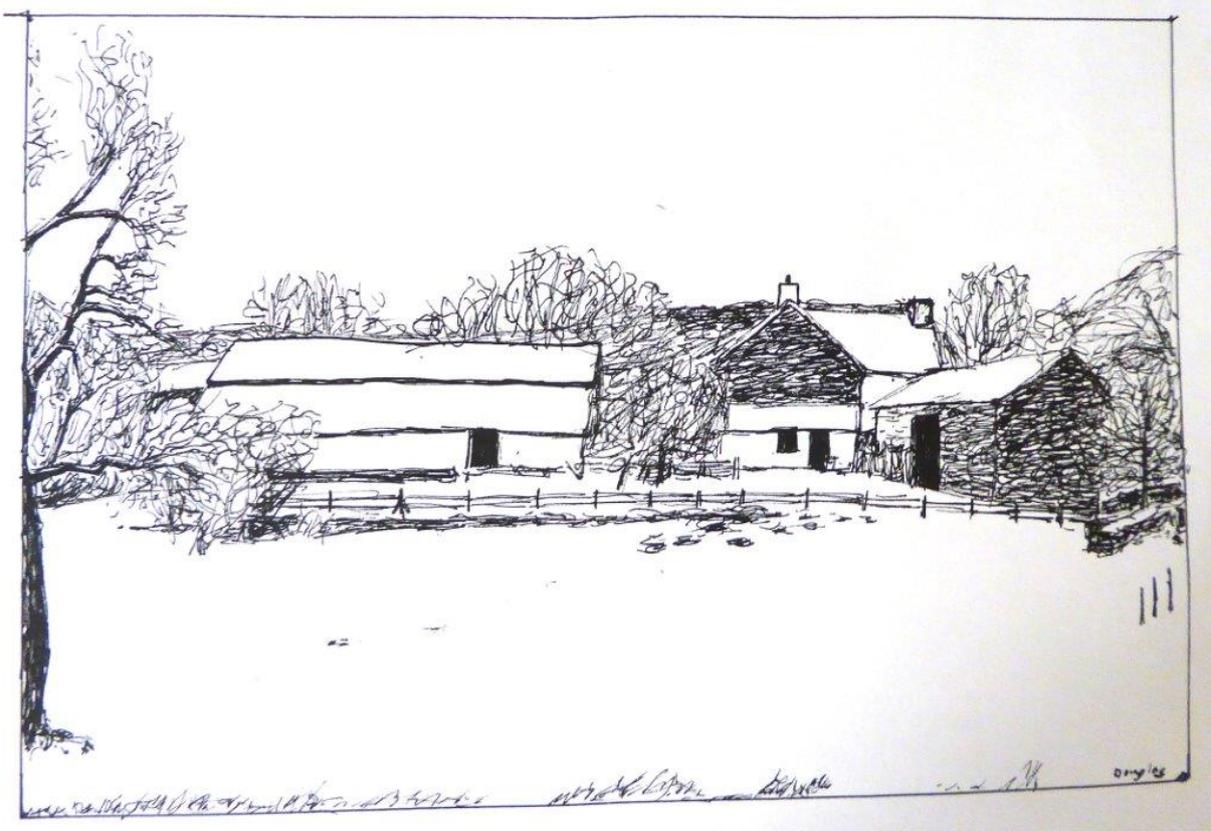


Speel Bank – a Cartmel Farm



Sketch by Douglas McCleery

Speel Bank Farm has been occupied by the Johnson family since 1958 when the young married couple first started farming on their own account. When they arrived there was no electricity and a hand pump for water, though there was a telephone on a party line with a neighbouring farm. Nearly 60 years at the farm may seem a long time but not compared to the known occupation by the Bigland family of around 200 years.

The farm is located at the end of a one mile single track road to the north of Cartmel. It has mainly supported livestock including sheep, cattle, pigs, deer and hens as the rocky nature of most of the land precludes much arable production.

There is now only one farmstead but in the past there were two separate farms located in the same farmyard. There is some evidence of another farmhouse (now demolished) with the inside of the chimney still visible on the outside of a farm building.

Speel is defined by the Collins Dictionary as a splinter of wood. Given that the farm and the surrounding landscape includes a number of long established woods, including ancient woodland, that is a logical definition. The spelling over time has varied in the records and includes Speelbanke, Speele Banke, Speilbank, Spielbank, Spilbank, Spilbancke, Speelbanck and Speel Bank.

The first mention of Speel Bank in the Parish Records was the burial recorded in Cartmel Priory records of Richard Brockbanck of Spilbancke in August 1593/4. The records also show that Edward Brockban(c)k(e) had two children whilst at the farm (Christopher in 1615/16 and Edward in 1618/19). The family lived there until at least 1627/8 when

unfortunate accident occurred and the burial was recorded of "Edward Brockbank killed in his own wood with a tree."

At the same time the Barrow(e) family were also living at Speel Bank. William Barrow(e) had two daughters (Margaret in 1606/7 and Anne in 1611/12). They may have been occupying a separate farmstead to the Barrow family but this has not yet been confirmed.

The Stockdale family owned land and at one time a farm at Speel Bank but never lived there. James Stockdale bought 2 fields close to Burns (the neighbouring farm) from John Ashburner in 1758. The field names are not known but are likely to have been added to one of the Speel Bank or Burns farms.

A 1796 plan of the two estates called Burnses and Speelbank belonging to James Stockdale comprises 45 acres of fields, 10 acres of woodland and at least 3 separate buildings, one of which was the farmhouse. As part of the Cartmel Enclosure Award (1801) James Stockdale acquired an allotment of land called Speelbank of 98A 2R 33P.

In 1810 there is a To Be Let notice for "an Estate situate at Speel-Bank' owned by James Stockdale at 2 o'clock on 8th September. It is available as a whole (65 acres) or in 5 lots. Lot I comprises "The Dwelling-house, Peat House, Barn, Cow-house, House and Garden, with two Fields called and known by the names of Hagg and Round Meadow, containing about 2A 3R 23P customary measure. Also a Peat Brow and Peat Coat in Ellerside." Three other lots comprise 4 fields each and the final lot is for an Allotment of 35 acres of Common upon Speel-bank Fell adjoining.

When James Stockdale died on 17th April 1823, listed in rents due from Candlemas 1823 to 17th April 1823 the date of his death and Arrears include Speelbank Estate, (tenant Richard Taylor - £74 10s 3d) and Allotment at Speelbank (tenant Jno Benson - £25 8s 6d).

The Bigland family had a very long connection with Speel Bank Farm. The first mention of the family was the baptism of Edward, son of Thomas Bigland of Speelbank on 27th October 1674/5 and the last was in the 1861 Census when James Bigland was farming 100 acres there with his wife Margaret and their five children. The aforementioned Thomas Bigland may be related to the Biglands of Bigland Hall as in the will of George Bigland of Bigland in 1685 he leaves "To Thomas Bigland of Speelbank a pair of best boots and holland shirt."

Many of the Bigland family appear to be long lived, particularly a Thomas Bigland whose death was marked by the following in The Lancaster Gazette on July 15, 1815; "On the 3rd Inst. At Speel-Bank in the Parish of Cartmel, Mr Thos. Bigland, at the advanced aged of 97. During this long period of existence, he was only confined to his bed three days. He breathed out his soul in peace, even without a groan, and was followed to his grave by five sons and two daughters, whose ages amounted to upwards of 450."

The Biglands owned their farm and a undated plan entitled "Plan of an Estate called Speel Bank in the Township of Lower Holker and the Parish of Cartmel the property of J E Bigland" details the fields and buildings which comprised this farm including footpaths, carriageways, the ownership of neighbouring land and which owner is responsible for gates between adjoining fields. It totalled 125 acres and 8 perches and includes 99 acres of fields, 19 acres of woodland and 6 acres of moss. This may be a map for the sale of the farm which was advertised to take place on 20th October 1859 at the Crown Inn, Cartmel. There are pencil markings showing that in 1880 a field called Horse Copy was 'ploughed out of lea'; in 1881 a field called Great Coat Close had a green crop and in 1882 a field called Lamb Close grew turnips.

The farm had mixed fortunes in the 19th Century with only one farmer listed in any of the Census records and 1841 both the houses were unoccupied. It appears from the Ordnance Survey maps that one of the farmhouses was demolished between 1890 and 1898 confirming the end of the two farmstead occupation.

Lyn Prescott