

ART. X.—*John Wesley's travels in Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands.* By the late T. A. BAINBRIDGE.

Read at Bangor, September 4th, 1952.

[This article was written by Mr Bainbridge as a continuation of that on "John Wesley's Travels in Cumberland", printed in *Transactions*, N.S. XLVII, 183-98. Owing to Mr Bainbridge's death, its appearance in *Transactions* has been delayed. C.M.L.B.]

IT was in 1739 that John Wesley, under the influence of George Whitefield, began field-preaching at Bristol. Ten years elapsed however before his journeyings brought him into Westmorland,¹ and incidentally at the behest of the same George Whitefield.²

In October 1749, being at Whitehaven, he recorded in his Journal: "I received a letter from Mr Whitefield, desiring me to meet him at Leeds . . . So we set out early on Tuesday, the 3rd; one of our brethren, who was a Yorkshireman, undertaking to put us into the way. He rode a little and a little farther, until we came to Old-hutton, above 50 miles from Whitehaven. We were dripping wet, having had heavy rain for several hours; but we soon got into warm beds, and all was well."³

Thus, at Old Hutton, about five miles south-east of Kendal, Wesley found his first lodgement in the county of Westmorland, and of Wednesday, 4 October 1749 he

¹ A description of John Wesley's journeys in our district will also be found in *Prelates and People*, p. 369-74.

² It is recorded that "Whitfield came to Kendal in 1745 and preached in the Market Place." "Again on June 22nd, 1750, whilst on a preaching tour through England, he came here (Kendal) and spoke . . . to several thousands in the Market Place." The following day he intended to proceed to Whitehaven. *Kirkbie-Kendal*, by J. F. Curwen, p. 354.

³ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, by the Rev. F. W. MacDonald (ii, 126) to which the references in brackets in the body of this Article refer.

wrote: "Our guide was resolved to go a little farther still; so we set out together, and rode on together to Leeds, though it was a long days journey and finding us full employ from 5 in the morning till 9 at night."⁴

Wesley next passed through Westmorland two years later and on this occasion he travelled northward from Bolton. "The next day (12 April 1751)⁵ we rode to Ambleside, and On Saturday, 13, over more than Welsh mountains to Whitehaven" (II, 193). This was the first of nine recorded visits to Ambleside, which appears in his Journal more frequently than any other place in Westmorland, presumably because of his many visits to Whitehaven.⁶

In 1752 he was in the extreme north of the county and on 27 May he wrote: "I preached at Clifton⁷ near Penrith, to a civil people, who looked just as if I had been talking 'Greek' " (II, 228). From this place, which, just seven years before had been the site of the last battle (or skirmish as some would prefer to call it) on English soil, he "went on to Lorton, a little village lying in a green fruitful valley, surrounded by high mountains."

It was in this same year 1752, just one hundred years after George Fox had arrived at Swarthmoor, that Wesley made one of his two recorded visits to North Lancashire. Leaving Whitehaven and travelling southwards along the coast by way of Drigg, he says of 5 June: "I went on, with Mr Milner, to Ulverstone. Here a very convenient place for preaching was offered. But few people had any desire to hear, so I went quietly back to my inn" (II, 229). The next day he rode to Chipping and then on to Bolton.

It was from Bolton, some seven years later that he

⁴ His meeting at Leeds with George Whitfield is dealt with at length in *Son to Susanna, The Private Life of John Wesley*, by G. Elsie Harrison, chapter 31.

⁵ In this year John Wesley married and resigned his Fellowship of Lincoln College.

⁶ "John Wesley's travels in Cumberland," CW2 xlvii 183 f.

⁷ In 1777, according to Nicolson and Burn, i 419, the village of Clifton contained about 25 families.

again approached North Lancashire and made the crossing of Morecambe Bay. Of the bay, Thomas West wrote:—

“The approach to Furness, the appendix of Lancashire, from Lancaster, hath always been considered as dangerous; but it is less so now than formerly, the sands being more solid; and in company with the guides few accidents happen. From the Lancaster shore at Herst (*sic*) Bank, to Cartmel shore, the sands are nine miles over. The river Ken hath its channel on these sands, and a guide on horseback is always in waiting to conduct travellers over at the stated hours. A neck of land in Cartmel, stretching out towards the ocean, divides the great bay of Morecambe: it is three miles over at the crossing to Furness . . . A little below Cartmel, on the road to Furness, lies Flouckburrow (*sic*) . . . The Leven sands are safe; yet the ford, like that of Ken, is frequently changing, by the shifting of the sands. This ford is every day tried for by the guide, and in his company you are safe.”⁸

Apparently John Wesley did not trouble overmuch about personal safety, for of his 1759 passage of Morecambe Bay he wrote, on 11 May: “At Lancaster we were informed it was too late to cross the sands. However, we resolved to make the trial; we passed the seven-mile sand without difficulty, and reached Fluckborough about sunset.” Of Saturday, 12 May, the next day, he said: “Setting out early, we came to Bottle (i.e., Bootle), about twenty-four measured miles from Fluckborough soon after eight, having crossed the Millam-Sand without either guide, or difficulty” (II, 448). He then proceeded northward to Whitehaven.⁹

These two journeys in reverse directions are the only recorded visits to Lancashire North-of-the-Sands. This was, in Wesley's day, a rural and sparsely populated region. Nearly half a century later, at the time of the first census (1801), the total population of North Lancashire was only 17,887, and Barrow-in-Furness, now a town of about 70,000, was merely a hamlet in the township

⁸ *The Antiquities of Furness*, 1774, pp. xiv-xv.

⁹ For an amusing account of this journey see CW2 xlvi 185.

of Hawcoat which formed part of the parish of Dalton.¹⁰ Two large volumes entitled *England Displayed* were published in 1769, ten years after Wesley's second visit, and among the twenty-seven market towns of Lancashire which were mentioned, four were in that part north of Morecambe Bay, viz.: Hawkshead, Cartmel, Ulverston and Dalton, but there is no mention of any place called Barrow.

The population of Westmorland was also relatively scanty, 40,805 being enumerated in 1801 as compared with 117,230 in Cumberland. Writing of this, Marr says: "Sparsely populated, on account of the hilly nature of a large part of the county, the people have lived mainly in scattered homesteads or small hamlets in the valley-bottoms, taking their produce to the market towns and there obtaining the few necessaries for their simple lives which they could not produce in their own homes. The Westmorland people therefore are pre-eminently dalesmen."¹¹

It was quite clearly, therefore, not a county which provided great opportunities for a field-preacher. Consequently it is not surprising to find that John Wesley's visits were to the market-towns, and most frequently to Ambleside and Kendal, because they lay on the high road from the south to Whitehaven, his favourite rendezvous in Cumberland.

The first mention of Kendal is on 9 April 1753, his Journal recording that "Mr Milner rode with us to Kendal, I preached there in a large convenient room (the weather not allowing me to preach abroad) . . . I was a little disgusted at their manner of coming in and sitting down, without any pretence to any previous prayer or ejaculation; as well as at their sitting during the hymn, which indeed not one (though they knew the tune) sung with

¹⁰ Cf. "Barrow-in-Furness: a population study," by T. H. Bainbridge (in *Economic Geography* 15, 1939, pp. 379-383).

¹¹ *Westmorland*, by J. E. Marr (Cambridge County Geographies, 1909), p. 4.

me. But it was far otherwise after the sermon; for God spake in his word. At the second hymn every person stood up, and most of them sang very audibly; and the greatest part of the Society followed us to our inn; nor did they leave us till we went to rest." (II, 250).

In 1764, on Monday, 25 June, he "rode by Keswick to Kendal" on what must have been a very extensive journey. According to Dr T. F. Hulme, he had left Bristol on Monday, 19 March and returned on Saturday, 4 August. "In this time at the lowest computation, he and his horse journeyed 1,800 miles . . . He preached in 122 towns and villages, generally in the open air."¹²

The next year he came to Kendal on a journey from Liverpool and was delighted, writing: "there is now a real work of God. The genuine gospel takes root, and sinners are converted to God" (III, 210).

He preached at Kendal again in 1767, but when he travelled to it in the following year conditions must have changed very greatly from 1765, for this time he says: "Seceders and mongrel Methodists have so surfeited the people here, that there is small prospect of doing good; however, I once more 'cast my bread upon the waters', and left the event to God" (III, 322).

Twenty years were to elapse before Kendal was found again in the Journal record, and by this time John Wesley was 85 years of age and this was to be his last journey through Westmorland. In the previous year (1787) one "Stephen Brunskill (of Orton) made an attempt to establish Wesleyan Methodist preaching. He rented a building at six guineas per annum."¹³

It is probable that on this journey northward in 1788 he would pass through Ambleside, but there is no mention of it in his Journal. There is an interesting entry however, dated 19 April 1784, where, after leaving

¹² *John Wesley and His Horse*, by T. F. Holme (1933), p. 66.

¹³ *The Older Nonconformity in Kendal*, by Nicholson & Axon (Titus Wilson, 1915), p. 354.

Settle, he wrote: "I went on to Ambleside, where, as I was sitting down to supper, I was informed, 'Notice had been given of my preaching, and that the congregation was waiting.' I would not disappoint them, but preached immediately, on 'Salvation by faith.' Among them were a gentleman and his wife, who gave me a very remarkable relation. She said, 'She had often heard her mother relate, what an intimate acquaintance had told her. That her husband was concerned in the Rebellion of 1745. He was tried at Carlisle, and found guilty. The evening before he was to die, sitting and musing in her chair, she fell fast asleep. She dreamed, one came to her and said: 'Go to such a part of the wall, and among the loose stones you will find a key, which you must carry to your husband.' She waked, but thinking it a common dream, paid no attention to it. Presently she fell asleep again, and dreamed the very same dream. She started up, put on her cloak and hat, and went to that part of the wall, and among the loose stones found a key. Having with some difficulty procured admission into the gaol, she gave this to her husband. It opened the door of his cell, as well as the lock of the prison door. So at midnight he escaped for life" (IV, 278).

There are but two entries concerning Appleby. On 30 June 1766 it is recorded: "About two we reached Penrith. Two of our friends guided us thence to Appleby, a county-town worthy of Ireland, containing at least, five and twenty houses. I was desired to preach here; but being very wet, I chose to ride on to Arthur Johnson's near Brough." The second entry is dated twenty years later, 12 May 1786, and is interesting for the lapse whereby Wesley described Appleby as the county town of Cumberland. Travelling on to Penrith he did some reading. "I looked over Lord Bacon's *Ten Centuries of Experiments*. Many of them are extremely curious; and many may be highly useful. Afterwards I read Dr Anderson's account of the Hebrides; how accurate and sensible a writer!" (IV, 341).

All the records relating to John Wesley's travels in Westmorland and North Lancashire indicate that his journeys were never made in the winter; but between March and October.¹⁴ This no doubt would be related to the poor state of the roads for "until the middle of the eighteenth century, the roads of Westmorland and the adjoining counties consisted of narrow lanes, fitted only for the transit of pack-horses."¹⁵

Westmorland obtained its first Turnpike Act, 26 Geo. II 1753, for widening and repairing the continuation of a Lancashire Turnpike of 1751 — northward that is from Heron Syke to Kirkby-in-Kendale, and from thence through the Town of Shap to Eamont Bridge. The preamble stated that "Whereas the road is very ruinous, and some parts thereof almost impassable and could not be kept in good repair unless some further provision was made . . . May it therefore please Your Majesty, etc. etc."¹⁶ After this other turnpikes were made, and by 1777 there were seven such roads passing through Kendal.¹⁷ Thus the good news brought by John Wesley were disseminated by his followers and in the first decades of the nineteenth-century chapels were built at many places including Kendal, Kirkby Stephen, Kirkby Thore, Ambleside, Appleby and Warcop, Morland, Shap and Kirkby Lonsdale, and Methodism made a lasting impression even among the dalesmen.

TABLE SHOWING ITINERARIES INCLUDING VISITS TO
WESTMORLAND AND LANCASHIRE
NORTH-OF-THE-SANDS.

1749	Whitehaven — Old Hutton — Leeds.
1751	Bolton — Ribchester — Chipping — Ambleside — Whitehaven.
1752	Weardale — Allendale — Clifton — Lorton.
1752	Whitehaven — Drigg — Ulverston — Chipping — Bolton.

¹⁴ Cf. CW2 xlvii 183 f.

¹⁵ Bulmer's *Directory of Westmorland* (1885), p. 71.

¹⁶ Cf. Curwen's *Records Relating to the Barony of Kendal*, iii 10.

¹⁷ Nicolson and Burn, i 9.

- 1752 Bolton — Chipping — (passed through Westmorland ?) Whitehaven — Dublin.
- 1753 Manchester — Bolton — Chipping — Kendal — Ambleside — Whitehaven.
- 1757 Bingley — Haworth — Ambleside — Keswick — Whitehaven.
- 1759 Bolton — Lower Darwen — Lancaster — Flookburgh — Whitehaven.
- 1761 Lower Darwen — Kendal — Whitehaven.
- 1764 Carlisle — Whitehaven — Keswick — Kendal — Black Burton — Long Preston — Skipton.
- 1765 Liverpool — Garstang — Kendal — Barnard Castle.
- 1766 Whitehaven — Penrith — Appleby — Brough — Barnard Castle.
- 1767 Liverpool — Kendal — Keswick — Cockermouth.
- 1768 Bolton — Kendal — Ambleside — Keswick — Cockermouth — Whitehaven.
- 1768 Barnard Castle — Brough — Richmond.
- 1770 Wigan — Bolton — Ambleside — Whitehaven.
- 1772 Manchester — Ambleside — Whitehaven.
- 1774 Otley — Pateley Bridge — Ambleside — Whitehaven.
- 1776 Colne — (passed through Westmorland ?) — Whitehaven.
- 1777 Otley — (passed through Westmorland ?) — Cockermouth — Whitehaven — Isle of Man.
- 1777 Isle of Man — Whitehaven — Cockermouth — (passed through Westmorland ?) — Settle.
- 1781 Preston — Ambleside — Whitehaven.
- 1779 Barnard Castle — Brough — Newcastle.
- 1784 Settle — Ambleside — Whitehaven.
- 1786 Barnard Castle — Appleby — Penrith — Carlisle.
- 1788 Otley — Pateley Bridge — Kendal — Whitehaven — Dumfries.

TABLE GIVING DATES OF VISITS TO PLACES IN
WESTMORLAND AND LANCASHIRE
NORTH-OF-THE-SANDS.

According to the Journal of John Wesley.

Ambleside	1751	1753	1757	1768	1770	1772	1774	1781	1784
Clifton	1752								
Kendal	1753	1761	1764	1765	1767	1768	1788		
Brough	1766	1768	1779						
Appleby	1766	1786							
Old Hutton	1749								
Ulverston	1752								
Flookburgh	1759								