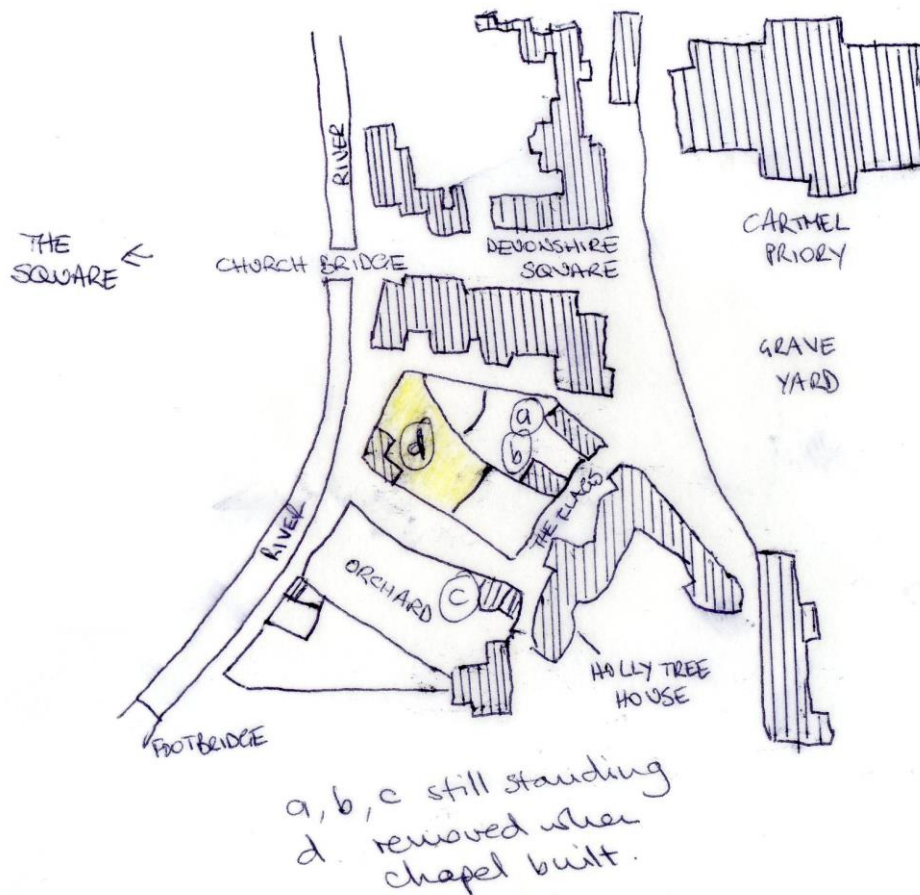


Cartmel Tan Yard

Until 1871 there was a tan yard in the centre of Cartmel. It was sold in 1871 by John Thomas Ashburner “formerly of Liverpool and now Douglas in the Island of Man” for £60^[1] and the site was redeveloped and the Wesleyan Chapel was built. In the report of the laying of the Chapel’s foundation stone it was reported that it was on the site of the new tan yard which suggests that there was an old tan yard ^[2]. As tanning was a very smelly business Cartmel must have become a much pleasanter place to live after 1871.

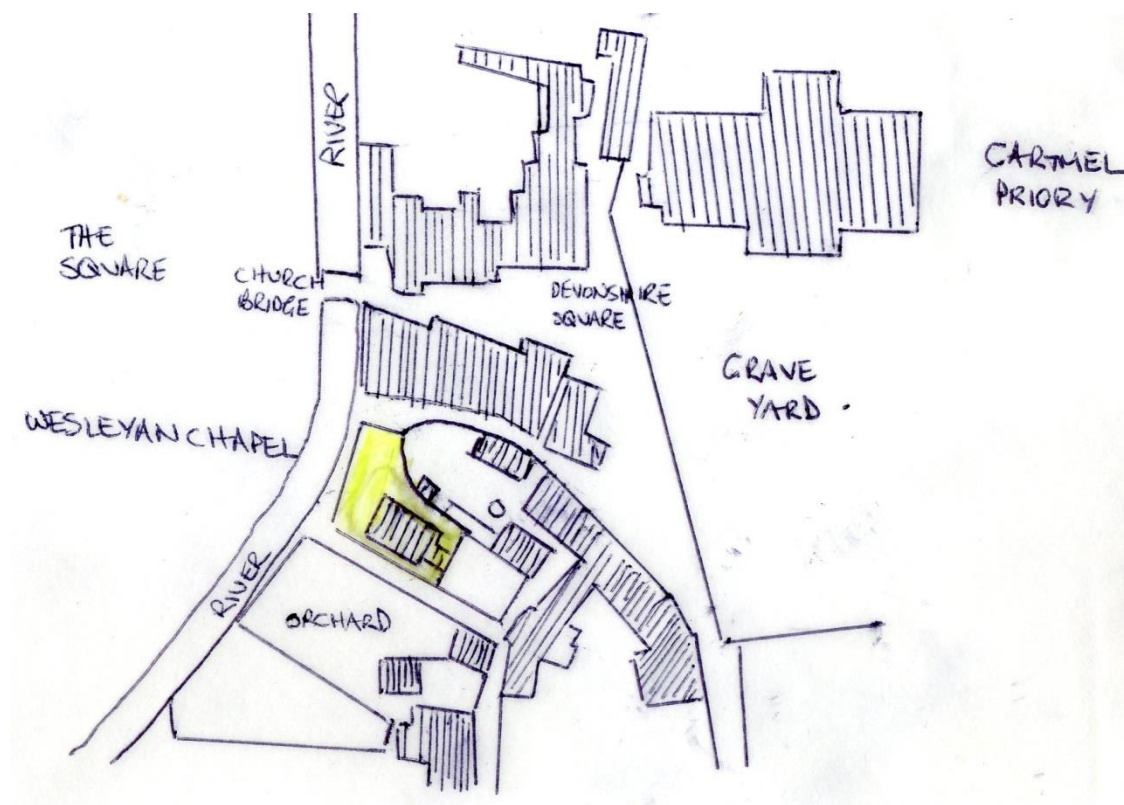
Map of location

This sketch map shows the tan yard sold for building the chapel (based on the 1851 OS map).



The site is highlighted in yellow and the building (d) in the south west corner was demolished to build the chapel.

The second map shows the chapel (based on 1893 OS map).



Description of site

In 1847 a letting advert described the tan yard as having 45 bark pits of which 14 were 'Handler's' (where the hide spent 6-8 weeks soaking in tannin) and all were 'under-housed'. A good supply of water was available (it was situated next to the River) and adjacent was a bark mill. All the buildings were in good repair. A dwelling house and stable could also be made available if required ^[3].

Forty years earlier in 1817 'two compact and very desirable tan yards, adjoining each other' were offered for sale or to let ^[4]. John Fell was the owner and occupier. One yard contained 47 pits and the other had 31 pits which were described as 'nearly new and in very good repair'. Building comprising a drying house, warehouses, bark mill and undefined 'other buildings', three dwelling houses, a shippon, two stables and other outhouses, an orchard, gardens and close of land were also included.

The earliest advert that I can find was in 1809 ^[5]. This gave a much more detailed description of the site which was owned by Mrs Ashburner and

the advert advised that the property was to be sold by auction on the premises on 5th September. The tan yard contained ‘13 wood pits with water and lime pits, a new iron bark mill, shades, drying house, bark rooms, etc’. There was land included suitable for additional pits or buildings. Three dwelling houses were included. One contained dining and drawing room and kitchen, cellar and pantry on the ground floor, four good lodging rooms on the next floor and the attic also contained four rooms. There were also ‘closets, cupboards and various conveniences’. The second house was smaller with a house, kitchen and milk house on the ground floor, four first floor lodging rooms and a garret. The third dwelling was a ‘small but neat and convenient cottage’. Outhouses were a good barn and two cow houses, one with a loft over a four stabled stable and a ‘large’ turf house. There was also an orchard, ‘well stocked with fruit trees’ garden, ‘delightfully ornamented with shrubs and flowers’ and a half acre field.

From the description it would seem that it had been a thriving business for at least 60 years when it finally ceased to operate. The tanning industry had thrived in the Lake District during the late 18th and early 19th century because of the availability of oak bark which was used in the process. However because of technological changes small tanpits became obsolete ^[6].

Tanning process

Tanning ^[7] was the process of turning horse and cow hide into leather. Leather was much in demand for boots, harnesses, straps and saddles. Horses were an important means of transport and cattle production had increased as population increased so there was a plentiful supply of hide. The process ^[8] included cleansing of the hide to remove all traces of blood for which a plentiful supply of water was needed. The unwanted parts of the hide were soaked off in a solution of lime and water. Hair was removed with a knife and used in mortar, upholstery and clothing. Flesh that remained after the liming process also had to be removed and that was used for glue and gelatin. Preparation for tanning involved soaking in an acid liquor such as a mixture of dog dirt and warm water (could also be hen or pig manure) ^[9]. It was only after these processes that the hide would be soaked in the tanning pits, starting with a weak solution for a few days followed by 6 to 8 weeks in handler or floater pits where the hide would be laid flat. For the next 18 months the hides were then stored flat, layered with ground bark between, all soaking in a strong liquor. Finally the tanned hides would be dried after washing and coating in linseed or cod liver oil. Finally the hide would be curried (cleansed, split and softened) ready for use. Rusland Tannery ^[10], situated south of

Grizedale Forest is an example of a tannery building of the mid-18th century, extended in the 19th century. It has been preserved by the Lake District National Park and the public can freely visit it.

Tanners

I have been unable to identify neither Mrs Ashburner nor John Fell who were named in the 1809 and 1817 adverts. So far I have identified the following tanners.

In 1829 **William Jackson** was living in Cartmel and his occupation was a tanner ^[11].

In 1833 **Robert Fell**, tanner married Mary Ann Leece in Cartmel and they had 2 children; Thomas baptised in 1834 and Agnes baptised in 1836. The 1841 census shows they had left Cartmel and by 1851 Robert (born in 1810) described as a journeyman tanner was living with his family in Lymm in Cheshire. Their son Robert had been born in St Helens in 1839 so they must have left Cartmel by then. The two children born in Cartmel appeared neither in the 1841 nor 1851 census nor in Cartmel burial records.

In the 1841 census **John Fell** (born in 1820) was living in Cartmel with his family who were basket makers and he was described as a tanner's apprentice. He was born in 1820. In 1881 he was described as a journeyman tanner and lived at Ulverston. In 1891 he was still described as a tanner and lived in Devonshire Yard, Cartmel.

Modern Times

From OS survey maps for 1851 and 1893 it is not possible to fully identify the site from the description above. All that can be identified is the land owned by the Chapel Trustees where the chapel was built which was only part of a rectangular block of land between the river to the west, buildings to the north and east and an uncultivated piece of land which could have been an orchard to the south. On the 1851 map there is an L shaped building on the south west corner of the chapel site which was removed to build the chapel. Possibly the dwellings and outbuildings mentioned are the buildings to the east on The Flags and the larger dwelling is Holly Tree House. Part of the site is now known as Unsworth's Yard which was redeveloped in 2010. The archaeological investigation ^[12] involving digging three evaluation trenches in 2007 found a large rubbish pit containing 18th century domestic ceramics and a large stone-lined field drain. No prior use of the site was identified. Before redevelopment into retail and office use the site had been a motor vehicle repair garage and haulage yard owned and occupied by the Unsworth Family since 1922.

Holly Tree House and the adjoining cottages on The Flags are located at the south east side of the site and fit the description of the three dwellings in the 1809 advert. Two detached building offset and behind the chapel are still standing but they have both been converted into houses. Possibly the old tan yard was situated where the orchard and building c is marked(1851 map) and along the riverside.



The Flags looking towards Cartmel Priory. ((a) on 1851 map is next to tunnel)



From the Flags looking towards Holly Tree House ((b) on 1851 map is on the right)



To the right detached building on the Flags behind the Chapel ((b) on 1851 map)



Former barn on The Flags behind the Chapel ((b) on 1851 map)



From side of Chapel looking toward Holly Tree House



Other detached building behind Chapel ((c) on 1851 map)



Pathway down right hand side of Chapel towards Holly Tree House



Pathway down left hand side of Chapel towards Unsworth's Yard and Priory



Pathway in front of Chapel looking towards Church Bridge showing River Eea

Pat Rowland
January 2017

References

1. A Conveyance from John Thomas Ashburner “formerly of Liverpool and now Douglas in the Island of Man” to the original Trustees of Cartmel Chapel dated April 13th 1871 confirms that “All that piece or parcel of Freehold land formerly used as a Tanyard” was purchased at a cost of £60.
2. Westmorland Gazette: *Saturday 02 December 1871*
3. Lancaster Gazette: *20 November 1847*
4. Lancaster Gazette: *20 December 1817*
5. Lancaster Gazette *26 August 1809*
6. William Rollinson. *Life and Tradition in the Lake District*; 1974
7. <http://www.cumbria-industries.org.uk/tanning/> accessed 18 Jan 2017
8. <http://www.cumbria-industries.org.uk/tanning/rusland-tannery/> accessed 18 Jan 2017

9. Marshall, J.D., Davies-Shiel, M. The Lake District at Work Past and Present. 1971. David and Charles, p44

10.<http://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/learning/archaeologyhistory/archaeologydiscoveryzone/archaeologyindepth/archaeologyruslandtannery> accessed 18 Jan 2017

11. Parson and White, History, Directory and Gazeteer of Cumberland and Westmorland with Furness and Cartmel 1829, Michael Moon 1976 p703

12. CWAAS Transactions 2008 Archaeological Projects in Cumbria: Lower Allithwaite: Unsworth's Yard, Devonshire Square, Cartmel p281

FURTHER READING

The tannery, Rusland, South Cumbria : Christine Howard-Davis, CWAAS Transactions, 1987

Recent archaeological work at Rusland Tannery, Cumbria : Juliet Reeves, CWAAS Transactions, 2002