martin Robinson. However, as his book deals not only with the whole of Cumbria but also with Lancashire, Cheshire and the Isle of Man, the entries for each property are, of necessity, limited.

My aim in this paper is to trace part of the history of one Cumbrian country house, Duddon Hall, near Broughton-in-Furness, and to attempt to set it in the wider context of comparable rural retreats.

By the late 18th century country house building in Cumbria was gathering momentum. Two main reasons for this are apparent. In the first place a new breed of men who had made their fortunes through trade and commerce in the rapidly expanding towns of Whitehaven and Carlisle were ambitious to acquire a landed estate and thus set themselves up as gentry. Examples of such families included the Hartleys of Whitehaven, merchants and later bankers, who purchased and improved several estates in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These included Gillfoot at Egremont and Rosehill at Moresby.<sup>2</sup> The Fergusons of Carlisle were able to build Houghton Hall, Houghton, in 1817 as a result of their cotton fortune.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, wealthy off-comers, attracted by the Lakeland landscape so far removed from the scenes of their commercial background, were equally anxious to found a dynasty in such pleasant surroundings. A prime example of such a family was the Marshalls, Leeds linen manufacturers, who built Hallsteads near Ullswater in 1815 and followed this up by purchasing further lands and estates, notably at Patterdale Hall.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the local professional classes in Cumbria were not slow to follow the rush, themselves hungry to ascend the status ladder by buying a country estate. For instance, the humble 18th century country attorney was gradually being transformed into the highly respectable solicitor of the 19th century, bringing with this change new wealth and position. The Saul family of Carlisle is a case in point. They were able to build for themselves at least two country houses, Crosby House, Crosby-on-Eden, in the early 19th century, followed, in 1820, by Brunstock House, Houghton, erected to the designs of the prominent architect Thomas Rickman.<sup>5</sup> My example of Duddon Hall is paralleled here in that its rebuilding at about the same time was also the direct result of a fortune made locally in the law.

South Cumberland in the late 18th century was still a remote and wild area, far removed from the relatively sophisticated industrial towns of Whitehaven and Carlisle. This was particularly true of the Lordship of Millom, a triangular tract of land bounded by the sea and the rivers Esk and Duddon. On its northern extremity stood the imposing Muncaster Castle, to the south the venerable remains of Millom Castle and to the east the recently gothicized Broughton Tower. Apart from these there was a dearth of even modest country houses, reflecting the lack of local,



PLATE 1. Duddon Grove in an engraving reproduced in *The Lonsdale Magazine* XVI (February 1822).

resident gentry. However, this situation was soon to change as the steady influence of the Industrial Revolution began to make its mark. By the early 19th century several families with commercial backgrounds had begun to establish their pre-eminence in the district, notably the Postlethwaites and Lewthwaites. The Postlethwaites, whose wealth was derived from Petty and Postlethwaite's Bank in Ulverston and from the ownership of slate-quarries, inherited The Oaks, Millom, from the Hodgshon family and immediately began to enlarge and gentrify the existing house and to lay out pleasure gardens.<sup>6</sup> The Lewthwaites, whose fortune was founded on Whitehaven and the West India trade, built themselves two attractive Georgian Villas between 1815-20 at Broadgate and Hazel Mount, Thwaites.<sup>7</sup> The history of nearby Duddon Hall reflects a number of relevant themes in the context of local country houses, not least in the rapid decline of the old order, the aspirations of its parvenu purchaser and the subsequent story of its convoluted descent.

The Duddon Hall estate occupies a delightful situation in the Duddon Valley some two miles north-west of Broughton-in-Furness. The River Duddon flows through the grounds and the scene can have changed little since it inspired William Wordsworth to write his Duddon sonnets.

The name of the property was originally Whoase or Wha<sup>8</sup> but by the end of the 18th century it became known as Duddon Grove, becoming Duddon Hall in the 1860s.<sup>9</sup>

The family of Cowper or Cooper had farmed the land since the reign of Elizabeth I and although they had gradually risen up the social scale from yeomen to minor gentry their ruin came about because of extravagance in the 18th century.<sup>10</sup> As a result of this, Major John Cooper, an officer in the local Militia, was forced to flee to Scotland to escape his creditors<sup>11</sup> and, for the first time for over two hundred years,

the Duddon Grove estate was put on the market.

The title deeds for this period are no longer in existence but the name of the purchaser and the year of the sale are known. The purchaser, who probably drove a hard bargain, was John Robinson (1738-1803) an Ulverston attorney noted for his sharp practices.<sup>12</sup> He was the son of Richard Robinson (1702-75) of Fell Foot,<sup>13</sup> Lakeside, who married in 1732 Elizabeth daughter of John Machell of Aynsome, Cartmel, the noted Backbarrow ironmaster.<sup>14</sup> Attorney Robinson amassed a large fortune and when he died childless in 1803 he left an estate of £90,000, the bulk of which went to his equally unpleasant nephew Richard Towers.<sup>15</sup>

Richard Towers was born in 1775, the son of Thomas Towers, an Ulverston shoemaker who in 1758 had had the good sense to marry Attorney Robinson's sister Frances.<sup>16</sup> Young Towers succeeded to the Duddon Grove estate when he was in his late twenties. He soon determined to make his mark in local society and to set himself up as a gentleman. To this end he rebuilt the mansion house in about 1805. It has been described by the architectural historian John Martin Robinson as "a plain ashlar Grecian early 19th Century house of three bays plus a long north wing", adding that when Towers rebuilt it he had "included a circular vestibule, central hall and oval dining room".<sup>17</sup>

However, Richard Towers did not go down well with the local gentry who considered him a parvenu. Tradition has it that he was prone to beating his wife in public, once at Cartmel races,<sup>18</sup> and he was fond of having acrimonious disputes with the neighbouring landowners. Sometimes this ended up with litigation but more often he merely took the law into his own hands. Frank Warriner in his *Millom People and Places* recounts the battle of Rainsbarrow Wood at the high end of Ulpha, when Towers' men fought against their Broughton adversaries:

Towers was reputed to feed his men very well, they boasted they had good roast beef seven days a week and crowed over the Broughton fellows whose diet they said consisted of "taties and red herrings. Several minor skirmishes left the Duddon Grove men victorious but it was not for long. The champion of "the Broughton side", a long, lean, lantern-jawed man, brought to the final contest an invincible weapon – a cat which had spent several weeks in the silent tomb. Waving it by the tail he charged furiously, yelling "Come on you roast beef men. I'll shown you what 'taties and red herrings can do' ". The enemy turned and fled. Locks were knocked off gates, gates unhinged and thrown into ditches, and the laden timber carts passed through in triumphal procession.

This dispute centred round a right of way near Duddon Grove to Rainsbarrow, a large coppice wood famed for its nuts. Towers was the loser in this instance.

Richard Towers also possessed a town house at 34 Queen Street, Ulverston, later owned by the Remington family, who were attorneys and later acquired extensive property at Aynsome, Cartmel and elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

Towers died at Duddon Grove on the 10 July 1831 aged 56<sup>20</sup> and was buried at Ulverston with his three sisters, one of whom had married the Revd William Millers in 1808. As Towers had no children he left his estate to his niece Frances Esther Millers. His estate was sworn at under £10,000<sup>21</sup>, a significantly smaller sum than he had inherited. No doubt the rebuilding of Duddon Grove and the cost of litigation had taken their toll.

Frances Esther Millers was the only child of the Revd William Millers,<sup>22</sup> who had a distinguished career at Cambridge, where he had been First Wrangler and afterwards a Fellow of St John's College. He then became Vicar of Hardwick, near

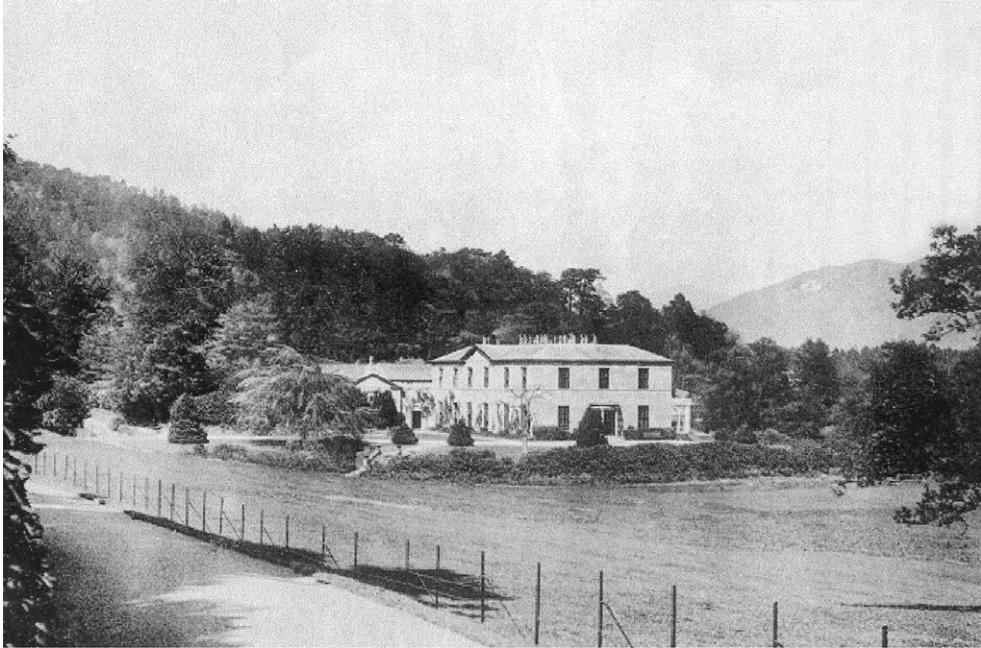


PLATE 2. Duddon Hall 1902.



PLATE 3. Duddon Hall 2000.

Cambridge, but by the late 1820s had moved to Springfield, Ulverston. Millers had been at school with James Losh,<sup>23</sup> later a barrister and Recorder of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. When visiting Lancashire, North-of-the-Sands, at about this time, Losh recounts an amusing glimpse of the Revd William Millers who he had not seen for many years:

We saw Mr Millers whom I knew 44 or 45 years ago, a raw, bashful lad at Sedbergh. After that he became a Cambridge Senior Wrangler . . . a situation not to be attained without considerable talents as well as great industry. He afterwards married an uneducated country girl who, by the death of some relations, got a fortune of £50,000 to £60,000 and he is now a kind of half parson and half squire, very little indeed of a literary person and his manners exhibiting a curious mixture of awkward shyness and conscious self importance.<sup>24</sup>

The 1841 Census Return for Duddon Grove shows the Revd William Millers, a widower, living there with his daughter Frances Esther, then in her late twenties, together with a farm bailiff, footman and six indoor servants. Mr. Millers died in 1843<sup>25</sup> and the ornate pillared Temple or summerhouse in the grounds bears the same date and also a coat of arms apparently for Millers impaling Towers.<sup>26</sup> Perhaps, therefore, this remarkable folly was erected on his instructions or in his memory.

Frances Esther Millers never married and spent the remaining years of her comparatively short life practising her personal piety, subscribing liberally to local charities and helping the poor. In 1845 she gave £2,000 for the purpose of building and endowing Buckman's Brow School, Thwaites.<sup>27</sup> The purpose of this school was to educate girls of between five and sixteen in the three "R"s with a particular bias towards religious instruction. In its heyday it had eighty pupils and remained open until the 1920s.<sup>28</sup>

According to local tradition Miss Millers was murdered by a maid to whom she left money and her ghost is said to haunt the grounds of Duddon Hall.<sup>29</sup> Her death certificate, however, shows that she died in 1847 of measles. She was only thirty-four but left a personal estate of £60,000 and the Duddon Grove estate to "my dear uncle the Revd George Millers of Ely".<sup>30</sup>

The Revd George Millers (1775-1852)<sup>31</sup> was the younger brother of the Revd William Millers. He was at Hawkshead Grammar School with the Wordsworth brothers and then at St John's College, Cambridge. In 1800 he was appointed a Minor Canon of Ely Cathedral and was the Precentor from 1833. In addition he held several local benefices in plurality. In 1807 he published an erudite history of Ely Cathedral which went into three editions.<sup>32</sup> In 1801 he married Mary Forby, a Norfolk girl, but they had no children. Apart from his clerical duties Millers was a magistrate for the Isle of Ely, a sociable person and noted for his kindness to his servants and generosity to local good causes.<sup>33</sup> He and his executors met the entire expense of boarding and painting the nave roof in Ely Cathedral, which began in 1855.

When the Revd George Millers inherited the Duddon Grove estate in 1847 he was therefore in his seventies, a widower and without issue. He already enjoyed a comfortable life style in Ely, living in what is now the Headmaster's house of the King's School. He had himself been an usher and assistant master at the school in his earlier days. Overnight he had become a rich man, the squire of a substantial Cumbrian estate and Lord of the Manor of Dunnerdale-cum-Seathwaite.<sup>34</sup> However he chose to remain living in Ely, being too attached to the place to leave it.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, he paid summer visits to Duddon Grove and arranged for his cousin the Revd John Romney, grandson of the celebrated artist George Romney, to occupy the house. The 1851 Census Return for Duddon Grove shows Romney, described as “a clergyman without cure of souls”, as the occupier, together with his wife, children and numerous servants.

Millers did not live long to enjoy his inheritance. Perhaps it was more of a burden than a pleasure to him and he must have wondered what to do with it. In January 1852 Millers died at Ely and was buried in the Cathedral<sup>36</sup> next to his wife who had died in 1845. Today their wall monument and the stained glass windows to their memory by William Wailes of Newcastle can still be seen.

The will of the Revd George Millers, made on 22 April 1848, is a long and complicated one but his benevolent character shines through the legal jargon. He left an estate of about £100,000 excluding landed property.<sup>37</sup> There are many legacies, some substantial ones, to his friends and servants. The Duddon Grove estate was to be handed over to his executors and trustees John Job Rawlinson of Graythwaite<sup>38</sup> and Henry Remington of Ulverston, attorney<sup>39</sup> to hold it in trust for the former’s son, William Sawrey Rawlinson (*b.*1835), a boy of seventeen about to take up a career in an expensive cavalry regiment. Young Rawlinson’s mother Mary Romney, a first cousin once removed of the testator, had married John Job Rawlinson, a barrister, in 1831.<sup>40</sup> She was the sister of the Revd John Romney, who was living at Duddon Grove in 1851.

Millers’ will specified that William Sawrey Rawlinson should not inherit the Duddon Grove estate until he was twenty-five in 1860. Thereafter the Rawlinsons owned the estate, which became known as Duddon Hall and comprised at least 1,500 acres of land,<sup>41</sup> until it was sold by them in 1902, only the second time since the reign of Elizabeth I that the property had come on the market.<sup>42</sup>

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### Notes and References

<sup>1</sup> R. Hugill, *Castles of Cumberland and Westmorland* (Newcastle, 1977), M. W. Taylor, *The old Manorial Halls of Westmorland and Cumberland* (Kendal, 1892) and J. H. Palmer, *Historic farmhouses in and around Westmorland* (Kendal, 1944).

<sup>2</sup> T. Cockerill, “The Hartleys of Whitehaven, Gillfoot, Linethwaite, Rosehill, Armathwaite Hall and Silchester House” (unpublished article, 1978) and *Burke’s Landed Gentry* (1858 and 1952 editions).

<sup>3</sup> C. R. Hudleston and R. S. Boumphrey, *Cumberland families and heraldry* (Kendal, 1978), 110 and J. M. Robinson, *A guide to the country houses of the north-west* (London, 1991), 83, 111, 115.

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 95, 104, 110, 222, 284.

- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, 100 and C. R. Hudleston and R. S. Boumphrey, *op. cit.*, 295-296.
- <sup>6</sup> J. M. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 131 and C. R. Hudleston and R. S. Boumphrey, *op. cit.* 266-267.
- <sup>7</sup> *CW2*, xcii, 94.
- <sup>8</sup> In 1597 Millom Parish Register refers to Whowes and in 1694 as Whoase. In 1728 it is called Whoes (Millom Parish Register), later spelt Wha House by Major John Cooper after 1759 and before he re-christened it Duddon Grove prior to the sale to John Robinson in 1784 *CW2*, lxiv, 341.
- <sup>9</sup> *CW2*, lxiv, 350. Also *Lonsdale Magazine* XXVI, Vol. III, 41-42.
- <sup>10</sup> *CW2*, lxiv, 336.
- <sup>11</sup> *CW2*, lxiv, 341.
- <sup>12</sup> Revd G. M. Cooper, MS (numbered B.O.I), Jackson Library, Tullie House, Carlisle. See also *CW2*, lxiv, 350
- <sup>13</sup> Greatly altered by subsequent owners and now belonging to the National Trust. J. M. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 183.
- <sup>14</sup> *CW2*, lxxxix, 263-268.
- <sup>15</sup> Will dated 2 March 1795. The probate papers show that his estate within the Archdeaconry of Richmond was sworn at under £50,000 and under £40,000 within the Province of Canterbury.
- <sup>16</sup> Marriage Bond 1758; married at Colton.
- <sup>17</sup> J. M. Robinson, *op. cit.*, 104-105.
- <sup>18</sup> Mrs J. S. Cooper of Ulpha, *A History of the Duddon Valley* (c.1970).
- <sup>19</sup> J. S. Remington, *A peep into the past* (Kendal, 1935): from author's handwritten note in his copy.
- <sup>20</sup> R. and F. Dickinson, *Monumental Inscriptions at Ulverston* (Kendal, 1973), 29.
- <sup>21</sup> Will dated 2 June 1830. Proved London 9 Dec 1831.
- <sup>22</sup> *Admissions of St John's College, Cambridge*, IV, 385-386.
- <sup>23</sup> C. R. Hudleston and R. S. Boumphrey, *op. cit.*, 210.
- <sup>24</sup> E. Hughes (ed.), *The Diaries and Correspondence of James Losh* (Surtees Society CLXXIV, ii, 71).
- <sup>25</sup> Will dated 11 June 1834 (Public Record Office, Prob. 11/1981).
- <sup>26</sup> Illustrated in *CW2*, lxiv, facing 339. The coat of arms is certainly spurious since neither the Millers or Towers families were armigerous.
- <sup>27</sup> Mannix & Whellan, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Cumberland* (1847), 349.
- <sup>28</sup> Ex. info. Dr R. G. Whitehead C.B.E., whose mother was a pupil there.
- <sup>29</sup> Ex. info, the late Hon. E. F. Cross (1891-1978) whose mother the Hon. Mrs Mary Cross of Ash House, Thwaites, heard it from the Rawlinson family of Duddon Hall.
- <sup>30</sup> Will dated 30 September 1846. She was buried with her uncles and aunts at Ulverston (R. and F. Dickinson, *op. cit.*, 29).
- <sup>31</sup> *Admissions of St John's College, Cambridge*, IV, 385.
- <sup>32</sup> Entitled *A description of the Cathedral Church of Ely, with some account of the conventual buildings* (2nd edition 1808, 3rd edition 1834).
- <sup>33</sup> *Cambridge Chronicle*, 10 January 1852, 7.
- <sup>34</sup> J. Richardson, *Furness past and present: its history and antiquities* (1880), i, 172-173. This lordship was anciently held by the Kirkby and then the Hesketh families. The latter sold it in 1774 to William Penny whose trustees sold it to Richard Towers on a date unknown. A lordship of the manor is an incorporeal hereditament and was thus capable of being bought and sold separately from the land over which it exercised manorial rights. It descended from Towers to Millers by will.
- <sup>35</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1852, Part 1, 310.
- <sup>36</sup> *Cambridge Chronicle*, 17 January 1852 for a full account of his funeral and burial.
- <sup>37</sup> Proved in the Canterbury Prerogative Court on 24 January 1852 and in the Archdeaconry of Richmond on 12 May 1852.
- <sup>38</sup> *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1863), Rawlinson of Graythwaite.
- <sup>39</sup> *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1952), Remington formerly of Melling.
- <sup>40</sup> *Burke's Landed Gentry* (1898), Rawlinson of Duddon Hall.
- <sup>41</sup> J. Bateman, *The Great Landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (1878), 376 gives the total of their landholdings in Cumberland and Lancashire as 3,527 acres but it is unclear how much of this comprised their Duddon Hall estate.
- <sup>42</sup> Duddon Hall estate sales particulars 1902 (copy in CRO(B) Z607). The estate then comprised 1,474 acres.

