

Chapter 7 Lords, Yeomen, Gentlemen, merchants, Merchant Adventurers and mercers

The Chief Lords - Percy and Clifford families

The Clifford Papers were found at Skipton Castle, then rescued and are now at the Yorkshire Archaeological Society in Leeds, on loan from the Fattorini family. They include details of land holdings and rents from about 1494 onwards for Craven properties. Transcripts are available on-line at www.NorthCravenHeritage.org.uk

The Chief Lord for Giggleswick parish was Henry Percy, 5th Earl of Northumberland 1478-1527. His daughter Margaret married Henry Lord Clifford (1493-1542) who was the 11th Lord of the Honour of Skipton. He was shortly afterwards created 1st Earl of Cumberland. Margaret or her heir was to inherit the Percy estates in Giggleswick Parish. Henry Percy had already appointed his son-in-law Henry Clifford as Steward to supervise lands around Skipton Castle.

The 6th Earl of Northumberland was childless and Giggleswick Parish was given to Henry Clifford in 1536, confirmed by Parliament in 1537.

Henry Clifford his son became 12th Lord of Skipton and 2nd Earl of Cumberland, 1517-1569. George was the 13th Lord and 3rd Earl, 1558-1608, and Anne, 1590-1676 was due to inherit. She spent much of her life trying to obtain her proper inheritance from Francis, 4th Earl of Cumberland. (*The diaries of Lady Anne Clifford, 1990. D.J.H.Clifford, Publ. Alan Sutton Ltd.*).

The inhabitants of Langcliffe had to pay entry fines and gressums to the Cliffords as overlords if they held land outside Langcliffe.

The wapentake or bailiwick of Staincliffe was a liberty from which the sheriff of Yorkshire and his officers were excluded. The tenure of the wapentake was a source of authority – the deputy bought the office and took the profits. The duties included the return of writs and processes to the Royal Courts and the collection of fees, perquisites, and debts to be sent to the Crown offices. The bailiff or his deputy proclaimed assizes and quarter sessions in Skipton. Earls Francis and Henry had a 60 year lease of the wapentake granted in 1612 by James I. After the fall of Skipton castle the Clifford fee went to patentees. Then the Earls of Cork took over the right. (*Lady Ann Clifford, R.T. Spence, Sutton Publ., 1997; ex Chatsworth BAS2, box, Wapentake of Staincliffe*).

The gentry

Queen Elizabeth's reign in the latter half of the 16th C was a great age for the gentry due to land improvement and vitality of commerce. The rise of many families was due to trade. Apprentices were often sons of gentlemen and persons of good quality.

Many of the wills available in the records refer to the status of the person concerned, usually yeoman, (or husbandman) or gentleman, all of which had rather particular meanings. The Gentleman is defined as quoted by G.M.Trevelyan *English Social History*, 1944, Longman) from Harrison (1577);

'Whosoever studieth the laws of the realm, whoso abideth in the University giving his mind to his book, or professeth physic and the liberal sciences, or beside his service in the room of a captain in the wars, or good counsel given at home whereby his commonwealth is benefitted, can live without manual labour, and thereto is able and will bear the port, charge and countenance of a gentleman, he shall be called 'master', which is the title that men give to esquires and gentlemen, and be reputed a gentleman ever after'.

The status of Gentleman and the title Mr (Master) therefore indicated a relatively wealthy man who owned property, particularly land, but who did not work the land directly. He may also have made money by trading. He may have been well-educated, could read and write and would be involved in parish and church affairs.

For the most part the yeomen were farmers leasing land from gentlemen and were concerned with stock raising, wool, grazing, frequenting of markets; income was sufficient to warrant the keeping of servants. Many were able to buy the lands of unthrifty gentlemen, often sending their sons to school and university and to the Inns of Court, or otherwise leaving them sufficient land to allow them to become men of leisure without having to work the land directly, and to become gentlemen. 'Knights, barons, and the greatest nobility of the Kingdom often place their children in these Inns of Court, not so much to live by the profession, having large patrimonies of their own, but to form their manners' (*Gray's Inn Register of Admissions*). Brayshaw and Robinson (1932) suggest that some may have referred to themselves as yeomen in later times of trouble, rather than as gentlemen which may reflect their status and wealth more appropriately.

Henry Billingsley, noted as a haberdasher in the deeds available, made his money out of the cloth trade in London. Sheep were very important for many centuries since the quality of English wool was held in very high regard; the rain and consequent green grass of England was vital. A haberdasher at that time was generally a dealer in a variety of household articles, or specifically a dealer in hats and caps from the 16th C.

After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603 there was a gradual rise in prices which tended to enrich the more enterprising of the landowners, yeomen and merchants. This inflation caused the Crown trouble in financing their affairs despite the royal power to control trade. Parliament was not in a mood to finance the Crown at a time of growing tension between Protestants, Catholics and Dissenters and between Crown and the people. Later in the 1600s taxes were invented to raise money for an income for Charles II, for example the Hearth Tax imposed in 1662 (1672 list for Langcliffe). The tax was at two shillings (10p) per hearth and was very unpopular since officials

were given power to enter and search premises; there was much evasion and the tax was a failure; it was repealed in 1689 by William and Mary. Because it proved difficult to forcibly inspect hearths in people's houses, the Window Tax took its place in 1697; every house was taxed at 2 shillings a year (10p) plus 8 shillings for a house with more than 10 windows. As with the Hearth Tax those too poor to pay church or poor rates were exempt. Windows could be observed from outside by officials, hence the blocking-up of windows seen in many houses of the time. Windows were blocked up for other reasons such as changing use of rooms so not all alterations are due to the window tax.

Merchants

see www.NorthCravenHeritage.org.uk, 'Carrs in Langcliffe', Michael Slater, NCHTJ 2003, p5

The trade of mercer is mentioned for several members of the Carr family of Langcliffe and Settle; a mercer is a merchant, more particularly a dealer in textile fabrics, especially silks, velvets and other costly materials.

William Carr(4) of Langcliffe 16??-1673 is stated to be a Merchant Adventurer (of Newcastle) in a deed (re-Langcliffe Moor with Wm Foster) of 1650/1. The Merchant Adventurers were a powerful organization built up in the 13th C by English merchants trading mainly in cloth. In the 15th and 16th C rivalry in France and Germany with Merchants of the Staple (wool merchants) and the Hanseatic League was strong. (A wool staple is a naturally formed cluster or lock of wool fibres and not a single fibre. Very many staples together form a fleece.) The Merchant Adventurers used their gains to buy foreign goods for import into England and by the early 1600s they were dominant. The organization was tightly controlled and membership required a fee; in the 17th C they supported Parliament against the King but were later forgiven. Their monopoly of the cloth trade was ended by William and Mary. The Merchants Adventurers had houses in York and Newcastle upon Tyne as well as London. We find that the Carrs of Langcliffe are associated with the Newcastle upon Tyne house. Leonard Carr, who was the son of William Carr(1), and nephew and godson of Thomas Carr, was indentured as an apprentice in 1597. (The choice was boothman, mercer, or draper). He was a Master by 1615 and later Governor of the Society in Newcastle. Another William Carr, son of a Thomas Carr of Langcliffe, was apprenticed to Leonard in 1622 as was a William Carr son of Henry Carr 'late of Langcliffe, yeoman (deceased)' in 1630. In 1670, another Leonard Carr, son of 'Wm. Carr, Merchant Adventurer' was enrolled by patrimony. It is likely that this Wm. Carr was William(4) mentioned in the 1650/1 deed, who was father of the Leonard who was the builder of the Manor Farm House still standing in Langcliffe today – datestone 1678.

(Merchants and Gentry in North-East England 1650-1830. The Carrs and the Ellisons. 1999. A.W.Purdue, University of Sunderland Press)

'It was not easy to become indentured to the powerful Newcastle Company. Father needed to be a man of mark in the district. Admission was highly prized as an avenue for younger sons and sons of existing merchants had first right of entry - but many apprentices came from far afield - including Yorkshire. Regulations were brought in in 1649 concerning 'their haire, manners and apparell ... and superfluos ribbining' - one apprentice had his hair cut in open court in 1649'.

Early connection with the North-East of the Carrs of Grainhouse is seen in the will of James Carr, vicar of Alnwick, died 1593, bequeathing property to Ralph Carr of Ford Castle in Northumberland so this involvement with the Newcastle Merchant Adventurers rather than those in York is not so surprising.

By the early 1700s wars had left the Government with heavy debt. It was also a time of financial speculation; in 1710 the Government granted a charter to a company trading in the South Seas in return for taking over part of the National Debt. In 1720 the Directors planned to take over all the Debt and issued South Sea stock to raise the money. This led to a speculation mania with shares rising within months nearly ten-fold. This in turn led to people hungry to invest in anything – including ‘a company for carrying on an undertaking of great advantage, but no-one to know what it is’. People had wildly optimistic expectations of future growth (repeating itself in 2000 with internet companies!). The slump took place within a few more months as a sense of reality crept in as to where and how profits were actually to be made. Thousands of people were ruined.

It is clear that the Carrs of Langcliffe were involved in the cloth trade (it is known that Thomas Carr eldest son of William (3) was a clothier in Huddersfield in 1639/40). It is also seen that William Carr (5) started to sell off his land holdings and his mill over a period of years from about 1712. Did he invest unwisely? He had debts early in the century which seemed to lead to problems. In the Middleton papers Mr Carr of Lanckliff is listed as 'arrear 4 years £0-0-3' in 1723 (ZMI/B/7/IV/1 Northumberland Record Office). In a list of 'leases wanting to make out the Quit Rents' we see 'Noe Leases or Rent Rolls of Langcliff £0-0-9' (ZMI/B7/6/7) (unknown date). Sir John Middleton of Belsay Castle left a will in 1717 (ZMI/B10/1/9) in which his son John Lambert Middleton is heir, with trustees, one of whom is William Dawson of Langcliffe, hence there is a close connection with Langcliffe. A deed of 1671 (ZMI/B7/I/15) concerns the holdings of John Lister of Arnoldsbiggin in Langcliffe and other local manors, being sold to John Lister and William Clapton.

Grace, William Carr(5)'s wife, was buried in Giggleswick in 1756; William died in 1766 at the age of 84 and is buried at Great Mitton where his son William was vicar.