

The Bigland Family of Cartmel

Growing-up, I didn't have any interest in any sort of history, never mind family history. It was when I took early-retirement and looked back that I realised how little I knew about my family, especially my father. He was typical of that generation in that he didn't say much about his past. He was also quiet and a bit of an introvert, so other family members didn't know a great deal about him either. As he'd died in 1987, he wasn't there to ask now that I'd taken an interest, so I decided to do something about it.

There is only one place to start anything these days – Google. I was amazed that within an hour, I had found my grandfather's name, birthplace and year of birth. I soon discovered FreeBMD and that supplied a lot more information about family members. The next big step was joining Ancestry and, all of a sudden, I had more information than I could handle.

So, who was my father and what was his background. I was born and brought up in north east Wales, where my mother was born. My father, and at least 6 generations before him, were from west Cumberland; Bromfield, Crosscanonby, Embleton, Gosforth, Egremont. Way back, there were a couple of shoe-makers but most were agricultural labourers, so presumably fairly poor. Trying to find work, my grandfather travelled to USA where he worked as a miner. After 7 years he returned to Cumberland. In the mid-1930s, my father moved to north Wales looking for work. I don't think he was successful and shortly joined the RAF.

My interest in family history now extended to my mother's side. I made the usual enquiries and was making progress when I discovered that another relative had done extensive research in the 1940s. It turned out that my great, great grandfather owned a mill in Witherslack and then his son opened a shop in Ulverston. The Dickinsons appear to have become fairly affluent.

My great, great grandfather married Ann Bigland, who was born in Cartmel and my 1940s great uncle had traced the Bigland family tree back to the 1500s. I was very impressed and decided to make some of my own enquiries. With the help of Pat Rowland, I found references to the Biglands that took me back into the mid-1400s. There are relevant documents in Kendal and Barrow Record Offices, where I spent more time researching.

My favourite discovery was during my visit to Cartmel Priory. This had nothing to do with my family research; I was just interested in seeing a very impressive, old building. However, I found a number of floor memorials to Bigland family members and also the grave of my great, great grandparents. I think that I should point out that "my side" of the Bigland family (Bigland's of Cartmel) were "distant cousins" to the more well-known Biglands of Bigland Hall, near Backbarrow many hundreds of years ago.

In summary, I am from north Wales like my mother. My mother's paternal family are from north Lancashire / Cumbria. My father's paternal family have a long history in Cumberland. Where did my parents meet? In Shropshire, where my father was based after the war and my mother worked as a teacher!

Kev Sewell