

Cartmel Agricultural Society and Show in the 19th century

Very little is known about Cartmel Agricultural Society and Show in the 19th century because no official Society records dated before 1895 have been found. Official records from that date onwards have been deposited at Cumbria Archives (Kendal) (ref WDSO 219). A short history of the Society was published in 1968 and part of it was written by the Chairman, Joseph Bertram Smalley, in 1937 for the Diamond Jubilee Show. Mr Smalley wrote about the source of his information. *'Mr Rodger Rawsthorn never missed a show from 1874 to his death in 1929. It is mostly due to old schedules and catalogues furnished by members of his family that it has been possible for this short history to be written.'* James Harrison wrote additional material about the show up-to 1968, presumably using the Societies records. The booklet does not contain much information about the Society before 1900.

Cartmel Peninsula Local History Society has been researching the history of the Society and its show in the 19th century to try and fill in this gap in knowledge using local newspaper reports, the only source of information that is available. Three newspapers in particular, Soulby's Ulverston Advertiser, Ulverston Mirror, and Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser, reported local matters and their reports are comprehensive and are available digitally. They were written at the time the event took place and contain lots of information about the annual show and occasionally about the Society's annual general meeting. Some of the information contained in these reports is different to the information that was contained in the short history that was written in 1937.

This is a short precis of some of the information that has been found. It answers why and when the Society was established, where the show was held and who was involved.

Why was the Society formed?

Large Agricultural Societies, established and managed by the largest landowners, had existed since the beginning of the 19th century. They aimed to educate farmers and introduce new ways of farming and improve farming to meet the demands of a growing population. However, tenants were not directly involved, and it was expected that landowners would pass on knowledge to their tenants. In Lancashire, North of the Sands, at Ulverston, North Lonsdale Agricultural Society, came into existence, in 1805 (General View of the Agriculture in Lancashire, published by Board of Agriculture (Great Britain) in 1815) but was relaunched again in December 1837 under the auspices of William Cavendish, the Earl of Burlington and several influential landed proprietors and practical agriculturalist connected with Lonsdale, North of the Sands (Kendal Mercury 27 Oct 1838). William Cavendish who lived at Holker Hall and owned Holker Estates comprising land in Furness and Cartmel, as well as other estates in Lancashire was a benevolent benefactor variously referred to by his titles such as Lord William, The Marquess of Hartington, the Earl of Burlington and from 1858, the Duke of Devonshire. He and his wife had set up a school at Holker village in the late 1820s to educate the local children and when his wife died in 1840 William retreated to his favourite Estate at Holker to concentrate on improving its agriculture. William had inherited the estate in 1834 from Lord George Cavendish and remained closely involved in its agriculture development until his death in 1891. His agent, initially William Robinson then George Drewry, who was appointed in 1845, were instrumental in introducing new agricultural ideas to the Furness and Cartmel Peninsulas.

In 1872 foot and mouth disease reduced entries, bad weather over the summer had affected the quality of crops and only six Cartmel area farmers won prizes at the North Lonsdale Show. Disquiet about the North Lonsdale Show allowing 'caravan' animals to take the main prizes had been raised. Caravan animals were specifically bred to win prizes, and they competed against locally bred animals at many of the shows around the country. The North Lonsdale Society Committee would not agree to introducing classes that enable local competitors to win prizes by restricted entry to the local districts because they were convinced that there was a need to bring the very best animals to the area to compete against the local farmers and it was part of their remit to educate farmers and competition would show them what could be achieved.

In June 1873 Cartmel farmers, many who were tenants of The Duke of Devonshire's Holker Estate, met at the Cavendish Arms, Cartmel and overwhelmingly decided to establish Cartmel Agricultural Society and stage a show specifically for the local farmers defined as those living in the seven townships that comprised Cartmel Parish (Allithwaite Upper, Broughton East, Cartmel Fell, Lower Allithwaite, Lower Holker, Staveley, and Upper Holker).

When was the Society formed?

According to the report in Ulverston Mirror and Furness Reflections published on 21 June 1873 a meeting was held on the 18th of June 1873 where it was decided to establish an annual Agricultural Show. Another meeting on 30th June established the rules and regulations of the Society and elected a committee (Barrow Herald and Furness Advertiser 5 July 1873). On Tuesday 9th September the first Show was held in Cartmel (Soulby's Ulverston Advertiser 11 Sept 1873)

Cartmel Agricultural Show

Cartmel Agricultural Show took place on Farmery Fields, two fields north of the Priory, between the Vicarage and Greencroft on Priest Lane. This field belonged to the owners of the Cavendish Arms and the tenant provided the meal that was served on Show day. At the first show on 9 September 1873 there were 359 entries. Gate receipts were nearly £23, with visitors paying 1 shilling before noon and 6d thereafter despite persistent heavy downpours of rain from 11am. Horses played an important part in the success of the show as there was a very large entry that attracted large crowds to watch the leaping in the early evening when the weather improved. A meal at the Cavendish Arms that evening was supported by so many people that the room was uncomfortably over-crowded and it was decided that a luncheon should be served in a marquee, erected on the field, at lunch time, the following year as there was no room big enough in Cartmel. The 1874 Show, held on Tuesday 8 September, had fine weather with gate receipts rising to £34 and attendance recorded at 1300 people. The chief attraction again was the horse jumpers. People were convinced that small, local shows could be successful. However, a few local farmers continued to enter animals into both the Cartmel and the North Lonsdale Shows.

The decision was taken in 1897 to move the Show that year onto Cartmel Park, as it had outgrown the space available on Farmery Fields and this is where the show has continued to be staged.

The show was held on a Tuesday in early September for many years but in 1898 and 1899 the show was moved to a Saturday in early September. In 1902 the show date was moved to Tuesday in late August. In 1919 the show date was moved to the first Tuesday in August. In 1929 the show date was moved to Wednesday in early August.

Who was the Patron?

No one would agree to be patron until it could be shown that the Society was successful. Neither William Cavendish, the Duke of Devonshire nor any members of his family attended the first two shows. After these two successful shows the committee discussed, in May 1875, who they should invite to be patron (The Ulverston Mirror 1 May 1875). Colonel Wilson Patten, now Lord Winmarleigh, had promised to become patron if the society prospered. It was therefore suggested he should be approached again but the Duke of Devonshire's name was put forward and it was suggested that he should be approached. After more discussion it was agreed that Lord Edward Cavendish, the Duke's eldest son, should be approached to become patron. He accepted and was patron until 1879 when William, the Duke of Devonshire agreed to be patron and Lord Edward became President. They were re-elected each year until their deaths in 1891. Victor Cavendish, Lord Edward's son, accepted the combined patron and president role following his grandfather and father's deaths until 1901 when it was decided that there would be a different president each year from 1902. It is not clear if Victor told the committee that he wanted to hand over the President role, but he continued as Patron. Victor inherited the Duke of Devonshire title in 1908 and left the district to take up residence at Chatsworth in Derbyshire but remained patron until 1910.

1873-1874 No Patron

1875 - 1878 Lord Edward Cavendish, Holker Hall

1879 - 1891 Duke of Devonshire (William Cavendish), Holker Hall

1892 - 1907 Victor Cavendish, Holker Hall

Who was involved in the early years?

Secretary

William Cragg, a gardener and seedsman, was the first secretary and was involved with the Society from the first meeting in June 1873. He was responsible for carrying out the Management Committee's decisions and organising the Show. For the period between 1884 and 1889 John Wearing, a farmer's son, took on the role as Secretary. William Cragg was reappointed in 1890. He was attending the annual meeting of Cartmel Agricultural Society in 1896 when he was seized with paralysis, and never rallied, dying at 5 o'clock the next morning, (Lancashire Evening Post 14 July 1896). Anthony Storey, who had been a farmer, took over as Secretary.

Chairman

Chairmen were usually farmers and there were five elected between 1873 and 1900. Their experience and enthusiasm helped to establish Cartmel Agricultural Society as a viable Society with a successful Show despite economic depression, bad weather and animal disease amongst the problems they had to deal with.

Charles Binyon who chaired the first meeting was a tenant of Holker Estates at Pit Farm, Cartmel and he was instrumental in seeking to establish the Society. He remained chairman until he left the district in 1878. His father had moved the family from Lincolnshire in 1856 and Charles had subsequently taken over the 500 - acre farm from his father.

The next chairman was Robert Hood Wright, tenant of 115 acres at Birkby Hall, Cartmel, owned by James Simpson Young of Abbot Hall, Kents Bank. Robert served as Chairman for one year, in 1879 following the departure of Charles Binyon. He did not have a farming background and had only taken over Birkby Hall in 1878.

The third chairman, William Richardson Nash was chairman from 1880 until 1887 and he farmed 1000 acres, initially in partnership with the Binyons. He had worked for the Binyon family on their Lincolnshire Farm and had moved to the Cartmel area with the family in 1856. He was the tenant of Windermoor Farm at Flookburgh, owned by Holker Estates from March 1857. When the Binyon's left the district William moved to Pit Farm at Cartmel and continued to lease both farms.

Thomas Westwood served as Chairman of the Society from 1888 until his death in 1897. He was a hotel keeper at Grange-over-Sands and farmer. His father originally farmed 190 acres at Castlehead, Lindale and Thomas and his brother were described as butchers in census records. In 1864 the Westwood family became tenants at the 164-acre Walton Hall Farm at Cartmel. Thomas became hotel keeper at The Crown Hotel at Grange on the death of his father-in-law soon after he had married into the family in 1865 but he also continued to farm the 16 acres in Grange that his father- in-law had farmed.

John Marshall Tyson, farmer of 402 acres at East Plain Flookburgh was Chairman between 1898 and 1902. He had taken the Holker Estates tenancy in early 1881 following the eviction of the former tenant who was declared bankrupt.

Presidents

1873 – none appointed

1874 - 1878 James Simpson Young, a large landowner who lived at Abbot Hall, Kents Bank

1879 - 1890 Lord Edward Cavendish, Holker Hall

1891 - 1901 Victor Cavendish, Holker Hall

Further research

Information about each show from 1873 until 1900 will be published later in the year as well as biographical information about some of the people who were involved in the Society in its early years. Other areas of research in the future will look at 20th century Shows, agricultural education including John Stewart Remington establishment of Aynsome Agricultural Laboratories and his appointment as Official Chemist to the Society, the impact of William G M Townley as he led the Society between 1903 and 1929 and the impact and changes brought about by the First and Second World Wars.

Pat Rowland, Jan 2023.