

The Atkinsons of Lindale

My great grandfather, Thomas Atkinson was born at Cragg Head, Loughrigg in Westmorland on the 27th February 1851. He came from a long line of yeomen farmers of Elterwater Park, Skelwith in what was then north Lancashire.

He married Elizabeth (Libby) Ann Tyson of Troutbeck in Grasmere Church on the 2nd of December in 1876, and set out on his farming career in Langdale, where their first three children, Mary (Minnie) Eleanor, Isaac Tyson, and Tom Turner were all born. As a tenant farmer, he had to go where the opportunities took him, and the move south to Newland Bottom, Mansriggs came sometime before their next son, Henry Walton was born on the 18th December 1885. My grandfather, Francis (Frank) Hugh was born there on the 28th May 1887, and also their second daughter, Elizabeth (Lizzie) Annie on 21st May 1888, but they had moved to New Close, Colton by the time of the birth of Alice Isabel (Bella) on 4th August 1891, and then to Abbot Park, Colton by the time of the birth of George Newby on 20th June 1895.

By the time of the birth of their last child, Elsie Florence on the 4th September 1899, the family had arrived in Lindale, and was living at the Wilson House. Thomas seems to have lost the tenancy of a farm, as on the birth certificate his occupation is described as a General Labourer. The census of 1901 confirms this, and the address is given as Tollgate, Wilson House. Six of their children are still living with them – Minnie, Tom, Lizzie, Bella, George and Elsie. Minnie is a laundress like her mother, and Tom is a stone mason. Isaac Tyson was not far away then, working as an agricultural labourer at Meathop Hall for farmer John Dixon, while Frank was at Little Moss-side working as a general domestic servant for the Misses Mason.

I have a photograph of my great grandparents, Thomas and Libby, captioned "Brocka Farm", just to the south of Lindale, but it is undated, so I have no way of knowing whether they were there before or after the Wilson House. Sadly, young George had died on the 29th July 1903, and was buried in Lindale Churchyard.



The 1911 census charts their next move, this time to Sunnygreen Farmhouse, on the Back O Fell Road to the north-east of Lindale. My great, great, grandfather, Thomas Turner Atkinson of Cragg Head, Loughrigg, had died on 28th of August 1909, and it seems likely that the sale of Cragg head enabled the family to purchase Sunnygreen. Isaac Tyson, the eldest son, then 30, is described as the farmer (Arable), while Thomas' occupation is that of a woodsman. Tyson, as he was known, was still single, and living with them were: Tom the stone mason, Henry who is now a Threshing machine Proprietor, Bella and Elsie.

1911/13 was a busy time for the family, with no fewer than five marriages taking place, at least two of which took place in Lindale St. Paul's Church. Lizzie married Albert Woods on the 6th February 1911, and Bella married Percy John Birch on the 4th June 1913. Lizzie and Albert had a son, James Thomas Woods later that year, but I have been unable to trace him or his father. Sadly Lizzie died on the 23rd May 1917, and was buried in Lindale Churchyard.

The Birch family remained in Lindale, however, and Percy and Bella went on to have five children, Gladys Moyra, Norman Wilson, Benjamin Trevor, Mary Isabel and Dorothy Vera. Norman Wilson Birch was born in 1916, and I strongly suspect that this is where my grandfather got the name for his third son from in 1919 – Norman Tyson Atkinson – my father!

Returning to Sunnygreen, however, Tyson Atkinson married Mabel Mark on the 5th May 1913, and had a daughter, Doris, born later that year. On the outbreak of the war, despite being in a preserved occupation, Tyson joined the Durham Light Infantry, and was posted to Yorkshire. Their two sons, George and Reuben were born in Yorkshire in 1915 and 1917 respectively. Thomas and Libby had managed Sunnygreen while Tyson was away, but on the family's return they moved into Lindale village itself.

I cannot be certain of the exact years, but the address given on my grandfather's death certificate of 3rd February 1922 was Ivy Cottage, which, if I am correct is still so named on Bell Hill. I am grateful to Suzanne Hill for pointing Ivy Cottage out to me when my daughter Kim and I were wandering about in the village last October.



How long Libby continued to live at Ivy Cottage after her husband's death I do not know, but a photograph I have of her standing at her front door is captioned "Yew Tree Cottage". There is another of her in her front room, and both were taken by my grandfather, Frank, who was a keen photographer, and visited fairly regularly. Unfortunately, they are undated, and I cannot be certain of when she moved. They could date as early as 1922, or as late as her death in 1930. So far I have been unable to locate Yew Tree Cottage, but intend to return later this year to continue the search.

I am very grateful to my second cousin, Sheila Thompson, daughter of Doris (Atkinson) who preserved great grandmother Libby's photographs after her mother died.



One of these is very special, and is captioned "All the grandchildren". It has Libby surrounded by her 13 grandchildren. Again it was taken by my grandfather, Frank, with his camera, almost certainly at Sunnygreen. From the likely ages of the children and certain other family events, it must have been taken during the summer of 1925. In the front row from left to right are Reuben Atkinson (8), Ben Birch (6), Louis Rigg (6), Norman Atkinson (6) and Jack Atkinson (8). Behind from left to right is Mrs Minnie Rigg with Mary Birch (3), Doris Atkinson (12), Eric Atkinson (13), George Atkinson (10), Libby Atkinson, Mrs Bella Birch with baby Douglas Atkinson, Norman Birch (11) and James Woods (14) with Mrs Annie Atkinson and Margery Atkinson (5) behind.

My uncle Douglas was born on the 25th February 1925, and my grandmother Annie died on 30th October 1925, and these two events pin the date of the photograph between them.

My father, Norman Tyson Atkinson, kept in touch with the Lindale family, despite having been born and bred in Arbroath in Scotland and having served in the RAF from 1936-49. As a youngster during the late 1950's and early 1960's we had several family holidays in the Lake District, and always visited Sunnygreen. Reuben Atkinson, whom I always referred to as Uncle Reuben was running the farm then, although great aunt Mabel was there keeping an eye on things.

Reuben was quite a character, and I can still see his cheery smile in my mind's eye. He taught me how to milk cows, and I helped with sheep dipping, Damson harvesting, scything hay and collecting hens' eggs. This last task got me into some bother with Great Aunt Mabel, however, as I was able to reach eggs in the parts of the shippon which she couldn't. As a result I had collected partly incubated eggs which brought complaints from the passing customers who had purchased these free range eggs at the roadside!

Norman Keir Atkinson OBE

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