

The Mortal Man of Allithwaite
by
Peter H. Le Mare¹



Recently my neighbour, Mike Jackson, showed me the above old photograph of the pub in The Square, Allithwaite. Neither of us could decipher the name; was it Royal Oak, Guide-Over-Sands or possibly Mortal Man? Probably not the latter as its date likely preceded photography. The picture is also in the account of the Guide/Royal Oak by Phil and Pat Rowland on the CPLHS website. Mike said that Dave Pounder and some others in the village remember seeing the name 'The Mortal Man' on a framed list on the wall of the vestibule soon after the Guide was renovated about 2000. I remember the list but not the detail. However, I have a vague memory of having heard of the Mortal Man in The Square.

Pat and Phil Rowland wrote histories of the two existing pubs in Allithwaite, now [Yakkers](#)², closed since 2016, and [The Pheasant](#). Both probably date from about the beginning of the 19th C. For some years about 1825 one of them may have been briefly the Mortal Man. This possibility is discussed by the Rowlands in their article on The Pheasant.

J. Hobbs³ commented that the inn was probably built about 1750. Early photographs of the both pubs indicate they were of the design described as double-pile small house by RW Brunskill in

¹ Greenfield House, Allithwaite, February 2018.

² Blue and underlining indicates a web link.

³ J. Hobbs, "Short History of Royal Oak, Allithwaite." BAMH/1/52, Melville & Hobbs Box 1, Barrow Archive. This folder also contains histories of pubs in Cartmel and elsewhere in Furness.

CARTMEL PARISH.—VILLAGES, &c.

[For the History and Directory of the Town of CARTMEL—see Vol. I. p. 591—596.]

ALLITHWAITE (Lwr.); 2 mls. SSE. of Cartmel.
ALLITHWAITE (Upper); 3 miles NNE. of Cartmel.
BIGLAND HALL, for upwards of seven centuries the seat of the family of that name, is in this parish; 3½ miles NW. of Cartmel.
BROUGHTON EAST; 2 mls. N. of Cartmel.
CARTMEL FELL; 7½ miles N. of Cartmel.
HOLKER (Lower); 2 miles SW. of Cartmel, in which township are the villages of Cark, Holker and Flookburgh.
HOLKER UPR.; 4½ miles NNW. of Cartmel.
LOW WOOD; 4½ miles NW. of Cartmel, in which is a large gunpowder manufactory producing 15½ cwt. daily.
STAVELEY; 5 miles NE. of Cartmel.

VILLAGE DIRECTORY OF CARTMEL PARISH.

ALLITHWAITE LOWER.
Those marked 1 reside in the Village; and 2 in Templeland.
Acaster Jph. mason, Pepper lane
2 Bigland Thomas, gentleman
1 Birkett Sarah, 'Mortal Man'
Carter Jas. guide over the Sands
1 Hadwen Wm. gentleman
2 Heavyside John, mason
Knowles Matthew, auctioneer
Lamb Thomas, maltster, *Rosthwaite*
Lambert Miss Mary, *Lodge*
Ridgeway Joseph, Esq. *Fellgate*
Rison Wm. vict.
Towers Richd. Esq. *East plain*
Woodburn Roger, miller
ALLITHWAITE UPPER.
Those marked 1 reside in Lindale; and 2 in Newton.
1 Ackerley Denton, land agent, *Wilson house*
1 Allen Peter, 'Royal Oak'
1 Allen Robert, jun. mariner
2 Barber Saml. 'Coach & Horses'
2 Battersby Wm. yeoman
2 Beck James, gentleman
2 Beck John, 'Horse & Farrier'
1 Bell Wm. yeoman
2 Borwick Miles, gentleman
1 Coupland James, joiner
2 Gibson John, gentleman
1 Holliwel Thomas, miller
1 Holliwel Thomas, yeoman
2 Jackson Wm. grocer
1 Legh Wm. Esq. *Castle head*
2 Redman James, joiner
2 Robinson Thomas, yeoman
2 Robinson Thomas, grocer
1 Simpson Wm. smith & farrier
1 Tugwood John, mariner
1 Webster Francis, slate merch.
2 Whitfield Wm. gentleman
1 Wilson Thos. *Buck cragg*
Letters arr. at 6 & 10 mg.
BROUGHTON EAST.
*Marked * reside in Grange and the Neighbourhood.*
Atkinson John, gent. *Broughton House*
*Atkinson Wm. hoopmaker
*Bamber Wm. joiner
Barber John, yeoman, *Longlands*
*Bell James, vict. and guide over the Sands
Benson Robert, miller, *Aynsome*
*Birch John, Esq.
Birch Scholes, Esq. *Stoney Dale*
*Cape Wm. timber merchant
*Clayton Wm. Esq.
Crosfield J. Esq. *Wood Broughton*
*Fletcher James, 'Crown Inn'
Gardner Walter, gent. *Bank*
Harrison Nicholas, yeoman
Knipe Rev. Philip, *Field Broughton Academy*
Lishman John, yeoman, *Stordys*
Law Wm. yeoman, *Hampfield Hall*
Machell T. M. Esq. *Aynsome*
Machell Richard, Esq. *Grove*
*Maude Thos. Holme, Esq. *Blawith Cottage*
*Mossop George, hoop maker
*Newby John, gentleman
*Postlethwaite Mrs. E. *Hard Cragg*
Rigg Grey, Esq. *Hall*
Roper John, yeoman, *High*
Strickland Thos. gent. *Scarth*
Sunderland Mrs. *Longlands*
*Taylor Thos. gentleman
*Turner William, gentleman
Wakefield John, Esq. *Lodge*
*Walker Mrs. Ann
Watson Abraham, yeoman
*Wearing Peter, hoop maker
*Winder Peter, hoop maker, *Low Plains*
*Wright Robert, mariner
CARTMEL FELL.
Atkinson Robert, land agent
Dodgson John, gentleman
Pool Mrs. M.
Stewartson Mrs. A.
Tyson William, 'Mason's Arms'
Wilson Rev. William
HOLKER (Lower)
Those marked 1 reside in Cark, and 2 in Flookburgh.
2 Armer Mrs. Ann
1 Atkinson Miss Ann
Bainbridge John, mason
Barrow John, schoolmaster
1 Barrow Richard, grocer
1 Bell James, gentleman
2 Braithwaite Misses A. & E.
1 Brewer John, gentleman
2 Briggs Mrs. W.
1 Brockbank Wm. yeoman
2 Bryers John, 'Hope & Anchor'
Bush Christopher, agent
2 Butler Wm. perpetual overseer
Cavendish Lord G. A. H. *Hall*
2 Coward Wm. mason
Dixon Henry, grocer
1 Dixon Joseph, miller
1 Elleray Misses E. & E.
1 Fawcett John, schoolmaster
1 Garfit Wm. paper mfr.
1 Green Miss, la. cha. school
1 Hall Edward, miller
Harrison James, yeoman
2 Harrison Nicholas, yeoman
2 Helme Edward, gentleman
Hornby Thomas, hoop maker
2 Inman Mary, 'Race Horse'
Jobson Bryan, gentleman
Kirkes Morecroft, Esq.
Lawrence Lawrence, yeoman
Machell Richard, gentleman
Newby James, Esq. *Cottage*
2 Rigg Rev. William
2 Roberts John, 'Crown'
1 Stockdale James, Esq.
1 Stockdale Wm. F. Esq.
2 Strickland Mrs. Eleanor
Thompson Joseph, gentleman
2 Todd Robert, wheelwright
Webster Robert, mason
A Coach to Ulverstone and Lancaster, Tide time.
CARRIERS, 1 John Butler, 2 Rt. Pool, and 2 Thos. Butler, to Lancaster, Tu. and Fri.; to Ulverstone, Mon. and Th.—Tide time.
HOLKER, (UPPER.)
Those marked 1 reside in Backbarrow; 2, in Beckside; and 3, in Brow Edge
1 Ainsworth, Catterall & Co. cotton spinners
Barker, Daye & Co. gunpowder mfrs. *Low Wood*
Bigland Geo. Esq. (Major) *Bigland Hall*
Bigland Thos. gent. *Speckbank*
Caddy P. maltster, *Green bank*
1 Catterall Thos. cotton spinr.
Cleminson W. yeom. *Green Hurst*

Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties (London: Faber & Faber, 1974). Many were built in the area between 1700 and 1850 and there are several in Allithwaite, including my house (1842). However, most have been modified so the common original design is not obvious.

My interest is to discover when and where the Mortal Man existed in Allithwaite. There is general agreement that it was owned or operated by Sarah Birkett having moved from Troutbeck, Westmorland, where she had owned an inn of the same name.

Putting '[Mortal Man, Allithwaite](#)' into Google I found the Lancaster directory by Edward Baines published in 1825. A copy of page 653 is above. It shows, under Allithwaite Lower, "1 Birkett Sarah, 'Mortal Man'"; 1 indicates she resided in the village. This seems to be the first public mention of the inn in Allithwaite and seems to have escaped other writers on the history of the inns of Allithwaite.

Before commenting in detail I make the following points about the format of page 653.

1. All inn names are in single quotation marks.
2. Vict. (victualler) is not shown against any inn so I assume that anyone listed as a victualler was not a publican.
3. In Lower Allithwaite, residence is indicated by: 1 - lived in village; 2 - lived at Templand. In Broughton East names marked * indicates lived in Grange or the neighbourhood.

The Rowlands used information from Hobbs (*op. cit.*) and reported that from 1824 to 1828 the Guide was operated by James Bell and so concluded that the Mortal Man was probably what became the Farmers Arms and then The Pheasant. I am not convinced of this. I noted above that none of those described as victuallers were associated with pub names. In Allithwaite Lower William Ritson was a victualler but was not associated with an inn or public house.

I [scanned Hobbs's paper](#) in the Barrow archive office. On page 3 his paper states

"The earliest official record is for 1823 wherein Miles Crayston is given as the innkeeper under the sign the "Guide over Sands". After a year he gave way to James Bell, in residence from 1824 to 1827 when he apparently went to the Swan at Newby Bridge; ...".

Unfortunately Hobbs did not specify the source of the official record so I have not examined it. A search of the web found the attached note from Heversham; it may explain why Crayston gave way to James Bell. Or, as I suggest below, to Sarah Birkett who renamed the pub to The Mortal Man.

Heversham (S). Sacred memory of Miles **Crayston** of Grange who died January 25th 1824 Aged 63 years. Also of Ann **Crayston** his Wife who died at Leasgill November 20th 1836 Aged 73 y.

<http://www.northofthesands.org.uk/westmoreland/surname/186/crayston>

In Baines's Lancaster directory James Bell is shown under Broughton East, not Allithwaite, as "vict. and guide over the Sands". An asterisk against his name indicates he resided in Grange or its neighbourhood. Although Hobbs refers to official records I suspect that he may have made the mistake of assuming that "guide over the Sands" meant Bell was the publican of the Allithwaite pub. However we should note that only Sands has initial upper case letter; and the presence of "the" suggests Bell was a guide, not a publican. In Allithwaite Lower James Carter is also shown as guide over the Sands but no one has suggested he was the publican at the Guide-Over-Sands. His place of residence is not recorded.

James Bell has vict. against his name, a victualler. In 1851 Mannex directory a publican is always shown as vict., unlike the 1825 Lancaster Baines directory. This may be because before the 1830 Beerhouse Act victuallers were purveyors of victuals or provisions as described by the Oxford English Dictionary. In Ireland a victualler was a butcher; in Scotland he was a dealer in grain, or a

corn-factor. It seems that a victualler was not necessarily a supplier of alcohol. After 1830 one who did would be licensed.

Earlier, on pages 2 - 3, Hobbs wrote

“About 1820 there was only one good inn at Allithwaite but Baines’s Directory (1824-25) then notes a “New Inn” which is not known otherwise, and there is no knowledge as to which house this refers.

It seems not unlikely that it was our inn – there was then necessarily much delay between collecting the information and publishing a directory, so that “a new inn” might well have only just come into existence and the sign not ascertained, or settled upon at the time particulars were obtained. However that may be, it is uncertain who commenced the present Royal Oak – from the descent of the property to which later reference will be made, it may not have been the owner, but the early tenants of the inn changed so frequently that there is doubt if it was the first of them.”

Hobbs then follows with the passage I quoted earlier.

I have not found the 1824-25 Directory referred to by Hobbs but I suggest there is a case that the “new inn” was the one which Sarah Birkett is recorded in the 1825 Directory as operating as the Mortal Man, shown on page 653 above, and that this became, or reverted to, “Guide-Over-Sands” when Sarah passed it on. She is known to have kept the Mortal Man at Troutbeck (see below) and it seems likely that she came to Allithwaite about 1822 because the advertisement, on the right, in the Westmorland Gazette of 17 August 1822 shows the inn at Troutbeck was to let. I think it surprising that, if there was a Guide-over-Sands when Baines acquired his data, he did not include it; so I surmise that Sarah occupied the building after Miles Crayston and before her death in 1826.

Unfortunately I have found no definitive evidence for my suggestion; it is based only on interpretation of published papers and of Baines’s 1825 Directory. So it remains possible that Mortal Man was an early name of what is now the Pheasant, as the Rowlands suggested in their paper.

Farms to Let in Grasmere.
Westmorland Gazette Sat 17.8.1822

GILLSIDE, adjoining the Turnpike-Road, comprising a Dwelling-House, large Barn, various Out-Buildings, and about Fifty Acres of Land surrounding the House, together with One Hundred and Eighty Sheep, and extensive Right of Common.

Also, that well-accustomed House, called the SWAN INN, with good accommodation for Travellers, suitable Out-Buildings, and Twenty-Four Acres of Land adjoining. The Stage Coach to Keswick passes the House twice daily.

Likewise, to Let, in Ambleside, Two small FARM HOUSES, with Barns, Cow House, Stable, &c. and about Fifteen Acres of Land.

Also, to Let, in Troutbeck, the PUBLIC HOUSE (**MORTAL MAN**), with large Barn, Cow House, Stable, and Out-Buildings, Paddock, and Garden.

To be entered upon at the usual time in the Spring 1823.

For further particulars apply to Mr. Partridge, in Ambleside, the Proprietor.
Ambleside, August 14, 1822.

In the Westmorland Gazette on 11 November 1826 Sarah’s death was announced thus:

At Allithwaite, Mrs. Sarah Birkett, innkeeper, and formerly of Troutbeck, famous for brewing fine ale. On her sign-post was written these words :

O mortal man, that live’st by bread,
How comes thy nose to be so red ?
Thou silly ass, that look’st so pale,
’Tis red with Sarah Birkett’s ale.

She was, or became, widely known – her death was similarly announced in the Chester Chronicle, as the Rowlands reported, in the Dumfries and Galloway Courier, in the Lancaster Gazette, and in Ipswich and Reading papers. In 1832 the death notice was included, under the heading *Ingenious Insinuation*, in a [book](#)⁴.

Acknowledgments

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⁴ Robert Chambers: *Scottish Jests and Anecdotes to which are added A Selection of choice English and Irish Jests*, p.290. (Edinburgh: Wm Tait 1832)