

John Dickinson - Cartmel Clockmakers in 18th Century by Nigel Mills.

I was asked recently if I knew anything about a clockmaker in Cartmel in the 18C named John Dickinson, and not one to resist a challenge, I said “not yet but I soon will”. In future I might be a bit more circumspect in my response!

Of course the name rang a bell, as it will with many of you, but not surprisingly I failed to find a link between the 20th century J.C. Dickinson and an 18th century clockmaker named John Dickinson. There may be no connection to find but I did discover that John Dickinson, Clockmaker of Cartmel ^{note 1}, did exist and that there are at least 2 long case clocks still ticking away after 250 years.

This picture is of a John Dickinson clock sold recently at auction in Bath ^{note 2}. It is described as “an oak thirty hour clock with 12” square brass dial signed by John Dickinson, Cartmel on a silvered disc to the matted centre with faux winding holes and arched calendar aperture, the case with long mahogany crossbanded door flanked by quarter pillars and the hood surmounted by a stepped cornice over a dentil frieze, 84” high; weight and door key”. (Hope you followed that!)



The John Dickinson in question was the son of a tanner in Lancaster. He was born circa 1724 and aged 26 became apprenticed to Jacob Housman, a clockmaker who lived in Warton and then Lancaster and traded with Gillows the furniture makers. John married Catherine Noble of Lancaster by licence at Lancaster Priory Church in 1750 and moved to and worked in Cartmel sometime between 1750 and 1779. He had 5 children John b.1751, Joseph b.1753, Isabel b.1755, Noble b.1758 and William b.1760. Cartmel Registers ^{note 3} show that both Noble and William were baptised at Cartmel Priory but that William died aged 3 years and was buried in Cartmel. I could not trace his grave.

John does not seem to have been a prolific clockmaker and although noted in records in 1758 as living in Church Town, Cartmel and again in 1764 he was by 1767 recorded as in Egremont. He retained his links with Lancaster. John having been made a Freeman of Lancaster in 1750 his sons were also made Lancaster freemen in 1779. John and Noble did not follow their father's trade being described as husbandmen of Bardsea and Egremont respectively.



I have related the facts found so far and this raises a few more interesting questions. Why did John marry Catherine Noble *by licence* in 1750 and where in Cartmel did he live?

Speculating on the first question: In the 18th century marriage by licence was expensive but dispensed with the need for banns to be read. So could it be that John and Catherine wanted to get married in a hurry? Another possibility is that by

choosing to marry by licence they wanted to indicate that they were comparatively affluent.

On the second question: They were recorded as of Church Town. I had assumed this was an old name for Cartmel but could it be a certain area of Cartmel say within the Priory curtilage or just outside? Any suggestions?

Looking further afield both Cartmel Fell and Cark also had clockmakers in the 18th century. The delightfully named Cornelius Clarke and his son Thomas Clarke were watchmakers and clockmakers of Cartmel Fell again with connections to Lancaster. At Cark there was William Lawrence in the 1780's and later at the turn of the century a Robert Sinkinson was described as a clocksmith. In April 1802 the Lancaster Guardian reported that Robert Sinkinson had run away from Cark Cotton Works. It reported "He is about 35 years of age, 5ft10ins high, dark complexion, very thin, much pitted with the small pox, and small eyes". Because of his knowledge of gearing he would have been valued by the mill owners of Cark and probably under contract as the article states that "anyone employing him was warned they would be dealt with according to the law".

The occupation of clockmaker or clocksmith was obviously of sufficient standing in this area in the 18th century as it was added often to entries in Cartmel Priory records of births deaths and marriages. For example a Thomas Knowles, clockmaker of Cartmel married in 1787, Edward Knowles clocksmith of Backbarrow married in 1811, and several other clocksmiths and clockmakers are mentioned as living in the early 19th century in Cartmel. In fact the occupations of Cartmel people in the 18th and 19th century is fascinating and would make a great research project. Any offers?

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note 1: Clockmakers of North Lancashire and South Westmorland 1680-1900 by Susan E. Stuart.

note 2: Auctioneers Gardiner Houlgate, Bath Auction Rooms.

note 3: Priory Church of Cartmel BDM's.