

II.—THE TOWNSHIP OF KNITSLEY, CO. DURHAM; ITS GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY.

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Knitsley, supposed to be "the knight's clearing"¹ called Knycheley in 1250, Cnicheley in 1280, Knitchley in 1626 and Knitsley in 1630, is a joint township with Consett,² under the name of Conside *cum* Knitsley (since 1345 at least), and consists chiefly of the agricultural and pastoral portion of that area. By Local Government order No. 31,655, which came into operation on 30th September, 1894, this portion, comprising an area of 2,201 acres was formed into the civil parish of Knitsley. Its rateable value in 1905 was £16,520, and the population in 1901 was 827.

It lies between the 750 and 880 feet contour lines and comprises the drainage area of the Smallhope burn (formerly the Con burn) one of the tributaries of the Browney river, the Wear's greatest affluent which has four heads—the Con burn, now called Back Gill burn, from Templetown, the Gill (or Hown's Gill) burn from Hown's Gill, Beggarside burn, from Rowley, and Dyke Nook burn from Miller's Hill. The beds of the first three burns are in deep narrow denes, or ravines, locally called gills.

Signs of early settlement in the township exist in the form of worked flints, which have been picked up in cultivated fields, and in a broken stone axe-head found near West Knitsley. At the head of Dyke Nook burn are the remains of a couple of dams, which formed the source of one of the aqueducts which supplied the water of the Roman camp at Lanchester, and which flowed thither, via

¹ *The Place Names of Northumberland and Durham*, by Allen Mawer, p. 130.

² For Consett manor, *Proc. Soc. Antiq.*, Newcastle, 3rd series x, 345-348.

the south side of David's Town, Woodlands Hall and Humber Hill, Colpike and Hollinside, between the last two of which, a part of the south wall of the main channel still exists. An uninscribed Roman altar found a quarter of a century ago on the edge of the lower of these dams was preserved at Little Greencroft Hall by the late Edmund Balleny.

The geological formation of the township is the lower carboniferous. The lowest coal seam (the Brockwell) was formerly worked on the south side of the township, where also is found good "seggar" clay and ganister. Other seams of coal are on the north, or Consett side of the township, some of which were worked by the Baker family of Crook Hall in the seventeenth and eighteenth century,³ and at present by the Consett Iron Company. Several "ironstone pits" in the township were worked by the sword makers of Shotley Bridge (1691-1790) and by the old Derwent Iron Company (1841-56). These pits were called Delft Pits and their existence is evidenced by the present name of the road from Consett to Lanchester (via Stockerley) which runs across the north-east of the township, and is called Delves lane.

The place-names in the township include Beggarside, Carribees, a farm erected on Knitsley Fell in 1783, the Delves, Dyke Nook, the Graves Wood (the scene of an attempted murder in 1808), High House (as named in 1513), Howens (so-called in 1570), High or West, Middle and Low or East Knitsley Farms, Knitsley Mill (a water corn mill in existence in 1540, ceased to exist in 1900), Liar-dene or Lyredene, the Lidgetts, Middles, Oliver Ford, Tod-hills, etc.

The Castleside and Consett Road partly borders its western side, Longedge (so-called in 1420), from Cold Rowley to Lanchester via Browney Bank its southern; the Iveston and East Butsfield Road its eastern, while Delves Lane skirts its northern. Other roads divide it north and south and east and west.

The Blackhill and Durham branch of the North Eastern

³ Coal accounts *penes* J.W.F.

Railway (formed in 1862), passes through it, and has a station for passengers and goods at Knitsley ($1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Consett), and the Blackhill and Bishop Auckland branch of the same Railway passes through its western side, crossing Howns Gill by a high brick barrel arched bridge, 700 feet long and 175 feet high, erected in 1857-58 at a cost of £14,000.⁴ This bridge took the place of an old standing engine which drew the waggons, etc., up and down either side of the "gill" or ravine, on sloping rails on the old Stanhope and Tyne Railway erected in 1833.

The principal part of the land belongs to six farms, between which are four hamlets, Templetown⁵ (52 houses), erected after 1860 and before 1890; Consett Park Terrace, erected after 1896 and before 1900, Knitsley Station Terrace erected in and after 1905, and the Delves Bungalows (280 houses), erected since 1922. The township at present enjoys the peculiarity of possessing neither church nor chapel, school, public hall, public house or tavern; whilst it did not even possess a shop until 1919.

Manor.—The township possesses both freehold and copyhold lands.

Knitsley though it does not appear as an estate until the beginning of the fourteenth century, gave name to a local family, for at least a century before that date. Of these we have the following records:—

1. John, son of Adam of Knychley had grants of land in the adjoining vill of Iveston, before 1250.⁶

2. Hugh of Cnicheley was a witness to the charter of John of Bradley, granting the manor of Edmundbyers, etc., to John de Lisle, in or about 1280; and also a witness to the charter of Hugh Fydi, mason, granting lands in Iveston to John, son of Adam of Knycheley, first named.

3. William of Knicheley was a witness to the charter of John of Chilton (lord of Heleyfield, an adjoining manor), granting lands in the vill of Heley (field), to

⁴ The first brick was laid 24 February, 1857. The bridge was finished for traffic in June, 1858.

⁵ Originally Temperley's Town, so called after Samuel Temperley who erected the first houses in 1860.

⁶ Copies of Charters *penes* J.W.F.

Hugh of Uvedale, and Engelis his wife, in or about 1280, and he was evidently the same William of Knycheley, to whom Richard Kellawe, Bishop of Durham, by charter of 24th November, 1311, for his homage and service, granted the vill of Knycheley, with its appurtenances and all the adjacent cultivated and uncultivated lands, to hold of the Exchequer of Durham. The said William Knycheley was dead before the date of Bishop Hatfield's Survey of, about 1380, for at that date Robert of Kellawe held the vill of Knycheley, which was freeland, once William of Knycheley's, by foreign service, and the annual rent of 15/1 payable quarterly. At the same date, one John Todd held one messuage and four acres of exchequer land, called Richard Land (not unknown) by the annual rent of 2s. and there were also 102 acres 3 roods of land in the moor of Knycheley which used to render annually 34s. 6d. then lying waste. In 1379 Thomas Surtees, knt., of Dinsdale, Co. Durham, died as appears by his Inquisition post mortem of 24th August, 1379, seised of the manor of Knycheley, together with four (4) cottages, and sixty (60) acres of land, which he had purchased under licence of alienation, held jointly, with Alexander Surtees his son and heir, by charter, homage, fealty and suit of court once a fortnight, leaving his son, the said Alexander, aged 22 years his heir.⁷ He seems to have alienated the same before his death in 1380, to Thomas Claxton of Old Park by Whitworth, Co. Durham, who died in 1401¹ seised, as appears by his Inquisition post mortem, 13th March, 1401-2, of the manor of Knycheley, held of the bishop of Durham by military service and the annual rent of 15s. to the exchequer—and which was then of the annual value of 78s. 4d.—leaving his son Thomas Claxton, a minor of 5 years, his heir, who appears to have either mortgaged or settled on trust the "vill of Knycheley" to Sir Ralph Eure of Witton le Wear, who held it conditionally at his death in 1422, as we learn from his I.P.M., 7th September, 1422, leaving his son William Eure, aged 26 years, his

⁷ Copies of all Inquisitions p.m. from Public Record Office, London, in hands of Writer.

heir. It must have reverted to the aforesaid Thomas Claxton, for at his death on 23rd December, 1461, he was, according to his I.P.M., taken 25th January, 1461-2, seised of the manor, leaving as his heir, his son Richard Claxton, aged 32 years. He died 30th May, 1472, seised as appears by his I.P.M., 15th June, 1472, of the same. His heir was his son John Claxton of Old Park, then aged 24, who died possessor in 1514, as his I.P.M., 21st August, 1514, tells us, leaving as his heir, his son Robert Claxton, aged 30 years who by deed of 1st August, 1515, granted an annual payment out of the manor, to his brother Thomas Claxton, and died without issue in 1517, seised, according to his I.P.M., 5th July, 1517, of the same manor of Knycheley leaving as his heir, his brother John Claxton, clerk, aged 30 years, who by deed of July 5th, 1535, passed the estate on to his nephew, Ralph Claxton, the son of his brother William Claxton, who by deed of December, 1544, granted an annuity out of his lands at Knycheley to one Henry Fawdon. The said Ralph Claxton died in 1547, seised as we learn from his I.P.M., 14th December, 1547, of the manor of, and lands and tenements in Kyncheley leaving his son Robert Claxton, a minor aged eight years, his heir, who for his participation in the "Rebellion of the earls," in 1569-70, was attainted under act of parliament of 1571.⁸ His life was spared and he died at Old Park, by Whitworth, in 1587,⁹ but his estates were forfeited and passed to the crown. John Claxton, his grandson, seems to have got possession of the estate, but how or when is not evident, for in 1626 he leased certain copyhold lands in Knitsley to his father, Sir John Claxton, knt., of Nettlesworth, and sold the manor of Knycheley and land and tenements there before October, 1627, to Francis Thursby, John Conyers, Francis Wrenne and another. Part of the after history is wanting. Before 1770, however, four freeholds in Knitsley had come into the possession of John Moses, merchant, of Kingston on Hull,^{9a} who entailed them on his only daughter, Jane

⁸ 13 Elizabeth cap. 41.

⁹ Will dated 10 October, 1587.

^{9a} John Moses died at Hull 26 April, 1773, and was buried at Holy Trinity, Hull, 29 April, 1773.

Moses who married, 9th July, 1788, Aubrey, 6th duke of St. Albans. She died 18th August, 1800, and they passed to her only child Mary, who married 6th November, 1811 (as his second wife) George William, 8th earl of Coventry. He died 15th May, 1843, she died 11th September, 1845, and their eldest son Henry Amelius Coventry, captain in the British army succeeded to the Knitsley estate. He died 3rd April, 1873, and was succeeded by his eldest son Henry Amelius Beauclerk Coventry, captain in the Grenadier Guards, who died 29th June, 1885. His successor was his eldest son Henry Robert Beauclerk Coventry of Monkton Park, Chippenham, who sold his Knitsley estates in 1920 to the tenants George Hardy, Aeneas Mackentyre, M.D.,¹⁰ and others, who are the present owners.

Copyhold lands.—Knitsley with Conside formed a copyhold vill of the great episcopal manor of Lanchester, where the tenants did suit and service and of which they held their lands by copy of court roll since 1345 at least. It remained in the possession of the see of Durham until by order of council of 4th April 1856^{10a} it was transferred to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who now hold the same.

In November, 1349, William Smyth of Knycheley, took of the lord of the (copyhold) manor, a rood of waste land before his door (*i.e.*, in front of his house) on which to erect a new forge—the former one having been burnt—to be held by the annual rent of 6d. In or about 1380, John Todd held a messuage and 4 acres of Exchequer land called Richard Land (now part of the farm called Todhills), by the annual rent of 2s. At that date there was also 102 acres 3 roods of land in the moor of Knycheley which used to pay an annual rent of £1 13s 4d., lying waste.

In 1385-6 the copyhold rents of the vill of Knycheley amounted to 17s. 1d.

In 1686 John Claxton, jnr., esq., with the consent of the steward of the copyhold manor of Lanchester, leased,

¹⁰ Dr. Mackintyre's farm (Middle Knitsley) was sold in 1925 to the Consett Iron Company.

^{10a} Gazetted 25 April, 1856.

to John Claxton, knt. (his father), then of Nettlesworth, $2\frac{1}{4}$ acres of waste land on Knitchley Green, on the south side of the tenure of Richard Labourne, and also 4 acres called Birk-hill (now unknown) abutting on the north and east of Knichley Fell, in the tenure of Robert Richison. In 1770 John Moses held about 10 acres of copyhold lands, which were mixed up with his freehold estate, and whose bounderies could not be shown.

The copyhold lands are now all intermingled with the freehold lands.

Knitsley Fell, a part of the extensive Lanchester common, was divided and enclosed under act of parliament of 1773.¹¹ The tithes of Knitsley belonged to the third prebend of the collegiate church of Lanchester, and we have several records of disputes concerning them between the dean and the prebendaries in 1313, and later.

¹¹ 13 George iii.