

ART. XX.—*The Rev. Richard Armitstead of Whitehaven.* By TIMOTHY COCKERILL.

*Read at Carlisle, April 3rd, 1965.*

FOLLOWING the publication of Mr H. B. Stout's *The monumental inscriptions of St. James's, Whitehaven* (CW Tract Series no. xvi) some notes on a former incumbent may be of interest.

The Rev. Richard Armitstead (sometimes mis-spelt Armistead) was Minister of St. James's, Whitehaven, from 1790 until his death in 1821. He was also Rector of Moresby from 1813 until his death.

The Armitsteads are an old yeoman family from the Craven district of the West Riding of Yorkshire. Mr T. M. Armitstead, a descendant of Richard Armitstead's younger brother, has traced the family back to the reign of Elizabeth. Both Richard's father and grandfather lived at Litton Hall, Arncliffe, and it was here that Richard was born, the second son of Marmaduke Armitstead and Mary, his wife. He was baptized 20 January 1765 at St Oswald's, Arncliffe.

Armitstead's early education is uncertain, but he may well have attended the village school and afterwards gone either to Giggleswick or Ermysted's Grammar School, Skipton, but neither school kept sufficient records to enable this to be confirmed. It is recorded, however, that he matriculated at The Queen's College, Oxford, 25 June 1784, aged 18, graduating in 1788 and proceeding to M.A. in 1791.

He was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Carlisle<sup>1</sup> on 4 July 1790 and priest exactly a week later, and how this yeoman's son from the Yorkshire dales gained preferment in the church is described by the Rev. W. A.

<sup>1</sup> John Douglas (1721-1807), Lord Lonsdale's nominee to the see of Carlisle; appointed a canon of Windsor 1762, Bishop of Carlisle 1787 and translated to Salisbury 1791.

Shuffney in his *Some Craven Worthies* (1903). Discussing the Rev. Edward Wilson, Canon of Windsor and tutor to William Pitt the younger, Mr Shuffney shows how Wilson befriended Armitstead. He quotes two letters written by Wilson to his sister Mrs Knowles of Halton Gill, Yorkshire, a neighbour of the Armitsteads, on 25 August 1789 and 12 July 1790.

The first letter is as follows:

“BINFIELD,

“August the 25th, 1789.

“DEAR SISTER,

“I do not know who wrote last, but I have intended to write to you a great while, and have waited from day to day only to learn what were my brother’s plans, as he talked of coming to the North this summer, and to take us in his way. We have been expecting to see him ever since May: I wrote to enquire what was become of him, and told him that he would let the summer slip through his fingers, and yesterday I had an answer from London to inform us that he was on the road, and would be with us to-morrow. I therefore should have postponed my letter till after his arrival, but, as Admiral Leveson and Commodore Bowyer have just made me a morning visit, the opportunity of procuring a Frank induces me to write to-day.

“I wish to tell you that the next small Living that falls vacant in the gift of the Dean and Canons of Windsor will probably be at my disposal, but I desire you to understand that I only say this in secret to you, for I know people enough that would be desirous of it; but bearing in mind what you said about L—— of Deepdale and A—— of Litton Hall, I shall be glad to know all that you know of them both, and whether your wishes continue as favourable to them as they were.

“If L—— has taken a degree at College, and the Living of All Saints in Herefordshire should drop first, it may be in my power to give it him, or exchange it for something else in the gift of the Bishop of Carlisle, who wants it for a friend of his. In the latter case, a Living in Westmoreland or Cumberland might be full as desirable to the A——’s, but let me know whether Richard is full four-and-twenty, and whether from what you know of him he would do credit to my Patronage. My knowledge of the family does not entitle them to any favours from us, but as You say Duke and his wife have behaved well to you, I shall be glad to put it in your power to shew them

favour for it. I have made some private enquiries about him at Oxford, and hear nothing amiss of Richard there, but I fear he is not yet old enough. He must be complete 24 to take a Living, and we cannot keep it vacant above six months.

"I heard of Timothy Hill a few weeks ago by Birkbeck, who had seen him at Settle, from which I conclude he still follows the old trade of badgering. I am glad to hear that he is still able to do it; for my part, it would now be a serious journey for me to ride from Halton Gill to Settle and back. I am about the same distance from Windsor, but tho' it is all the way a level gravel walk or a pleasant green turf, shaded almost all the way with trees, I have only gone on horseback once this summer.

"I frequently ride to Bracknell, or perhaps as far as 5 or 6 miles out, before dinner; but 10 miles out is a great undertaking, and especially to get on horseback after I have dined. I do not feel to myself larger than when you saw me last, but as Selina says I am a great deal, and many people are inclined to be of the same opinion, I suppose they are better judges than I am.

"Selina and all of us are at present very well, and feel no little comfort in having got rid of workmen of all kinds, and being settled in a very elegant house<sup>2</sup> every way fit for a man of two or three times my income, with delightful gardens and hedgrow walks belonging to it, in a situation that wants nothing but water to make it everything that is beautiful. I wish I could show it you, but I suppose it would be as difficult a task to get you hither as for me to ride to Halton Gill on horseback. All here join in love, duty, and all good wishes to yourself, Wilson, Molly and Ann Holmes, and all friends with your affect, brother,

"E. WILSON."

In the second letter Wilson writes:

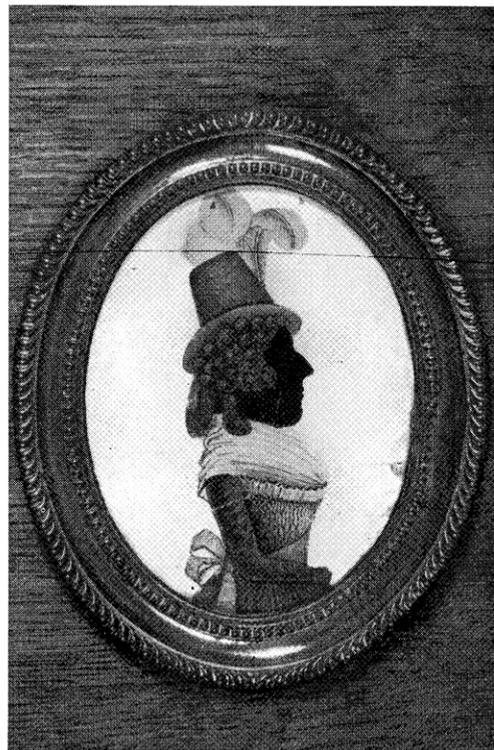
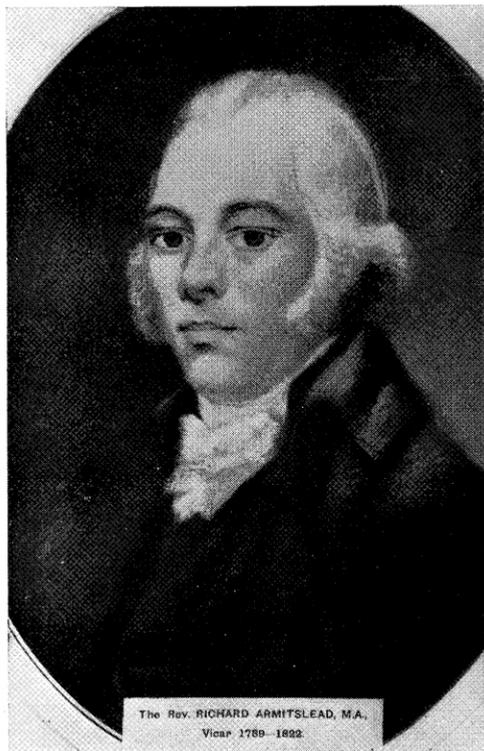
"BINFIELD,

"July the 12th, 1790.

"DEAR SISTER,

"I accompanied Mr. Armitstead yesterday morning to Windsor, and assisted the Bishop of Carlisle (John Douglas) in ordaining him priest. I should have made a point of doing the same the Sunday before, when he was ordained deacon, but the indisposition of my Curate obliged me to stay at home to take my own duty. He returned to Oxford yesterday from Windsor, from whence he purposes, as indeed I have advised

<sup>2</sup> Canon Wilson lived at The Grove, Binfield, now owned and occupied by Sir Robert Wilmot, Bt.



The Rev. RICHARD ARMITSTEAD and AGNES (LEWTHWAITE) his wife.  
The Rev. Richard's portrait is in St James's Church, Whitehaven, and is reproduced by kind  
permission of the Vicar. Agnes's picture is in the possession of the author.

him, to return to Litton very shortly unless any occasional duty should present itself that will repay the expense of staying in college.

"We have received no answer yet from Lord Lonsdale, but, considering the man and his present engagements in Elections, we do not wonder at it, particularly as he expects to see the Bishop of Carlisle soon in Cumberland, and probably he may wait for that. The Bishop intends to set off from Windsor sometime next week, and will reach his palace at Rose Castle in about ten days or a fortnight. From these circumstances you see we must expect to remain some weeks longer in darkness respecting the Chapel at Whitehaven.

"As the first idea of it was a proposal from Lord Lonsdale himself, I cannot allow myself to entertain a doubt of it; but if it should fail the Bishop will take the very first opportunity in his power to provide for Mr. Armitstead, and on that assurance he has been so good as to ordain him both deacon and priest without a title. He is therefore, now ready for any preferment that offers; and the Bishop has also further had the goodness to write to Lord Lonsdale and say that he has had the opportunity of seeing the young man both at Windsor and Binfield, and that in person, address, and understanding he fully answers the character I had given of him. Indeed, Armitstead has had the good fortune to obtain the good opinion of us all. We have had his company a whole week, and both in private and in public he has comported himself in a way that has given us great pleasure and set him very high in our esteem. I have great hope of his doing extremely well in life, and I am happy in the opportunity I have had of giving him this first introduction into the world, as it is in all its parts both creditable and honourable. He was ordained in our magnificent chapel, received the Sacrament afterwards in the King's private chapel, slept at the Deanery within the Castle of Windsor, had repeated opportunities of seeing the whole Royal Family both at Chapel and on the Terrace, and of associating with very distinguished characters in an easy, familiar way. As you have been very desirous that I should do something for Mr. Armitstead, I thought it would be a pleasure to you to know all the above particulars; and for everything respecting us, as you will see him very soon, I refer you to him, as he has now a tolerable knowledge of both Binfield and Windsor; and our associates in both . . . With all good wishes and regards to yourself, Wilson, Molly Holmes, and Ann, and all friends.

"Your faithful and affect. brother,

"E.W.

"P.S.—I am at present quite unhorsed. I have sold one this week that was quite a beauty to look at, but he was not sure-footed enough for me to ride him with any comfort, so I was glad to get rid of him. I have desired Mr. Armitstead to look out for one in the North."

Commenting on these two letters Mr Shuffney says: "We can imagine with what eagerness all these details about Windsor and the ordination would be read by Mr Armitstead's friends in Littondale, and as we read in the letter how the ordination was hastily conducted in the Royal Chapel by a Bishop who was not in his own diocese, and the two orders of deacon and priest were conferred upon Mr A. in a single week, contrary to the rubric, and that without a title, we are impressed by the fact, as we think of the careful ordinations and the severe preparation required in the present day, that a great change has passed over the church in this respect, for the better, since the 18th century." It was in this manner that Armitstead became minister of St. James's, Whitehaven, a position he held for over thirty years.

It is clear from a glance at the Whitehaven directory for 1811 that Armitstead entered fully into local affairs; he was one of the three surrogates in the town, a commissioner of land and property taxes for Allerdale above Derwent Ward, a vice-president and also auditor of the Benevolent Institution, chaplain to the Whitehaven Local Militia and on 23 February 1814 he was appointed a Governor of St. Bees School. In addition, he was a magistrate at Whitehaven and was appointed Rector of Moresby by Lord Lonsdale in 1813, holding this living together with St. James's, Whitehaven, until his death.

It was in 1818, four years after Armitstead's appointment as a Governor of St. Bees, that Henry Brougham singled out Lord Lonsdale, himself a Governor of the School, for special attack, alleging that St. Bees was being mismanaged and complaining that a decided majority of the governors were clergymen holding livings under

Lonsdale and supporting him despite obvious irregularities.<sup>3</sup>

Armitstead died at his house in Queen Street 18 May 1821, and was buried at St. James's, Whitehaven, three days later.<sup>4</sup> He was 57, and not 61 or 66 as inscribed on his monument in the church (see Stout's *Monumental Inscriptions*). He is commemorated in both St. James's, where there is also a portrait of him, and in Moresby Church.

He was survived by his widow Agnes, eldest daughter of William Lewthwaite of Whitehaven and Broadgate, near Millom, whom he had married on 14 September 1796 at St. James's, Whitehaven.<sup>5</sup> She is listed in the 1829 Directory as living at 41 Queen Street and she died on 15 April 1853, aged 83.

Their children were as follows:

1. Richard (1797-1869), a solicitor in Whitehaven, who married 20 June 1829, Caroline Morland of Moresby and d.s.p.
2. (Rev.) William (1799-1870), incumbent of Lorton 1825-64; unmarried (see Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigienses*).
3. John (1801-53), a solicitor in Parramatta, New South Wales.
4. James (1803-4).
5. Joseph (1810-34), died in Jamaica s.p.
6. Mary (1800-69), unmarried.
7. Agnes (1804-5).
8. Margaret (1807-9).
9. Frances Elizabeth (1808).
10. Agnes (1809-69) married, as his second wife, William Postlethwaite, banker of Ulverston and d.s.p.

<sup>3</sup> See *Quarterly Review*, no. xxxviii, 1818. The article refers to the allegations made by Henry Brougham as to the mismanagement of certain educational charities during the deliberations of the Select Committee appointed to inquire into the Education of the Lower Orders.

<sup>4</sup> See parish register of St James's, Whitehaven, entry no. 2084.

<sup>5</sup> See P.R. of St James's.

11. Margaret (1811-26), unmarried.
12. Frances (1815-90) married William Lancaster Alexander of Oak Hill, Lorton and Shatton Lodge, Embleton and d.s.p.

I should like to thank the following for their help: Mr C. Roy Hudleston; Mr T. M. Armitstead of Ashgrove, Shawbridge, Clitheroe, Yorks; the Rev. C. G. Steward, Vicar of St James's, Whitehaven; the Rev. J. Nicholson, Rector of Moresby; and Mr R. L. Drummond-Hay, Assistant Librarian, The Queen's College, Oxford.