

The Gaskarth family of 19th century Cartmel

(from information given by Andrew Rutherford, whose great grandmother was Margaret Wolstencroft, nee Gaskarth)

The first reference to the above family came when Andrew Rutherford enquired why his grandmother, Mary Wolstencroft, (daughter of Edward Wolstencroft and Margaret Wolstencroft, nee Gaskarth) was born in 1881 at a Public Room in Seven Acres farm, Cartmel. This was shown in the 1881 census.

In the 1881 census Edward Wolstencroft was head of the household living at Seven Acres with his family. Public Room is written in the same box as Seven Acres and described on the census as uninhabited. So was the public room in Seven Acres building or was it a building in Cartmel on the enumerator's route, followed the Police Station in the census, the nearest building to Seven Acres? Was it written in later and thus put in the Seven Acres box? In 1861 census there is a public room in Cartmel, no clue where; in 1891 the public room is on School road in Cartmel; in 1901 census it is next to Parkside and Park View. So it appears that this public room could be in the vicinity of the present Sticky Toffee Pudding shop.

The following is written by Andrew Rutherford.

A Family Mystery

It is part of my family's tradition that my great grandmother, Margaret Gaskarth was brought up by a doctor in Cartmel and that he left her an annuity, the payment of a sum of money each year for life.

Margaret was born in 1849. She was the youngest child of Thomas Gaskarth and Mary Barrow. She had 3 brothers and 2 sisters. In the 1851 census she is shown, aged 2 with her family in Ulverston, the town where she was born. Her father died in 1860, but I can find no reference to the family in the 1861 census when Margaret would have been 12. The next reference but one is to her marriage which took place in Manchester in 1880 when she married Edward Wolstencroft, an engineer from the city. Curiously the 1881 census finds them at Seven Acres farm, near Cartmel, Margaret has given birth to a daughter Mary, aged one month and also present is her mother Mary, described by the enumerator as annuitant. Thereafter Margaret, Edward and daughter Mary spend the rest of their lives living in Salford, a district of Manchester.

None of this has solved the puzzle outlined above in the first paragraph. So I determined to find out what I could about a doctor who would have been active in Cartmel at the time when Margaret was growing up.

The doctor was John Gaskarth who was born in 1812 and I think was brought up by his uncle, also John Gaskarth who lived at Matsons, a villa on Windermere, near Bowness. John studied medicine in London. The *Kendal Mercury* of Saturday May 28 1836 states; 'Mr John Gaskarth of Matsons near Bowness, nephew of Mr Gaskarth of Kendal passed his examination at Apothecaries Hall on 12th instant'. This qualified John to be a general practitioner and he chose Cartmel where he was the doctor for over 30 years. The 1841 census has him in Cartmel aged 25 and described as Surgeon. Living with him is his sister

Mary Ann Gaskarth, also 25. They are shown at the same address in the 1851 and 1861 censuses. Mary is described as Housekeeper and they have a live-in house servant.

Some references to the doctor in the local press, discovered by my brother through the British Newspaper Archive.

The Advertiser May 4 1899

Oddfellowship in the Furness District

Loyal St Mary's Lodge, Cartmel

This lodge was first opened on the 3rd October, 1836. 'The late Dr John Gaskarth was the first medical officer to the Lodge, and in connection with his appointment the following entry appears in the minutes under date 5th December 1840, "Resolved that John Gaskarth be our doctor for the next coming 12 months, that his salary be £20, and if he finds it a good job he returns us £5, and that he commences the 19th day of December, 1840." Dr Gaskarth discharged the duties of medical officer for many years, and proved himself a most efficient, painstaking and successful officer'.

The Westmorland Gazette and Kendal Advertiser

Cartmel Petty Sessions May 19 1860

Wilful Damage (I have abbreviated a lengthy report)

Thomas W Atkinson of Field Broughton, near Cartmel, gentleman, was charged with having broken fourteen panes of glass in the windows of the dwelling house of Mr John Gaskarth, surgeon, Cartmel, and damaging the front door of the house on the 13th inst. It seems he was drunk and ordered to pay damage and costs. At the same Session Atkinson was charged with stabbing and wounding members of the Wilson family in their own home. This was on the 14th. Dr Gaskarth, who had been called to the home at four o'clock in the morning, gave evidence of the injuries he attended to. The prisoner was committed for trial at the next Lancaster assizes.

Soulby's Ulverston Advertiser February 2 1871

'It is our painful duty to record the death of Dr Gaskarth, which took place at his residence on Tuesday morning last. Deceased had practised in Cartmel over thirty years, during which period he had made a very large circle of friends and acquaintances - for his professional visits extended over a very large area - who deeply deplore his loss. As a surgeon he was well skilled, as his experience testifies, and one of the prominent traits in his character was his manly straightforwardness. He was also an ornithologist of no mean order, and had in his possession at various times many rare and valuable specimens. He also devoted a good deal of his leisure hours to horticultural pursuits, and was quite at home when conversing on gardening matters. His remains will be interred at Bowness on Saturday, the 4th inst.'

Inscription in Bowness churchyard, Windermere

In memory of

John Gaskarth of Cartmel, Surgeon

who died on the 31st day of January 1871 aged 58 years.

The 1871 census for Cartmel taken on 2nd April records Mary Anne Gaskarth (56) no occupation, and living at the same address, Margaret Gaskarth (21) domestic servant. Mary Anne died in Cartmel on 28 June 1878 and was buried at Bowness. Bearing in mind what was stated in the first paragraph about an annuity, I purchased a copy of her will from Wills & Probate for it was stated that her personal estate was under £20,000, an enormous sum for those days and I thought she might have left Margaret the money. But it was not to be for Mary Anne had left her fortune to a niece, a late niece's family and cousins. Margaret appears on the will but only by her signature as a witness.

I then purchased a copy of the doctor's will. This time part of the 'mystery' was solved for at the beginning it states; "I give to my servant Margaret Gaskarth an annuity of fifty pounds and direct the same to be paid to her by equal half yearly payments during the term of her natural life ..." The rest of his estate he left to his sister. Another condition was that she *remained as a servant to Mary Anne. Mary Anne died on 28 June 1878. The Ulverston Mirror* of 14 April 1883 advertises; Sale at Cartmel. The freehold property of the late Dr Gaskarth. Double fronted dwelling house in Market Square £420 also a store room £5 and 8 acres of land £580. This would have been where the doctor lived and practised for over 30 years in the heart of the village.

Neither the doctor nor his sister married, so they had no children. Did they take to young Margaret and bring her up as family lore has it? They shared the same surname and the same family lore says they were related, but I have no evidence for this. The will was written in 1870 when Margaret was 20. She was described as servant but why such a generous annuity? £50 in 1870 is getting on for £5,000 at today's value (2019). And so, because of the generous gift and her relatively young age, I like to think that the childless pair took an interest in the girl, perhaps paying for her schooling, and leaving her with a comfortable income after their deaths.

After marriage she spent the rest of her life in Salford with her husband Edward Wolstencroft, an engineer in cotton mills and later on he had his own business making varnish. Their daughter Mary married but lived locally in Higher Broughton, Salford. Edward died in 1912. Margaret would have known her 4 grandchildren and when she became old and unwell she moved in with them. The address on her will is Higher Broughton, Salford but it also states that she died on 15 June 1924 at Aynsome Lane, Cartmel. Her funeral was held in the Priory on the 18th of June. She left £667 to her daughter. I wonder, was the annuity still being paid up to her death aged 74, for a total of 53 years?

Cartmel, a quiet rural village on the southern edge of the Lake District, must have presented a real contrast to polluted Salford with its Ship Canal, docks, steam railways and mills. I believe Cartmel was never far from Margaret's heart. At some time in later life she arranged for a stone to be set up as a memorial to her mother Mary, her father Thomas Gaskarth and to five of her children who all died in infancy between 1884 and 1890 and whose names are "Gone but not forgotten". Her own death is recorded and at the bottom it says, 'This stone was erected by her daughter Margaret Wolstencroft'. This stone will be in Cartmel cemetery.

Post Script: The enumerator at Seven Acres farm in 1881 got it wrong; He spelled 'seven' wrongly as he did the name, Wolstencroft. But his biggest mistake was to describe Mary as annuitant. That as we know should have gone to Margaret.

Andrew Rutherford

10 June 2019