

ART. XIX. – *Early Museums in Lakeland*

By A. J. WHITE M.A., F.M.A., F.S.A.

THE history of museums has focused in the past, quite rightly, on institutions such as the Ashmolean, the British Museum, and the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, each one a pioneer in some way. However, early museum development was not confined to the south and east of the country; there were three early museums in Lakeland, all founded during the late 18th century. In many ways, being privately operated and aimed principally at the tourist market, they anticipated some modern trends. Ultimately all failed and were broken up, but it is not perhaps their contents that matter so much as the purpose for which they were set up, and the contemporary views which they called forth.

The story has been told many times of how the English Lake District was “discovered”.<sup>1</sup> Briefly a combination of things led to the discovery; wars in Europe for long periods in the late 18th century closed it off to English tourists, the development of better roads, a growing taste for the Picturesque, and most importantly, a guide book to make the area accessible and to point out the best views. The guide book was *Guide to the Lakes*, by Father Thomas West, a Jesuit priest, and the first edition appeared in 1778.<sup>2</sup> West did not create the demand, but his book helped to stimulate it, and to encourage less individualistic spirits to venture forth among ways which were becoming quite well trodden.

The new brand of visitor, “Lakers” they were called, although travelling guide-book in hand, needed (or were persuaded they needed) local guides to lead them to mountain summits, waterfalls, or more particularly to the various “stations”, set points from which it was agreed the best views could be taken. Two of these guides, Peter Crosthwaite and Thomas Hutton, subsequently set up museums in Keswick, the former in 1780. Crosthwaite was a native Cumbrian, and had been a weaver, a naval commander in India, a customs-officer, and an inventor.<sup>3</sup> Judging by the detailed maps of the lakes which he surveyed between 1783 and 1794, he was also an extremely fine cartographer.<sup>4</sup>

### Crosthwaite's Museum

Crosthwaite was clearly the trend-setter. Visitors agreed that his was the first (and best) of the museums of Lakeland. According to a handbill of 1792 he carried on his other activities as well as running his museum, selling mineral samples and prints as well as Claude glasses.<sup>5</sup> It is known that he made a path to the top of Latrigg and cut steps, to help visitors to Scale Force, in his spare time.<sup>6</sup>

“More of gimcracks than antiquities”, said Johnson Grant in 1797,<sup>7</sup> while Henry Kett wrote the following year of a Roman altar, “an inscription concerning its genuineness I had some doubts”.<sup>8</sup> Joseph Budworth, however, who paid a visit in 1792 considered his shilling well spent.<sup>9</sup>

A longer description, not at all complimentary, is given by William Gell in 1797.<sup>10</sup>

We went that evening to Crosthwaite's museum. His collection chiefly consists of mineral productions and those Indian bows, caps, and ornaments which are to be found in every museum. He had a collection of coins, which I did not examine, the chair of Ld Derwentwater, a Chinese Gong which produced a most thundering sound, and an instrument of the staccato kind, made of stone of which he pretends to have found six notes in the proper musical succession. He also sells his own maps of the lakes which have the character of the nicest accuracy in every respect. His daughter seems an elegant woman, and more worth seeing than anything else in his house, as to himself he is seated in a gouty chair and drums in one corner of the room, like a fool, to the noise of a barrel organ. While he has mirrors in every direction at the windows, by which he instantly sees every carriage that comes from any of the neighbouring towns, though he sits not near to any of the windows himself. The organ strikes up if any one passes, and his horrible drum is thumped, at the same time the old woman runs upstairs and rattles away at the Gong, in a manner that cannot fail to attract the notice of the unfortunate strangers in the street. He has even attempted to make a larger Gong than that he has already, with which he might astonish strangers but this had not succeeded, probably owing to the too great thickness of the brass of which it is formed.

Other visitors noted with approval the set of reeds fixed to the windows, looking through which one could see the principal views of Derwentwater.<sup>11</sup>

Housman describes the museum thus;

Mr Crosthwaite's Museum is a spacious building, divided into several large apartments, and contains a profusion of singular curiosities . . .<sup>12</sup>

The Museum itself "at the Quadrant, Telescope, and Weathercock a little below the middle of Keswick", is figured in an otherwise open area of Crosthwaite's map of Buttermere, Crummock and Loweswater Lakes. The absence of gentlemen's seats in this vicinity probably caused him to insert it here.

By 1808 Crosthwaite was dead. In 1810 the governess, Miss Weeton, paid a visit to the museum;<sup>13</sup>

We visited both Museums: Crosthwaite, the original proprietor of the principal one, is lately dead; his son and successor appears to me a mere drone; the father was said to be very clever.

The son, Daniel, (d. 1847) and his family (Elizabeth Crosthwaite – "Dealer in Minerals", was proprietor of the Museum in 1855)<sup>14</sup> continued to run the museum until 1870, when it was offered for sale as one lot, and if not so disposed of to be sold by auction. A total of 1,595 lots were identified in the catalogue, to be sold over six days, and the list makes fascinating reading.<sup>15</sup>

### **Hutton's Museum**

Much less is known of this museum. Green states that it stood "on the way from the middle of the town to the lake". Budworth, answering criticisms of the small size of Hutton's Museum, says;

". . . if he has a little Museum he has but a little fortune, and if he has but a small house, he has a large family".<sup>16</sup>

Miss Weeton, writing in 1810,<sup>17</sup> says;

Hutton, our guide, and the Keeper of a second-rate Museum, is a very intelligent man; he is

very clever as a Mineralogist and a Botanist, but not so absorbed in science as to prevent his being a most entertaining travelling companion to any one; he related many anecdotes, and his descriptions of the scenery are correct and sufficiently diffuse, without being either dry or tedious. He is a grandfather, and quite of a plain, farmer-like appearance.

Hutton had acted as guide to William Wilberforce on his tour in the summer of 1779.<sup>18</sup>

A Directory of 1829 records,<sup>19</sup>

Hutton, Thomas, a venerable botanist and mineralogist, resides at Keswick, where in 1786, he established a Museum, and has ever since officiated as a guide to tourists.

Hutton died in 1831, aged 85, and his two daughters carried on his work. Hannah Hutton was proprietress of the museum as well as a dealer in minerals in 1855.

There was an immense rivalry between the two museums; Crosthwaite bitterly resented Hutton, and his handbill of 1794 expressly warns visitors against being taken to the wrong museum! He claimed that he had been falsely induced to give up the guiding business in return for an accommodation because of the museum question.

A contemporary of these two was William Todhunter, who set up his museum in Kendal. Kendal is not central to Lakeland, but has had a continuing importance as the main south eastern entrance to the area. Many tourists travelled across the Sands of Morecambe Bay towards Newby Bridge or Coniston, but those aiming for Windermere found Kendal a natural base.

### **Todhunter's Museum**

After an earlier, and false, start in Hawkshead, William Todhunter established his Museum in a room near Abbot Hall gates (177, Highgate) in 1796, until he moved again in 1800.<sup>20</sup> William Gell<sup>21</sup> made a visit in 1797 and was scathing. "We arrived at Kendal about six in the evening and saw there a miserable museum a most wretched Imitation of Crosthwaites".

In about 1800 the museum moved into premises on the corner of Finkle Street (the Fish Market).<sup>22</sup>

In 1800 the Carlisle newspapers carried this advertisement;

Wm. Todhunter returns his most grateful thanks to the ladies and gentlemen who have patronised his museum, and generously contributed to it, and informs them that he has now been able to add many valuable specimens, and has re-arranged the whole systematically in two rooms, fitted up for the purpose and ornamented with shell work etc. He has now collected together Minerals, Shells, Petrefactions, Incrustations, Crystallizations, Spars, Marles, and many curious Fossils, Mosses, Lichens, and plants of spontaneous growth, a variety of Birds, Quadrupeds, Fishes and Coins, Medals, Antiques and curiosities originally belonging to Kendal Castle, Sculptures from Furness Abbey, Basaltes from the Giant's Causeway, Musical Stones from Kendal Fell, and some curious specimens of mechanism etc. Admittance, ladies and gentlemen 1/- each; children, working people and servants 6d. each. Open from 7 a.m. till 10 p.m., Sundays excepted.

Upon the proprietor's death the contents of the museum were put up for sale, on 15 July 1835 and the following advertisement appeared in the *Lancaster Gazette* on 11 July. No sale catalogue appears to survive.

Sale of Minerals, Marine Productions, Preserved Zoology, Antiquities, Old Armour, and China and other Curiosities.

The Museum of the late Mr Todhunter, of Kendal, Westmorland.

Which will be sold by auction by Mr Goulden, on Wednesday, the Fifteenth July, and following days, at Mr Harker's, the Black Horse and Rainbow, Kendal, the Sale to commence at One o'clock.

Several thousand Museum and Cabinet Specimens – Large Fine Chrystalizations; rare undescribed Fossils, and others; Ores, and singular Combinations, &c.; some Foreign Minerals and Precious Stones; Sets of Minerals and Musical Stones; Giant's Causeway; Variety of Shells; Fish, Amphibia, Reptiles, Insects, and Birds; three crates of oid China and Delph; various Antique Utensils; Weapons of Ancient Britons, Celts, Romans, Saxons, &c.; Roman Urns; Druidic Remains; a Saxon Cross; many Relics of Past Ages, Places and Persons of Note; Old Typography, Writing, &c.; a few Lots of Books, Paintings, and other Effects, worthy the attention of Ladies, Men of Science, and Dealers.

On View, Tuesday, July 14th, from nine to six o'clock.

A Directory of 1829 records Todhunter's Museum,<sup>23</sup>

. . . having existed upwards of 30 years, during which time the proprietor has gathered together, at great labour and expense, a very large and interesting collection . . .

As there was less call for the services of a guide in Kendal, Todhunter combined his museum-keeping with taxidermy and the sale of tuned sets of musical stones (for which see below).

### **Musical Stones**

One of the features of Lakeland entertainment was music. French horns were popular instruments, played by Derwentwater for the echo effect and also the Arcadian overtones. Crosthwaite was claimed to be the inventor of the Aeolian harp, played by the wind blowing across the strings. Another local product was the set of musical stones, present in both Crosthwaite's and Todhunter's Museums. The former had found some stones on 11 June 1785, in the bed of the Greta, to make the start on a tuned set of sixteen. Later on "Rock Bands", using similar but larger sets toured the country – "Richardson & Sons Original Rock Band" and the "Till Family Rock Band" are recorded in photographs and tuned stones survive in Lancaster, Kendal, and Keswick (Fitz Park) Museums.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Collections**

Some indications of what the museums contained has already been shown. What is somewhat surprising, and interesting, is that so much local material was collected. Elements of these collections survive in the present Kendal Museum (by way of the Kendal Natural History and Science Society) and in the Fitz Park Museum in Keswick.

Unfortunately since no catalogue survives of Todhunter's Museum we do not have much detail of the collections. However, we do know that he had "Roman urns found at Watercrock, the MS Genealogy of the Saxon Kings; an iron cannon ball . . . found at Kendal Castle; together with some Kendal Tokens . . ." <sup>25</sup> He also had a very early lantern clock, given by James Cock, Mayor of Kendal in 1654, to be held by each Mayor

successively. Another intriguing item was the Runic cross, dating from the late 9th century, found in Lancaster churchyard in 1807 and stolen from its place at the Vicarage gate.<sup>26</sup> This cross had a very eventful life and is now in the British Museum. Todhunter also had six coins of Cnut from the Halton hoard, found 1811.<sup>27</sup>

It would appear that the bulk of the collection consisted of geological items, which also figure largely in Crosthwaite's catalogue.

Hutton had;

the vegetable and mineral productions of these counties; he has likewise a grand collection of birds preserved, from the remotest parts of the known world; fishes, insects, lizards, moths, butterflies, and serpents; – also a large collection of ancient and modern coins, casts, and medals; a cabinet of shells, and other marine productions; a remarkably large, living eagle . . .<sup>28</sup>

With Crosthwaite's collection we are on somewhat firmer ground, though it is not known to what extent the collection remained static or whether items left it before 1870. Certainly a hoard of Anglo-Saxon coins from Dean, Cumberland, is known to have been in the collection but does not appear in the sale catalogue.<sup>29</sup>

The collection was divided into the following categories;

Antiquities found in Cumberiand, Antiquities found at Kingsholm, near Gloucester, Miscellaneous Antiquities, Relics of the Derwentwater Family, Miscellaneous, Fossils found in Cumberland, Ancient Books, Manuscripts etc., The Mineralogy of Cumberland, Miscellaneous articles, Birds etc., Miscellaneous, Gold Coins, Greek Coins, Roman Coins, Egyptian, English Coins, Roman Coins, English Coins, Maunday Money, Bank Tokens, Scotch Coins, Various Coins, American Coins, East Indian Coins, French Coins, Papal Coins, Spanish Coins, Russian Coins, Portuguese Coins, Austrian Coins, Dutch Coins, Miscellaneous Coins, Silver Medals, Bronze Medals, Medals – various, Tokens, Curiosities (Resumed), Antiquities, Curiosities etc.

These headings hardly convey the breadth of collections; a few examples (with their lot numbers) must suffice;

- 123 Chinese gong, of fine deep and rich tone, brought from Canton about 1780.
- 180 Caricature by H. W. Bunbury Esq., of individuals who figured in a contre-danse at the Queens Head Inn, Keswick, entitled "Lumps of Pudding" . . .
- 71 A cluster of 55 hazel nuts, which grew in Greystoke Park, Cumberland.
- 206 An instrument invented by the founder of the museum, to measure inaccessible distances.
  - 1 Pair of shoes of O'Brien, the celebrated Irish giant . . . (who exhibited himself in Keswick 1803).
- 88 Head of a New Zealand chieftain, named Ingolee, aged 25 years, slain in battle in 1825.
- 231 An eagle of the smallest tribe, shot at Armatrigg, near Keswick.<sup>30</sup>

### The Visitors

Who were the museums aimed at? Clearly they were a function of the early tourist industry, providing morning, evening or wet day entertainment for the "Lakers". This group itself tended to include the lower gentry and the middle classes, who were mainly those able to afford the travel costs and educated to the taste for the Picturesque. No doubt this began to change with the advent of railways and generally cheaper

travel, but the handbills give indications of an interesting change in the admission policy at Crosthwaite's Museum. Those of 1792 and 1842 agree in "Admittance to Ladies and Gentlemen 1s. each" and the times of opening as 7 a.m. till 10 p.m., but by 1842 "country people" admitted at 6d. each had become "servants". The tourists had arrived, settled and become natives, their villas thronging the lake shores, while the old independent "Statesmen" so beloved by Wordsworth, the "country people" Peter had encouraged, had largely disappeared, to be replaced in Daniel's time by the servants of the well-to-do.

### Acknowledgements

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### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> E.g. E. W. Hodge, *Enjoying the Lakes; From Post-Chaise to National Park* (1957).
- <sup>2</sup> Gray is often considered to be the pioneer of Lakeland landscape, but in fact his writings were popularised only by quotation in West's Guide.
- <sup>3</sup> See introduction by W. Rollinson (ed.) to the 1968 reprint of *A Series of Accurate Maps of the Principal Lakes of Cumberland, Westmorland & Lancashire . . . First Surveyed and Planned between 1783 and 1794 by Peter Crosthwaite*.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>5</sup> Claude glasses were tinted concave mirrors used by serious students of the Picturesque who turned their backs on the scenery and composed in their glass a view such as Claude Lorrain might have painted.
- <sup>6</sup> E. Moir, *The Discovery of Britain: The English Tourists 1540-1840* (1964), 147.
- <sup>7</sup> J. Grant, "A London Journal of a Three Weeks Tour in 1797 through Derbyshire to the Lakes", in W. Mavor (ed.), *British Tourists, IV* (1809), 219-92.
- <sup>8</sup> H. Kett, "A Tour to the Lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland in August 1798", in W. Mavor, (ed.) *British Tourists, V* (1809), 118-57.
- <sup>9</sup> J. Budworth, *A Fortnight's Ramble to the Lakes in Westmorland, Lancashire and Cumberland, By a Rambler* (1792), 175-6.
- <sup>10</sup> W. Rollinson (ed.), *A Tour in the Lakes Made in 1797 by William Gell* (1968), 13-14. For those who like bad verse, John Ruskin's *Iteriad*, 2, 166 ff., describing a similar visit in his youth, is a must.
- <sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.* in note 7.
- <sup>12</sup> J. Housman, "A Descriptive Tour and Guide to the Lakes, Caves, and Mountains . . ." in *Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire* (1800), 151-2.
- <sup>13</sup> E. Hall (ed.), *Miss Weeton; Journal of a Governess 1807-11* (1936), 263.
- <sup>14</sup> *Royal National Commercial Directory of the Northern Counties* (1855), 41.
- <sup>15</sup> Barrow-in-Furness Library, PL 631 lc 321 PY. A further sale of items formerly in Crosthwaite's Museum took place 15/8/1871; a catalogue is in the Armit Library, W34 (728.84).
- <sup>16</sup> W. Green, *The Tourist's New Guide [to the Lakes]* vol. 2 (1819), 10; J. Budworth, *op. cit.*, 230-2.
- <sup>17</sup> J. Housman, *op. cit.*
- <sup>18</sup> C. E. Wrangham (ed.), *A Journey to the Lake District from Cambridge, 1779* (1983), 52.
- <sup>19</sup> W. Parson & W. White, *History, Directory & Gazeteer . . . of Cumberland & Westmorland* (1829), 47.
- <sup>20</sup> J. F. Curwen, *Kirkbie-Kendall* (1900), 121, 371.
- <sup>21</sup> W. Rollinson (ed.), *A Tour in the Lakes, made in 1797 by William Gell* (1968), 10, 45.
- <sup>22</sup> C. Nicholson, *Annals of Kendal* (1832), 122-3.

<sup>23</sup> W. Parson & W. White, *op. cit.* 645, 660.

<sup>24</sup> See "The First Rock Group", *Geological Curator's Group Newsletter*, 2, no. 4, and subsequent correspondence.

<sup>25</sup> J. F. Curwen, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> R. Simpson, *The History and Antiquities of Lancaster* (1852).

<sup>27</sup> *Archaeologia*, XVIII (1817), 199 ff; J. D. A. Thompson, *Inventory of British Coin Hoards* (1956), 66.

<sup>28</sup> W. Green, *op. cit.*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *British Numismatic Journal*, XXVIII (1958), 177-80.

<sup>30</sup> The lot numbers start from 1 in each day's sale, hence the order quoted here.

