

ART. XIII. – *Carlisle Brickmakers and Bricklayers 1652-1752.*

By B. C. JONES, M.A.

IN December 1672 Sir John Lowther of Lowther wrote “I have gotten men from Carlisle to burne Brick at Crakabanke, and am to give 4s. a thousand, and provide all materialls, as Cole, Straw, Sand; and intend the like at Yeanewith, the ground beeing approved as very good in both places for that purpose, beeing very usefull for Ovens, backs of Chimneys, [and the] paveinge, and the inside of walles and Pidgon Cotes beeing dry, and not subject to cast a swett as stones are; And when stones are not neare may be allmost as cheape; but experience will instruct us more”.

The experiment was not successful for in May 1673 he noted “the Bricke was brunt at Crakabanke beeing 60,000 and at Yeanewith 20,000, but the Season was soe wett as they could never be gotten well dried, soe they proved worth noethinge. Soe lost about 200 load of Coles; and £15 in monie paid the workemen, who should have had 4s. a 1000”.¹

The Carlisle brickmaker was William Agasman who wrote to Sir John from Carlisle 28 April 1673 “I did begin to make bricke Aboute ten dayes Agoe And the weather hath bene soe cruell could And sharpe that I am forsed to Leave itt of[f] Againe till the Lord send mee warmer weather, for twoo of my workmen hath gotten A greate could And are not Able to worke for the present”.²

Carlisle brickmakers were also employed unsuccessfully to make bricks to build the garden wall at the Flatt, Whitehaven (now Whitehaven Hospital) 1676-7. There was no brickmaker in Whitehaven or nearby at this time for before beginning the work Sir John Lowther of Whitehaven had asked his Steward Thomas Tickell “to Enquire whether a Brickmaker may not be had as cheap from Dublin as from Carlisle and what the difference may be in their skill”. Brick earth was found in Flatt meadow and was probably carried to the Sandhills for burning, but the poorness of the bricks was imputed by the Carlisle brickmaker to the badness of the Whitehaven coals of which “he had a double proportion to those he burnes at Carlisle”.³

If Carlisle’s brickmakers failed when they were employed outside their own town they were more successful at home and were the first of their trade to establish themselves in Cumbria.

It is possible that brick was burnt in Carlisle intermittently from the 15th century onwards when the tile tower at the Castle was first built. Tile Close in St Nicholas is marked on a map of the lands belonging to Carlisle Castle in 1610 but archaeological and documentary sources give us no cause to think that bricks or tiles were used extensively in buildings before the 17th century.⁴ Available evidence is slight but what there is suggests that many town buildings were made of clay and then roughcast like those in the country. For the better buildings, protection on the outside was almost certainly by weather boarding. There was work for masons in the town at the Castle, on the town walls, perhaps on repairing the fabric of the Cathedral or even in building garden walls, but not for bricklayers. No bricklayers were employed when the moot hall was rebuilt in 1668; and stone for facing and roofing was preferred even in the rebuilding of the bigger houses nearly twenty-five years later as for example in the case of Tullie House in 1689.⁵

Nonetheless the trade was gradually establishing itself. Entries in the accounts of the Chamberlains of Carlisle 1 May 1652–24 June 1653 record the costs of keeping “the boy which makes the Tyle” in lodging and clothes. One entry on 25 October 1652 was for the sum of £1 “payed to the Tylemaker for taking a poore Boy to apprentice”. No names are given however and there are no further references to brick or tiles until 1663 when John Bushby supplied bricks and workmanship for the chimney at Scotch Gate.⁶

St Mary’s parish register records the burial of Thomas Hansel of Pluckholme “bricklayer” on 17 August 1672.⁷ Matthew Wilman or Wildman, was buried in St Cuthbert’s churchyard on 4 August 1684 and in the inventory of his goods and chattels dated 21 August he was described as a “bricklayer”. Out of an inventory totalling £23. 6s. there was a sum of £10 “for halfe of the Murrall hill Brick kiln” which shows that he was a brickmaker as well as a bricklayer and gives a location in Carlisle for the manufacture of bricks somewhere near to the present Cumberland News building.⁸ Carlisle museum has a brick dated 168[1] which was found on the old Greyfriars site in English Street.⁹ Was this a product of the Murrell Hill brick kiln? The valuers of Wildman’s goods were Edward Lowry, gentleman, Mr John Charnley, Mr John Bushby and Thomas Hartness. The first three who signed their names were owners of property in King’s Arms Lane and in Lowry’s Lane towards the Greyfriars.¹⁰ Thomas Hartness who made his mark was perhaps his journeyman or employee. He was described as a bricklayer at the baptism of his son John in St Cuthbert’s church on 9 August 1682, and also at his death, in his will 9 August 1703 and inventory, 18 January 1705/6.¹¹ By 5 December 1688 he had thrived sufficiently to buy for £31 a small property on the north side of King’s Arms Lane, then called Borrowdale vennell.¹² This house is referred to again in the will of his son Thomas in 1725, but it is not clear if this is the “mansion house” in which his father lived at his death in 1706.¹³ Thomas Hartness senior bequeathed to his wife Jennet “the room that Nicholas Lowther lately lived in and also one little Buttery joining to the same room and one Loft or chamber above the Buttery joining to Mrs Lowryes vennell and also one shop joining to William Smallwoods dwelling house”. His bricks and the money owing to him he left to his son Thomas to pay his debts and funeral expenses. As for his apprentice “John Blalock” he wrote “I do dispose of him to my sonn, he paying yearly to my wife ten shillings and five shillings to the said Jo: Blalocke and my Will is that if my sonn has not a minde to take my Apprentice, I do leave my said Apprentice to his own disposall he paying my wife thirty shillings per annum untill he be loose of his Apprenticeship”.¹⁴ St. Mary’s register records the burial of John Blacklock bricklayer in “Scotch St. extra” “at the Meeting House” on 18 July 1714. Thomas Hartness junior did not follow his father’s trade; he was a tailor.¹⁵

A family who began work as bricklayers at the end of the 17th century and continued to flourish as builders into the 18th century were the Railtons. On 20 May 1690 John Railton bricklayer bought a small burgage house on the north side of St Cuthbert’s Lane.¹⁶ Others of that name, also bricklayers, were Thomas whose children Richard and Thomas were baptised in St Cuthbert’s Church on 23 June 1695 and 19 April 1697 and Robert whose will was proved 30 May 1748 and who was a witness of John Railton’s will dated 6 November 1734 and proved at Carlisle 7 May 1743.¹⁷ By 1734 John Railton’s son, George, had set up in business as a general builder and was working on repairs and alterations. A series of bills presented for payment in 1735 give an interesting picture of the Railtons at work. Bills of 12 April 1733 for bricklayer work and plastering for

“Altering the court of the Inner Hall for the Gallery” and 28 October 1733 “for building a new Brick House att the Fishery at Kingarth” give names of the work force. On the first job on 12 April the bricklayers John and Robert Railton, John Gash and George Topping as well as George Railton himself were employed on taking down the old ceiling and carting away the rubbish. For breaking out the windows in the gallery and walling up the staircase as well as for plastering they were all paid equally 18d. a day; the two labourers who assisted them earned 9d. a day, the apprentice 1s. a day. On the second job on 28 October the bricklayers were Robert Railton, John Fitchit, Thomas Nixon and Richard Heslop. On this occasion George Railton paid himself 20d. a day and the others at the rate of 18d. a day, with the exception of Richard Heslop – probably the apprentice who earned 12d. a day. For work done on 12 April 1733, 1500 bricks were brought from Botcherby and 500 from Gosling Sike. For the fish house the 10,000 bricks used in building were from Etterby Hill.

In 1734 George Railton was employed as the builder of “two appartments of Charity houses” for the Corporation and submitted an estimate of bricklayers’ work as follows:

	£	s	d
The Front of the 2 Rooms in Length next to the gates is 26 foot long by 18 foot High, one Brick $\frac{1}{2}$ thick makes 52 superficial yards at 2s. 6d. per yard	6	10	0
The Gable end is 20 foot long by 20 foot square; Height makes 44 yards 4 foot superficial; one Brick $\frac{1}{2}$ thick att 2s. 6d. per yard	5	11	3
Pitch of the Gable end is 6 yards superficial. The Inner side wall is 25 foot 6 in. long by 18 foot High makes 51 square yards. All 2s. per yard, one Brick thick finding all	5	02	0
The Backside wall is 15 foot 6 in. High by 26 foot long one Brick thick makes 44 yards 7 foot att 2s. per yard	4	9	6
The midl[e] Gable end one Brick thick 17 foot 6 in. long by 18 foot High makes 41 yards superficial at 2s. per yard finding all, the Pitch of the Gable included	4	2	0
The 2 Room floors to be laid with Brick containing 44 yards at 9d. per yard for Brick Sand and workmanship	01	14	0 ¹⁸

In 1743 George Railton was one of the contractors for building an arch at the south end of Priestbeck Bridge Carlisle for a sum of £380.¹⁹ In 1746 he took a lease of the alabaster quarries at Wragmire bank in the Dean and Chapter’s manor of Botchergate.²⁰ Fifteen years earlier in 1731 he had been employed by the Glovers’ guild in laying an “Alabaster floor” in their guild room.²¹

It is worth noting that his father, John Railton, his relative Robert, and George himself were all brothers of the Glovers’ guild. On 31 January 1705 Rowland Stag son of John Stag of Stanwix was apprenticed to Robert Railton bricklayer and his apprenticeship was noted in the Guild minute book. John Railton was one of the “Four” of the Guild until his death in 1743. George was admitted a brother on 5 May 1709 and succeeded his father as a “Four” of the Company on 2 May 1743. On 6 September 1717 the minute book recorded that “John Fitchett son of Margaret Fitchett of the City of Carlisle hath put and bound himself to George Railton his master” not to learn the glover’s trade but the skill of a bricklayer. The same John Fitchett was one of the bricklayers employed by George Railton in the building of the Fish house noted above.²²

From 23 June 1710 to 23 November 1751 George Railton lived in a Dean and Chapter burgage house, later divided into four, and known as the Black Swan. It stood on the west side of Castle Street on ground occupied by the now demolished St Mary's Church.²³ For nearly twenty years from 19 March 1732/3 until his death in January 1752 he served on the Corporation of Carlisle as one of the capital citizens, a position from which he could find work for his trade.²⁴ He died without making a will. No letters of administration were taken out so little is known about his standing in the world when he died. His son Thomas was admitted a brother of the Glovers' guild on 5 November 1747 and succeeded his father as one of the "Four" on 6 August 1752.²⁵

As far as is known George's death ended a family business which had lasted for sixty years and which spanned a period of time when the trade of bricklaying finally established itself in Cumbria. Few examples of the work of these early bricklayers survive. Perhaps the best monument is a brick gable to a house in Botcherby which bears the inscription

THM
1700.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Mr Blake Tyson for references to brickmaking at Whitehaven, to Mrs Susan Dench for drawing my attention to the wills and inventories of Matthew Wildman and Thomas Hartness, and to Mr Dennis Perriam for referring me to the brick in Carlisle museum and to the dated brick gable on a house in Botcherby.

References

- ¹ Surtees Society, cxc. C. B. Phillips ed. "Lowther Family Estate Books 1617-1675", (1979), 254.
- ² Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle. Letters to Sir John Lowther D/Lons/L1/1/23/9, "William Aggusman" was returned for one hearth in Botchergate Without and was discharged by certificate, 1674. C.R.O., Carlisle Hearth Tax 1674, transcribed by John Steadman.
- ³ C.R.O., Carlisle. Letters to and from Thomas Tickell. D/Lons/W2/Box 2, letters 239 and 313.
- ⁴ C.R.O., Carlisle. DX 350, photograph of an original plan at the Department of Palaeography and Diplomatic, University of Durham, ref. Howard of Naworth C49/1. Information as to the use of bricks from Carlisle Archaeological Unit.
- ⁵ C.R.O., Carlisle. Records of the City of Carlisle Ca. 5/1/47.
- ⁶ C.R.O., Carlisle. Records of the City of Carlisle Ca. 4/3.
- ⁷ C.R.O., Carlisle. PR 47/1.
- ⁸ C.R.O., Carlisle. PR 79/1 and Carlisle Probate records P. 1684.
- ⁹ Carlisle Museum accession register 210.
- ¹⁰ C.R.O., Carlisle. P 1705. Will of Thomas Hartness and Ca. 3/3/11 and 29. Carlisle Freeholders Call book, 1660, 1673.
- ¹¹ C.R.O., Carlisle. DRC.6/28/1. Bishop's transcripts of registers and P. 1705 Will and inventory of Thomas Hartness, bricklayer.
- ¹² C.R.O., Carlisle. D/Cart. numbered deeds 30. Thomas Faulder's estate, King's Arms Lane.
- ¹³ C.R.O., Carlisle. P 1725. Will of Thomas Hartness, tailor.
- ¹⁴ C.R.O., Carlisle. P 1705. Will of Thomas Hartness, bricklayer.
- ¹⁵ C.R.O., Carlisle. PR 47/1 and P 1725. Will of Thomas Hartness.
- ¹⁶ C.R.O., Carlisle. D/MBS, Mounsey's estate deeds of property in St Cuthbert's Lane.
- ¹⁷ C.R.O., Carlisle. PR 79/1 and P 1743. Will of John Railton, P 1748. Will of Robert Railton.
- ¹⁸ C.R.O., Carlisle. Ca.4/11-125. Vouchers 1735.

- ¹⁹ C.R.O., Carlisle. Ca. 5/1/49.
- ²⁰ C.R.O., Carlisle. Dean and Chapter lease book 1685-1852.
- ²¹ C.R.O., Carlisle. D/Lons/L, 13/11. Copy minute book of the Guild of Skinners and Glovers.
- ²² C.R.O., Carlisle. D/Lons/L, 13/11. Guild minute book as above.
- ²³ C.R.O., Carlisle. Chapter lease book as above.
- ²⁴ C.R.O., Carlisle. Ca. 2/6. Corporation Order Book.
- ²⁵ C.R.O., Carlisle. PR 47/2. George Railton was buried in St Mary's Churchyard on 27 January 1752.
D/Lons/L, Guild minute book as above.

