

ART. XXI.—*John Pennington, 1st Lord Muncaster.*
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Read at Penrith, July, 8th, 1966.

SIR JOHN RAMSDEN has written that “the history of Muncaster Castle is the history of the Pennington family, apart from that the Castle has no history”.¹ That Muncaster Castle still exists today is due to one man, John Pennington, and it is his life which I wish to sketch in this paper.

The position of the Pennington family had been immensely enhanced by two marriages — that of Sir William Pennington to Isabel Stapleton, the heiress of Warter Priory, near Beverley in Yorkshire, and that of their son Joseph to Margaret, daughter of John Lowther, 1st Viscount Lonsdale. The former marriage gave them the basis of wealth which made possible their rise into the peerage. While the composition of the Pennington family wealth is still far from clear it seems probable that the 1873 rental figures,² which showed the Warter Priory rental as being nearly three times that of Muncaster, reflect the earlier superiority of Warter to Muncaster. It is significant that it was to Warter that Sir Joseph Pennington retired from Cumberland in 1776.

John Pennington was born at Bath in 1741 and was baptized in the Abbey Church there on 22 May.³ His father, Joseph, had married in 1739 Sarah, the only daughter and heiress of John Moore, a Bath apothecary.

¹ In a pamphlet probably embodying his talk given to the Society when it visited Muncaster on 21 June 1957. I am indebted to Mrs N. P. Rushby of Carleton Green for lending me her copy.

² *Return of Owners of Land 1873*. The actual figures for the two estates given there were — Muncaster 5,531 acres, rental £2,524, Warter 7,994 acres, £7,544.

³ Bath Abbey Register. The memorial stone at Muncaster which states his age at death as 76 is incorrect and has led astray most compilers, e.g. *Complete Peerage*.

According to John Pennington his mother brought with her £20,000.⁴

The marriage was an absolute disaster. Fortunately for posterity, Sarah Pennington, who was able and unscrupulous, put her case in writing. She published⁵ *An Unfortunate Mothers Advice to her Absent Daughters; in a Letter to Miss Pennington*.

This short book purports to be a letter of advice on the accomplishments necessary for a gentlewoman. It was, as she admits, written in an attempt to resume contact with her daughters from whom she had been parted when they were children. If she was not allowed to do this there would be a future letter, which must contain the relation of many events. While accusing her husband of having listened to false accusations, and of being jealous of his complete lack of control over her fortune, she does admit that her public conduct was "such as the most finished coquette alone would have ventured upon". It is hardly surprising that her husband should have considered her unsuitable to bring up his children, and she was forced to live apart from them at Fulmer in Buckinghamshire, where she died in August 1783.

Joseph Pennington is a shadowy figure about whom there is all too little knowledge. He was never able to achieve a satisfactory relationship with his nephew, Sir James Lowther. Where his brother John had "frightened him into an immediate civility",⁶ Joseph allowed Sir James to ride roughshod over his political ambitions and those of his son. John Pennington disliked his father and presents a hostile and biased portrait of him. It seems that Joseph Pennington had a fatal irresolution which prevented his ever achieving success.

Of John Pennington's youth and early manhood little is known. He was admitted to Winchester School in 1754,

⁴ Memorandum in his handwriting amongst Pennington MSS.

⁵ The earliest edition of this I have seen is the second edition dated 1761.

⁶ Joseph Pennington to Sir John Pennington dated 5 December, probably 1762. Pennington MSS.

and afterwards entered the Army, becoming Ensign in the 3rd Foot Guards on 17 September 1756 and Captain in 1762. He exchanged into the 2nd Foot Guards as Major in 1765. A few years later, in the summer of 1771, he travelled into Spain with his friend, Robert Grimston of Neswick. It is significant of the Penningtons' links with Yorkshire that throughout his life John Pennington's friends were Yorkshiremen rather than Cumbrians. In 1773 he became Lieutenant-Colonel of the 37th Regiment of Infantry, and it was in that year, when stationed at Fort George in Scotland, that he met Dr Johnson at Sir Eyre Coote's house and out-argued him.

After the fiasco of the 1774 Cumberland election Sir Joseph Pennington retired to Warter and never again resided for any length of time at Muncaster. In 1775 Sir Joseph made over the Muncaster estate to his son, on certain conditions, and their different interpretations of these conditions permanently damaged relations between them. Sir Joseph believed that he had made over to his son an annual rental of approximately £1,200 charged with the interest on £11,600 of debts, which amounted to £514, thus giving him a clear rental of some £686. According to John Pennington, the actual rental only came to approximately £745.⁷ It is not clear from the available evidence who was right, but it seems likely that John Pennington exaggerated his plight. It is also clear that there were other grounds for misunderstanding. John Jackson, who was acting as Steward at Muncaster, wrote to Sir Joseph on 1 January 1777⁸ complaining that he could get no answer from the Colonel on estate business, that rents were behind and that he or someone for him (e.g. for John Pennington) was wanted at Muncaster. Written on this letter is the draft of a letter to Jackson, presumably in reply:

⁷ Memorandum in Pennington MSS. in his handwriting.

⁸ Pennington MSS.

I find all is strangely neglected by my son. Indeed he can not hold any Court or grant any Admittance as I have never by Agreement. in writing in any shape convey'd the Manors and Estates to Him (nor will I do it unless He will marry according to his promise of which I now despair) but however Business must be properly done on account of the tenants and therefore if He does not attend to it *I will* very shortly hold Courts and do the Business my own Self.

Relations worsened between father and son, and on 1 December 1777 Sir Joseph resumed control of the Muncaster estate. It is hard not to have some sympathy for both sides in this unfortunate quarrel. John Pennington was in an impossible position. In theory he controlled the estate but his father's servant managed it and was in direct contact with Sir Joseph. Sir Joseph, on the other hand, was becoming increasingly anxious about the continuance of his line. His second son had been killed in a duel,⁹ his youngest son had also in that year been involved in a dangerous duel, and his eldest son was now 36, and none of them was married. Relations between John Pennington and his father were improved for a time by the former's marriage on 26 September 1778 to Penelope Compton, daughter and heiress of James Compton (great-grandson of Spencer, 2nd Earl of Northampton) by Frances Riggs of New York. It is clear from the marriage settlement of 13 and 14 July 1778, when the Muncaster estate was finally settled on John Pennington, that Penelope Compton was a considerable heiress as her dowry consisted of £31,000.¹⁰ The marriage was not only a financial success — it was also a completely happy one.

Throughout his life John Pennington suffered, as will be seen, from the consequences of his impetuous nature. This should not conceal the fact that the main cause of the breach with his father, which reopened soon after

⁹ Cf. CW2 lxiv 388-389.

¹⁰ There are copies of this in the Pennington MSS., and also the Irton Hall MSS. in Whitehaven Public Library.

his marriage, was Sir Joseph's inability to trust his eldest son. John Pennington's friends were eloquent in their sympathy. Sir Eyre Coote, under whom he had served at Fort George, had written on 16 August 1777 in a letter of sympathy.

How many then are those in the World who would think themselves the Happiest of beings in possessing such a son as you are, while as it is, you are thrown away upon a Person who knows not how to value your virtues or to make any use of your amiable qualities but as Weapons against yourself.¹¹

John Pennington's first interest in the Cumberland political scene appears to have been his abortive candidature for Carlisle in the 1774 election.¹² His candidature in the 1780 Cumberland election has long been known from his address to the electors¹³ in which he bitterly condemned his cousin, Sir James Lowther. Sir Joseph Pennington had built up close links with the anti-Lowther faction in West Cumberland. He was the friend of John Senhouse of Calder Abbey, and as long ago as 1768 Charles Lutwidge had written: "What I have often mentioned depend upon it will be the case we shall all look up to Moncaster, if I was not convinced of this would not name it."¹⁴

From the following letter it is clear that in the contest John Pennington was able to rely on the Government interest:

Bushy Park Sunday

Private.

2 o'clock Sep^r. 24 1780

Dear Sir,

I have this moment received the favor of your Letter, and in consequence of it Lord North has written to Lord Sandwich by Express desiring that He would procure the full Exertion of the

¹¹ Haigh MSS. Sir Eyre Coote (1726-1783) of West Park, Hants., M.P. for Leicester (1768-1774), and Poole (1774-1780), Commander-in-Chief India 1777 to his death. Pennington had served under him at Fort St George, and Sir Eyre was one of the Trustees of his Marriage Settlement.

¹² Cf. Brian Bonsall, *Sir James Lowther and Cumberland and Westmorland Elections, 1754-75* (1960) 137.

¹³ Cf. R. S. Ferguson, *Cumberland and Westmorland M.P.s* (1871) 173 f.

¹⁴ Charles Lutwidge to Sir Joseph Pennington 29 June 1768. Pennington MSS.

Derwentwater Interest in your favor. The Directions of course will be forwarded by Express — I wish that your Letter had arrived sooner, as the Cumberland Election you inform me comes on Tuesday next the 26. However I hope that your success (for which Lord North is very anxious) will render any assistance that this interference might give you unnecessary. In case that the Contest may last, the Derwentwater Interest may arrive Time enough, which I assure you will give me great pleasure.

Our friend Lutwidge I hope is not idle in this Business 'tho he cannot appear a personal Solicitor in it. However He as well as any other person you or he may think proper to employ are at full liberty to represent the hearty wishes and Desires of Government to Support you upon this occasion.

That this may reach as soon as possible I forward it by Express and am very truly

Dr Sir

Yours most faithfully

W. Brunnell.¹⁵

This is the only letter or paper that I have come across amongst the Pennington and Haigh MSS. which refers to this election. It leaves unanswered the question as to why John Pennington waited until the last minute before announcing his candidature. It is clear from Sir James Lowther's counter-measures that he took his cousin's decision very seriously. John Pennington himself maintained that it was Sir James' opposition and the consequent harm that would have resulted to his supporters that caused his withdrawal from the contest. It seems more likely, though, that his very late announcement of his intentions had made it quite impossible for his friends to organize their own interest and that of the Government in sufficient time to register their votes in the event of a poll. Whatever the reason for his declining the contest, John Pennington withdrew permanently from Cumberland politics after it.

In the following year he was returned in a by-election for the borough of Milborne Port in Somerset. While le

¹⁵ Haigh MSS.

Grys Norgate¹⁶ is almost certainly correct in attributing his election for this seat to Lord North, the latter's role was really that of broker. Lord Rockingham, writing to the Duke of Grafton on 3 May 1782 when the latter was trying to secure a place for Pennington, said:

I have heard that Mr. Pennington paid a considerable sum for his seat, and which I have heard was not very convenient to him.

Your Grace knowing Mr. Pennington will easily suggest to your mind, that this matter will require some delicacy in the managing but if some sort of Office of Business out of Parlt could otherwise be agreeable to Mr. Pennington — I should have no doubt, that I could easily find a very independent and rich Gentleman, who would reimburse Mr. Pennington's Expenses, if he could be chose in the Seat in Parlt, which Mr. Pennington now holds.¹⁷

The seat appears, in fact, to have cost Pennington £3,000,¹⁸ and he must have found the cost of Milborne Port a great strain on his resources. The parliamentary interest at Milborne Port was divided between the Medlycotts of Venn and the Pagets, later Lords Uxbridge. The fragmentary nature of the Pennington and Haigh papers unfortunately leave the answers to many questions uncertain — chief among them, the identity of the person to whom the £3,000 was paid. It seems probable from a later letter of Lord Uxbridge that it was paid to Thomas Hutchings Medlycott of Venn.¹⁹ Medlycott certainly knew Pennington and wrote to him on 17 December 1781,²⁰ asking him to request a favour from Lord Paget for him. This letter from Medlycott is of great interest for its references to the Pitts, father and son: the following remarks can only apply to them:

I cannot with sincerity congratulate you and my Country on the rising genius you mention; His Father is a character I always

¹⁶ In his biography of John Pennington in the *DNB*.

¹⁷ Grafton MSS. Cf. John Brooke's article on John Pennington in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1754-1790*, vol. iii.

¹⁸ Letter from Uxbridge to Lord Muncaster 29 June 1791. Haigh MSS.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

admired — but never c^d approve; — his virtues have undone his Country; — I never can forgive the last Stab he gave his unhappy Country by the repeal of the Stamp Act; It is the Principle, he adopted on that occasion, that I condemn; — I was in the House when he made his memorable Speech — which I then said was England's dying speech. — By giving up the Supremacy of the British Parliament to bind America in all cases — he dismember'd the British Empire.

As a result of this payment, John Pennington considered that he had the right to follow his own inclinations in politics. This attitude was bound to bring him into conflict with Lord Uxbridge, but for several years the relationship between the Muncasters and Uxbridges remained friendly. Amongst the Haigh MSS. there are several letters from Uxbridge and his wife to Muncaster, inquiring after his wife's or his son's illnesses. But by 1791 the relationship had changed completely, and it was Lord Uxbridge's opinion that Muncaster sat on his interest at Milborne Port that caused the break. There is a letter from Lord Uxbridge to Lord Muncaster amongst the Haigh MSS., dated 29 June 1791, which sets out the differing attitudes and also something of the distress that the bitter quarrel caused to him:

29th June 1791

My Lord,

Tho' I had determined on my part against a further continuance of Correspondence on the Subject of our late letters, and by departing from that determination may perhaps only enlarge your advantage ground, and give you fresh occasion for the exercise of Eloquence, with which I pretend not to keep pace; yet as there was a point or two in my note which you say you do not understand, and of which you seem to call for an explanation, I think it incumbent upon me to say a word upon them — what I alluded to them in saying that "You alledged as a proof of freedom from obligation" etc. was a declaration of yours, that your coming in for M. Port had prevented my giving up the Borough — an idea which I had thrown out only, as I have already said "to lessen the weight of obligation where I thought it would be truly felt" — the other point on which you wish me to have been more explicit, refers to a pecuniary transaction, but as it seems to have escaped your recollection, I wish not at present to recall it to it.



JOHN PENNINGTON, 1st LORD MUNCASTER.
(Reproduced from the portrait at Muncaster Castle by courtesy of
Sir William Pennington-Ramsden.)

I have only to add that with respect to the affair of the £3,000 my opinion remains unchanged, and with respect to the transactions of M. Port, I must also confess, that the general (habit ?) of my Sentiments, is, and long has been such as I have avowed them in my last note, however I might have been led to forget them for a moment amidst those professions of kindness and friendship which you expressed with such apparent cordiality in the conversation to which you allude — yet they are Sentiments w^{ch} I shou'd have been very reluctant to utter to a person I so long esteemed my friend, had not I felt myself called to it by your first letter which I can not consider as either amicable or conciliatory.

As to any reference on the Subject, you will follow your own discretion, but as I foresee no good that can arise from it, I must beg to be excused from concurring in it.

Of friendship, tho' I have not the talent of painting it in the glowing colours that you do, yet I can feel both the value and the loss; of the latter of which I am particularly sensible when I recollect the satisfaction I once had in subscribing myself your sincere friend.

Uxbridge.²¹

Uxbridge's explanation of his earlier remark to Muncaster that his coming in had prevented his giving up the borough seems disingenuous. It is clear that he owed Muncaster a debt of obligation. It is also clear that in this case, as throughout his life, Muncaster was his own worst enemy. His impetuous and hot-tempered temperament immediately widened a disagreement into a violent quarrel. The disagreements which resulted in Muncaster abandoning Milborne Port in 1796 reflect little credit on either of the two main participants.

Pennington was, on 21 October 1783, raised to the Irish Peerage as Baron Muncaster. He owed this entirely to his father. The position is set out in a letter of Sir Joseph Pennington's to the Duke of Grafton on 8 December 1782:

My Lord Duke,

After so many years silence upon the Subject of the promise, most graciously made to me, by his Majesty, through Your

²¹ *Ibid.*

Grace, at the Time I quitted the Board of Customs, I am confident, you will not accuse me of any Impatience but allow, that I have quietly waited until the time arrived, that I saw it in Your Power, with propriety, — to renew the Application, for that promise to be fulfill'd.

Last year upon the Change in Administration, — when you accepted an Office under the Crown, I thought it too early, as things were then and soon after so — unsettled, that I wish'd not to Trouble Your Grace until Everything was fix'd —

The Request I made my Lord, was at first, that my Son might be taken care of, in the King's family — The Promise was — "He shou'd be taken care of, — Mr. Pennington was then in the Army — He has since quitted that profession, and is married, and I flatter myself, from the Fortune He then got, and the Settlements I made —" He is easy — My Second Son is in the Second Regiment of Guards, and went through all the Severity and Cruel hardships with Lord Cornwallis in America:— and without the least partiality, is one of the most Deserving Sensible men I ever knew. — If my Lord — the King will — graciously extend the promise, which has never yet been attended to, to my Son Lieutenant Colonel Pennington, of the Second Regiment of Guards, in the Line of his profession, as Aid de Camp by — Brevet, and otherwise hereafter, as His Majesty — thought proper, I shou'd be happy, and think the promise, at length, fully discharged —

The last Promotion of Lieutenant Colonel's — Stop'd almost with my Son, which is very — grating to a Soldier, after such hardships, and Service in America —

I beg the favour of Your Grace's assistance herein, and I have the honour to be

With the greatest Esteem and Regard

My Lord Duke

Your most oblig'd

and obedient Servant

Joseph Pennington²²

Warter

December 8th 1782

near Pocklington

Yorks

Grafton had not forgotten his obligation to the Pennington family, but he had long since decided that his obligation was to John Pennington and not to his father.

²² Grafton MSS. A draft of this letter is in the Pennington MSS.

He had written some seven years previously, on 9 November 1775,²³ to John Pennington, informing him that he was delivering up the Privy Seal, but also assuring him of his renewed interest if he returned again to political life. Mr John Brooke in his description of John Pennington has described with what determination Grafton honoured this promise when he returned to office on the formation of the Rockingham Administration in 1782. Grafton made the satisfaction of his debt a condition of his continuance in office. After various posts had been suggested and turned down it was at last decided in June 1782 that the matter would be settled by John Pennington being included in the next list of Irish Peers. Well might John Pennington write from Muncaster on 26 September 1783 to the Duke a letter of eloquent gratitude.²⁴ Grafton's absolute insistence on the honouring of this debt to the son of an uninfluential Cumberland landowner is an immense testimony to his own integrity and loyalty to those who had been of service to him. Grafton, in the course of a letter on 16 October 1783 to John Pennington, wrote:

. . . allow me, tho' late to congratulate Your Lordship on a Matter, which I will own I had more at heart, than anything of the kind before, because I felt that I was bound to see it concluded in the best manner that it could be attained.²⁵

It is ironical that when the peerage was at last conferred on Pennington the Duke was again out of office, having resigned in February 1783. Lord Camden wrote to him on 29 July commenting on this:

Your Grace is fortunate to have carried your point at last for Mr. Pennington and it is remarkable that it sh^d be done at last by an administration you have no connexion with. I begin to think that out of place is a better situation for favours than in place and that independence is a stronger plea with a Minister than a Seat in the Cabinet. I think of asking next Winter for an Earldom. If I remain a private man.²⁶

²³ Haigh MSS.

²⁴ Grafton MSS.

²⁵ Haigh MSS.

²⁶ Grafton MSS.

The peerage was created with special reminder to John Pennington's brother to take account of the fact that the original debt had been created by their father's resignation from the Board of Customs in 1769.

In a letter to Lord Rockingham on 12 June 1782 (quoted in *The House of Commons, 1754-1790*, p. 263) Grafton refers to the fact that Pennington would become, by the foreclosing of a mortgage, a large landed proprietor in Ireland. The mortgage referred to was a disastrous mistake which bedevilled Muncaster's finances for years. Part of the story can be found in a series of letters from J. T. Batt his Solicitor.²⁷ It appears that the trustees of Lord and Lady Muncaster's marriage settlement had lent £36,000 charged on the security of the Irish estates of Captain Ogle. Batt was, by the end of 1784, in despair, had "little reliance on the good sense or fair dealing of any man, or Tribunal in that Land of Levity".²⁸ A year later in a letter to Mr Kemmis, attorney-at-law, Batt could write "when once it is on this side of the Water, I shall congratulate Lord Muncaster on having finished the most vexatious transaction that I have ever witness'd, and which is sufficient to deter all English Lenders of Money from ever risking it upon Irish security".²⁹

Whether Lord Muncaster extricated himself completely from this embroglio is not clear. Some at least of the money was repaid, as on 10 December 1785 Batt wrote to Lord Muncaster³⁰ telling him that with £10,000 received he was paying off mortgages in Yorkshire and small sums owing to the trustees of Muncaster, and Drigg and Carleton schools. Throughout his life Lord Muncaster was in financial difficulties. While he blamed this on his father this verdict cannot be accepted without qualification. In the series of letters from Henry Edwards

²⁷ Haigh MSS.

²⁸ 16 December 1784. Haigh MSS.

²⁹ 9 December 1785. Haigh MSS.

³⁰ Haigh MSS.

of Salisbury,³¹ who managed the Bath properties of Lady Pennington, Sir Joseph is revealed as a careful and prudent landlord. Lord Muncaster accused his father in a memorandum of dissipating all but £1,000 of Lady Pennington's fortune.³² This was certainly untrue, as the Bath properties fetched almost £4,000 when sold in January 1804.³³

Lord Muncaster himself was always short of money and lived in a style which his estate could not afford. The rebuilding of Muncaster Castle and his seat in Parliament were a constant drain on his limited resources. The improvements he carried out constantly at Muncaster, and, after his father's death, at Warter were of great future benefit to the estate, but expensive in the short term. It is most unfortunate that only scattered references to his financial position have come to light in the Pennington and Haigh MSS. It is not possible to construct at any time a statement of his finances.

One of Lord Muncaster's least known and yet greatest achievements in Cumberland was as an improving landlord. It seems probable that future research will show that the role of John Christian Curwen was neither so important nor so novel in the cause of agricultural improvement in Cumberland as has been often claimed. Curwen was adept at the art of self-dramatization. Muncaster, writing to Addington on 20 January 1804,³⁴ recounted how Curwen had deliberately stolen coal to the value of £10,000 from under land owned by the Lowthers, and gives his opinion of Curwen full rein:

It has never fallen in my way ever to have heard any man in any private sphere of life, so universally ill spoken of, even by those the most acquainted with him. Then, He is literally in the County, Nobody, tho' by marriage with the Heiress of

³¹ Pennington MSS. One from this series is at the East Riding Record Office at Beverley.

³² Pennington MSS.

³³ Haigh MSS.

³⁴ Haigh MSS.

a most ancient respectable family — the History of all which is bad — He possesses for his wife's life, considerable collieries, but not much landed estate — Regarding him in a political point of view, Nothing can be worse — He has been notorious everywhere for the last ten years, for holding the most violent, unqualified, gross Democratic Language imaginable.

Lord Muncaster was peculiarly well placed for introducing agricultural innovations into West Cumberland. Not only did the Penningtons have a large estate in East Yorkshire, but also his friendship with Yorkshire landowners, and in particular his greatest friend, Henry Duncombe of Copgrove, ensured that he learnt of fresh ideas before they penetrated into Cumberland. Bailey and Cully in their *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Cumberland* (1797)³⁵ make many references to his pioneering activities in this field. With regard to summer fallows for wheat they comment (p. 190):

We were informed that it is not much more than 40 years, since summer fallows for wheat were first used; and it is not twenty years since Lord Muncaster introduced summer fallows, and the culture of wheat, in the neighbourhood of Ravenglass, where it is now grown in great abundance, as well as all along the Coast to Scotland, and in the neighbourhood of Carlisle.

The same authors pay tribute to Lord Muncaster's use of potatoes for feeding cattle (p. 193), his cultivation of cabbages (p. 195), and experiments with carrots (p. 195). He had the slake or mud left by the tide carted and spread on his grasslands (p. 206), and used mussels as a manure (p. 206). He also accidentally discovered the utility of sea sand in destroying moss (p. 206). He was equally interested in livestock, whether it was introducing long-woolled sheep from the Yorkshire Wolds (p. 215) or proudly writing to his steward that his Great Ram had been weighed and turned 15 stone 9 cwts. In the same letter he boasted that the gentleman from the Board of Agriculture was so struck with the size and beauty of his

³⁵ There was an earlier edition of this in 1794, but I have used the 1797 edition.

two oxen that he had made correct drawings of them.³⁶

Bailey and Cully's testimony is borne out by a series of letters³⁷ written by Lord Muncaster to his steward, Cuthbert Atkinson, in the late autumn of 1795 when the latter was at Warter. Lord Muncaster had immediately after his father's death in 1793 carried through the enclosing of the estate at Warter, and took the closest personal interest in every detail. He believed in short leases of 9 years, which should only be extended to 15 if the return was correspondent to the extra six years.³⁸ He had found at Copgrove, where he was staying, that Henry Duncombe had a man conducting water meadows for him.³⁹ Muncaster was immediately interested and eventually had this form of improvement carried out at Warter and Eskdale. Any new process immediately attracted him. He was as interested in some poisoned pills advertised in the Hull paper at a halfpenny apiece which would (allegedly) poison nothing but rats,⁴⁰ as he was in winter vetches,⁴¹ roughcast,⁴² or a threshing mill which Atkinson has obviously mentioned to him.⁴³

Lord Muncaster knew his land intimately and had no hesitation in giving Atkinson a list of rents to be fixed for each of the Warter farms.⁴⁴ He might value most

"the Harmony and Good understanding between me and my tenantry",⁴⁵ but he was equally determined that as a landlord he would also not be "an imprudent one to myself or for those who come after me on the other (hand) for I have more than my own personal interests to attend to and consult upon the occasion — as what I do is tying up the hands of (possible?)

³⁶ Muncaster to Cuthbert Atkinson 27 October 1795. Pennington MSS. Cuthbert Atkinson of Carleton Hall, Holmrook was, from about 1780 to Lord Muncaster's death, his steward.

³⁷ Pennington MSS.

³⁸ Letter of 1 October 1795. Pennington MSS.

³⁹ Letter of 4 October 1795. Pennington MSS.

⁴⁰ Wednesday, 15 October 1795. Pennington MSS.

⁴¹ 29 October 1795. Pennington MSS.

⁴² 29 October 1795. Pennington MSS.

⁴³ 5 November 1795. Pennington MSS.

⁴⁴ Pennington MSS.

⁴⁵ Muncaster to Cuthbert Atkinson 25 October 1795. Pennington MSS.

future proprietors of the Estate as well as myself for a course of years to come".⁴⁶

Atkinson's visit to Warter in 1795 did involve Lord Muncaster in a quarrel which not only irritated him profoundly,⁴⁷ but also illustrates the difficulties of running two widely separated estates in an age of bad communications. Lord Muncaster before enclosing the Warter estate had consulted a Mr Leatham who he regarded as a sort of superior commissioner. Leatham continued to advise Lord Muncaster, but when the latter and Atkinson came to consider the rents Leatham had proposed for some of the farms they both considered that these were too low.

Living as he appears to have done, among them Leatham had come to identify himself with the tenants, and reacted violently when Muncaster declined to take his advice over the suggested rents. It is clear that he considered that his own honour and credit was involved. It seems also that Leatham's valuation of the estate became known, whether deliberately or not was uncertain, and this fact caused Atkinson great difficulty.⁴⁸

Perhaps Lord Muncaster's most enduring memorial is the great plantations of trees he planted at Muncaster. No visitor travelling north up the West Cumberland coast can fail to note the great woods which surround the Castle. In a report on the Muncaster estate for the 2nd Lord Muncaster in 1816, Thomas Myer⁴⁹ particularly noted the several flourishing plantations chiefly consisting of oak, ash, fir, larch, beech, birch, lime, sycamore and Spanish chestnut. Amongst the Pennington MSS. there exists a list of the trees planted at Muncaster between 3 December 1793 and 16 April 1794.⁵⁰ Larch was the most heavily planted (over 6,000), but beech, oak, birch and sycamore were also being planted extensively.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Cf. in particular letter to Cuthbert Atkinson of 25 October 1795. Pennington MSS.

⁴⁸ Muncaster to Cuthbert Atkinson 1 November 1795. Pennington MSS.

⁴⁹ Pennington MSS.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Muncaster's planting schemes were not confined to timber-producing trees. The same memorandum shows him planting in the shrubbery at Muncaster — "arbutus, white Portugal broom, Persian jasmine, hallisias, clethoras and strip'd bark maples" to mention only some of those listed.

If Lord Muncaster rarely took much interest in politics there was one political question he had a passionate interest in, and that was the abolition of the slave trade. His close friendship with William Wilberforce and the Rev. Thomas Gisborne may have stimulated his interest. So strongly did he feel, however, that he published in 1792 *Historical Sketches of the Slave Trade and of its Effects in Africa addressed to the People of Great Britain*, by the Right Hon. Lord Muncaster. The tone of the language bears the stamp of Lord Muncaster's controversial style. In describing the effect on Africa of the discovery of America, he notes "Happy had it been for both worlds, had they never been introduced to each other". After describing the depravity of the African rulers as a result of the trade's activities he goes on in characteristic vein, "The whole was begun, and is still kept on foot, by our infernal seductions, by our villainous practices, and devil-like temptations and arts". His personal involvement in this question is a tribute to the compassion and kindness that underlay his occasionally hot-tempered outward appearance.

If Muncaster's marriage owed anything to his wife being an heiress, the glowing eulogies to her in the monuments he erected in Muncaster church seem to hint at a more than token affection. Lady Muncaster died as a result of a fall from her horse when she was staying with the Duncombes at Copgrove on 15 November 1806. Their only son, Gamel, died in 1788 when a boy of eight, and their elder daughter, Anne Jane Penelope, died in 1811. The remaining daughter, Maria Frances Margaret, married in that year James, Lord Lindsay later Earl of

Crawford and Balcarres. Even though Lord and Lady Lindsay stayed much at Muncaster in the remaining two years of Lord Muncaster's life, loneliness seems at times to have overwhelmed him. Writing to Lord Egremont on 7 January 1812, he mentions:

In the course of these thirty years which have gone by, my wife, my son and my daughters in that all my whole family have either died or been married.⁵¹

The marriage in 1802 of his brother Lowther Pennington to the widow of Captain Morison of the 60th Regiment of Foot must have been a severe blow to Lord Muncaster, as the subsequent birth of a son destroyed by virtue of the entail the hope he must have nurtured of Muncaster descending to his daughters. Lowther Pennington was a weak man who seems always to have been in debt. On 7 May 1804 Lord Muncaster offered his assistance. He considered his brother's wife to be "unexceptionable except in want of fortune",⁵² which was the more serious in that she had two children by her previous marriage to support. From a memorandum written almost certainly in October 1805, Lord Muncaster seems to have been unsuccessful in straightening out his brother's affairs, as he comments:

From the manner in which he speaks of his affairs, he either does not quite comprehend or understand them, or I fear, he is got into very bad hands. It grieves me to the heart but I really know not how to help him — and his statements are always so blind, and so very unsatisfactory.⁵³

The early death of his son must have been a devastating blow to one who was as devoted as was Muncaster to his family history and his family home. The choice of the archaic family name of Gamel for his son illustrates this romantic side of his nature. How much of the legends concerning Henry VI which have grown up round Mun-

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Haigh MSS.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

caster was derived from family tradition and how much embroidered by his antiquarian temperament will probably never be known. The case against Lord Muncaster has been put intemperately in J. G. Lockhart's *Curses, Lucks and Talismans* (Geoffrey Bles, 1938). Lord Muncaster in his artistic outlook was very much the product of an age which revelled in the Gothick taste. The commemorative stones now outside the east window of Muncaster church are a delightful example of this. The beautifully cut lettering, simulating the style of the era of the Pennington concerned, is in every case a minor work of art. That he was fascinated by Henry VI is clear from a letter written by his old friend W. Burgh on 19 November 1790:

I have another work in hand for you too but only just entered on, it is a picture of Henry 6th from Fenn's drawing which I could not obtain till within these two or three last days — I had intended to have finished this without naming it to you but on reflection I think it better to let you know lest you should think of getting a copy of this drawing executed by any other hand.⁵⁴

It seems, however, out of character that Lord Muncaster should have done more than embroider an existing tradition and seek fresh ways in which to exalt an historic connection with Muncaster that clearly enthralled him.

Muncaster itself he loved. He rebuilt it in the Gothick style that suited his temperament so well. With its battlements, Georgian windows, octagonal library and situated in one of the loveliest positions in England, it is no wonder that his friends lavished their praise upon his rebuilt castle. Typical of this was the remark of his friend, J. B. S. Morritt of Rokeby: "I wait'd till intelligence came of yr arrival at the enchanted Castle. Enchanted it certainly is, for whoever ventures within

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

the magic ground finds that nothing can extricate him but the more potent spell of absolute necessity."⁵⁵

No-one with knowledge of the two can fail to be struck by the similarities in the lives and outlook of Lord Muncaster and Thomas Johnes of Hafod. In one further way Lord Muncaster emulated his contemporary. He not only built an octagonal library — he took pride in its contents. When sending him a book on 5 December 1799, Archdeacon Plymly commented: "I think it worthy of a place in the Muncaster Library, for it is handsomely printed with good views, and very entertaining."⁵⁶

The care of Muncaster after his death concerned him greatly, and when he came to make his will he granted a 21-year lease of it under the terms of his marriage settlement so that Lord and Lady Lindsay might continue to live there. He did so:

In consideration of the very large sums of money I have expended out of the fortune I received from my late dearly beloved Lady Muncaster the Mother of my dear daughter Lady Lindsay at Muncaster Castle and being apprehensive from various circumstances that my brother may not make it his constant place of residence in which case the place would inevitably fall into a bad state of repair and being desirous it should be kept up for the benefit of my successors.

Life at Muncaster during the latter years of Lord Muncaster's life had its lighter side. No-one of his military training could fail to be inspired by the fancied threat of Napoleonic invasion. His friend Thomas Gisborne, in a teasing letter of 19 May 1798, wrote that he did not know where to send his letter as he did not know whether Lord Muncaster was at "the encampment forming on the top of Scawfell — the battery to defend the mouth of the Esk — the light-house erecting on the

⁵⁵ J. Morritt to Lord Muncaster 6 July 1812 or 1813. Haigh MSS. J. B. S. Morritt (1771-1843) of Rokeby Park, Yorkshire, was a friend of Sir Walter Scott. There is an interesting account in one of his letters to Lord Muncaster of a visit by Scott to Rokeby.

⁵⁶ Haigh MSS. The Rev. Joseph Plymly, Archdeacon of Salop, inherited the Longnor, Shropshire, estate of the Corbetts, and by Royal Licence assumed the surname and arms of Corbett on 20 November 1804.

high ground in the Park — and the Garrison fortifying to secure the Gorge of Borrowdale''.⁵⁷ To this time, also, in all probability belongs a poem entitled *The Mountaineers of Muncaster*, which perhaps compensates for its abominable poetry by its loyalty. The first verse sets the tone:

*The right honourable Lord Muncaster to his great
noble praise
Two hundred mountaineers his Lordship now has raised
For to protect his Majesty & his Subjects in this Land
His Lordship has his mountaineers at the word of
Command.*⁵⁸

There are many facets of Lord Muncaster's life which for lack of evidence are obscure. Perhaps the most important of these is the reason why he wished for so long to continue a Member of Parliament. With the exception of the years 1802-1806 he was a Member continuously from 1781 to his death in 1813, first as Member for Milborne Port, then from 1796-1802 for Colchester, and finally from 1806-1813 for Westmorland. He seems to have been an almost completely silent M.P., and when he did speak seems to have chosen only completely unimportant matters as, for instance, when on 20 March 1789 he seconded a motion for leave to bring in a bill to provide for an annual commemoration of the revolution of 1688.

He died on 8 October 1813, and it was fitting that he should have died at Muncaster which he had restored so lovingly. His faults, in particular his impetuosity, caused him much unnecessary distress throughout his life, but they were more than counterbalanced by a charm that captivated those who knew him. His old friend W. Burgh comes nearest to depicting the enchantment of those who fell under the spell of his charm and kindness and the beauty of his home:

⁵⁷ Haigh MSS.

⁵⁸ There is a copy of this in the Pennington MSS.

I often meditate upon the happiness I enjoyed at Muncaster and still retain a great Enjoyment in Reflection. I can take my chair in memory in the rational chearful and pleasant society of your Library, or take Dick's chair perhaps and thence survey whatever Nature has formed capable of working its way to the Mind through the Eye: the lovely walks in which I have so often attended you I frequently walk over again, and reckon as you point them out the several retirements of the Mountains, or wonder at the variety which every ray of light is capable of bestowing not on the Colouring only but on the very form of your majestic Scawfell.⁵⁹

Acknowledgements.

This paper would not have been possible without the assistance of many people. I am indebted to the Duke of Grafton for access to his family papers at the W. Suffolk Record Office, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres for access to the papers from Haigh Hall now deposited at the John Rylands Library, and to Sir William Pennington-Ramsden for access to the Pennington Papers now deposited in the Record Office at Carlisle. I am also grateful for their assistance to Dr Taylor (Keeper of Manuscripts at the John Rylands Library); Mr M. P. Statham, the West Suffolk County Archivist; Mr B. C. Jones of the Record Office, Carlisle; and Mr C. R. Hudleston.

⁵⁹ W. Burgh to Lord Muncaster 19 November 1790. Haigh MSS.