

Review of **Landscapes and Townscapes of North Craven**

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LIFE IN OLD- TIME NORTH CRAVEN

Craven's heritage is being investigated with great intensity by groups of dedicated people. Nowhere is the enthusiasm for the distant past greater than in Long Preston. Members of the heritage group are leaving no parchment untouched and no pages of old records unscrutinised. A consequence is an awakening of knowledge of life in the Craven district in the distant past, incidents from which have tended to be romanticised by earlier authors.

A new addition to the several papers, tracts and booklets already available at Long Preston is *Landscapes and Townscapes of North Craven*, subtitled "insights from the archives". Tony Stephens, the author of this succinctly written and extremely well- illustrated book, has based much of his research, soundly, on a survey of George Clifford of 1579. The researches of Tony Stephens, and the presentation of his research, make hard facts interesting.

George Clifford's survey of 1579, which is owned by Skipton Castle and is on long term loan to the Yorkshire Archaeological Society in Leeds provides an insight into local life not only in Elizabethan times but also in earlier and later centuries. Clifford terrain was at that time extensive, taking in Settle, Giggleswick, Long Preston and Rathmell in the Ribble valley, together with the valleys of Langstrothdale and Littondale. Tony has also provided us with the benefit of his researches on Burton in Lonsdale, a village a dozen miles to the west of the Ribble valley. A different set of ancient documents survive for Burton, providing other insights into the history of North Craven between the 14th century and modern times.

Life in North Craven in the 16th century was surprisingly feudal. Elsewhere in England, many tenants who survived the Black Death of 1349 were able to accumulate land and improve the economic circumstances of their families. Yet in North Craven, in 1579, the standard holding remained the oxgang, roughly 13 modern acres. On the many small strips which made up this oxgang, a farmer might raise sufficient oats and barley to meet his family needs but was precluded from buying more land, tenancies passing from fathers to first sons through the manor court. A near bankruptcy of George Clifford in 1603 forced him to sell long term leases to his tenants, releasing them from their feudal way of life. Tony then charts the growth of a prosperous class of yeomen and traders in the 17th and 18th century, identifying their residences, many of which survive to the present time.

Typical of the families which flourished were the Cooksons of Settle. They held the Naked Man Café, at one time an inn and a prime feature of the market place. The insignia of 1663 of this prominent building is of innkeeper John Cookson. Other Cookson generations followed until John Cookson who was there at the beginning of the 18th century left for Wakefield, where he was a physician for over half a century- and became one of the most wealthy men in the West Riding. His impressive memorial in Wakefield cathedral attests the wealth of a family which had risen from oxgang holders in the 16th century to one of the most wealthy in the West Riding by the last decades of the 18th century.

Perhaps more surprising is the rise of the Tathams of Burton in Lonsdale. Also oxgang holders, the Tathams had been arraigned before the Star Chamber for rioting against land enclosure at the beginning of the 16th century. Despite this, they survived to become the most prominent landowners in Burton by the end of the 18th century. There is a suggestion that bribery and unscrupulous business dealings contributed to their success.

The publication of Landscapes and Townscapes was sponsored by the Long Preston Heritage Group, and Long Preston is a prominent feature of the book. Though less wealthy than Settle and Giggleswick, Long Preston's history is equally interesting, largely because the late medieval records of Bolton Priory's involvement in the township have survived. The second decade of the 14th century saw perhaps the most calamitous weather of the millennium, with widespread starvation across the country. Tony has been able to show from its tithe returns to Bolton Priory that Long Preston's crop yields were halved. As elsewhere in England, many Long Preston residents must have starved.

Long Preston also fell on hard times in the 19th century, when its hand loom weaving industry collapsed. While England's population quadrupled, Long Preston remained roughly the same size throughout the century, leaving much of its old structure intact. Particularly important are its crofts, which are of late medieval origin, and enable us to understand the layout of the township in those times. At the time of Domesday, the village comprised about two dozen farmsteads which were arranged around an open green with crofts behind the farmsteads. The original green is today somewhat disguised by infill buildings across one of the diagonals. Fragments survive as two small greens on either side of the A65. Indeed, many of the crofts that lay behind the late medieval farmsteads still survive behind the buildings that face the original green.

Today the Long Preston Heritage Group is actively researching its Victorian past, and Tony tells me that exciting new findings are beginning to emerge from sources such as township censuses and newspaper reports. We can look forward to future revelations which will illuminate our understanding not only of Long Preston but also of North Craven.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'W.R. Mitchell'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'W' and 'R' at the beginning.

W.R.Mitchell