

ANN FENWICK

Anyone who lives in or around the Lune Valley will be familiar with the name 'Fenwick', largely because of the "Fenwick Arms" pub at Claughton. Not many people could say why this name is familiar or where it came from.

This is the story:

The pub itself goes back 250 years to the year 1770.

Ann was born in 1724, the only daughter of a Lancaster attorney, Thomas Benison, and his wife Ann. They moved from Lancaster into newly built Hornby Hall in the village of Hornby, in the Lune Valley. Thomas was a Protestant, but his wife, and daughter were of the Catholic faith. Ann Snr. was born Ann Dowbiggin and married a man named Winder. He subsequently died, and Ann Snr. then married a second time to Thomas Benison. Unfortunately, they were on the point of moving into Hornby Hall when Thomas died.

Thomas died without having made a will, so his daughter Ann inherited a large fortune. She also inherited from her uncle Robert Benison, who had shares in a ship, The True Love. Ann was only eleven years old, and was at a convent school, The Bar Convent School in York. Her mother and another relative administrated her estate until Ann reached the age of 22 in 1746, when she took over management of her own affairs. The Convent had obviously educated her well. She kept very detailed accounts of her expenditure and many of these documents still exist.

THE PENAL TIMES

Since the time of the Reformation in England, and in the reign of Elizabeth I, Catholics were persecuted to prevent a resurgence of the power of the Popes in Rome. Incidents like the Gunpowder Plot, and the invasions by Catholic descendents of King James II, in 1715 and 1745 (Bonnie Prince Charlie) did nothing to allay these fears. But by 1766 these fears were starting to subside and the process of dismantling these Penal Laws began.



This is a picture of Ann Fenwick.

When she was 28 she married John Fenwick of Burrow Hall. The marriage was a happy one, but tragically, five years later John Fenwick died in a hunting accident. There were no children from their union.

This is when things started to go wrong for Ann.

Whilst her husband was still alive Ann added her fortune to her husband's so that he could use it as collateral for borrowing money. When he died, Ann's money was considered to be part of her husband's estate. He died in 1757. The Estate was assigned to Thomas Wilson.

Some sources say that Thomas Wilson was John Fenwick's nephew, but took the name Fenwick on receiving the Estate. Other sources say that Thomas was John's brother. Thomas Fenwick (Wilson) was a barrister, and the Member of Parliament for Westmorland. All of Ann's property, including Hornby Hall, went to Thomas Fenwick.

Ann's mother died in 1762, never knowing the difficulties her daughter was to have in obtaining her rightful fortune.

Thomas Fenwick disputed the ownership of Hornby Hall, maintaining that Ann, as a Catholic could not inherit it, (1707 Act Of Parliament). Ann went to law to recover her property and the courts found in her favour. Thomas Fenwick at last offered her use of The Hall for her lifetime, plus a sum of £3,000, and an annuity of £400 per year.

Ann, at this time, was dying from cancer. She visited Bath to 'take the waters' where she met William Pitt the Prime Minister. The annuity of £400 was never paid, and Ann began to be in financial difficulties in that she could not pay her servants and other expenses. Indeed she was faced with debtors prison.

In 1770 Ann travelled to London where she had an interview with the Lord Chancellor, Lord Camden. He was convinced of the injustices that Ann had suffered, and he put a Private Bill through the House of Lords, the highest court in the land. In 1772 The Act was passed and awarded Ann a sum of £7,000, and annuity of £400 until her death. Ann was able to return to her home at Hornby Hall where she was able, in spite of her increasingly ill health, to resume her charitable works.

She died in 1777 aged just 53.

In the year following Ann's death the first Catholic Relief Act was passed. It had always been Ann's wish that the Catholic people of the Lune Valley should have a place of worship. In 1763 she had a chapel built at Claughton, three miles away.

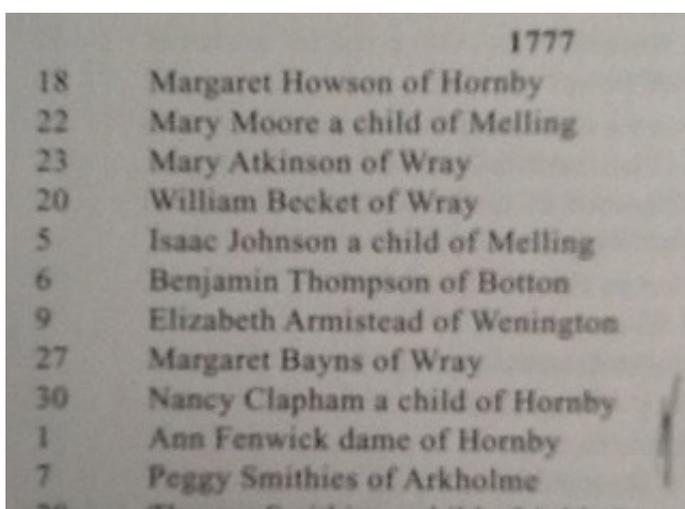
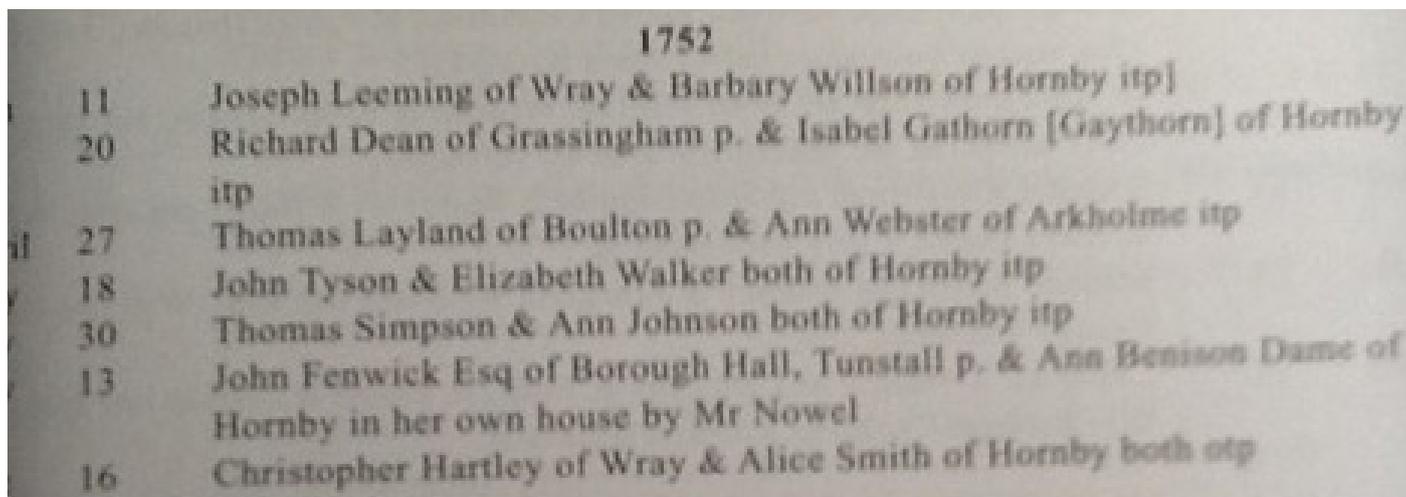
Her own chapel in Hornby Hall would not be used after her death, when The Hall would pass into Protestant hands. She had her own chaplain, Mr. Thomas Butler and Ann left funds in her will for the purchase of a house and small plot of land for the building of a chapel (1779). The chapel was part of the house, until in 1821, the incumbent, Father John Lingard pulled down the chapel at Claughton and had a chapel built onto the house in Hornby. The house now serves as The Presbytery.

After Ann's death Thomas Butler continued to minister to the people.

This is a modern era photograph of Hornby Hall. It was taken over by Lunesdale District Council and used as offices, but was destroyed by fire in 1946.

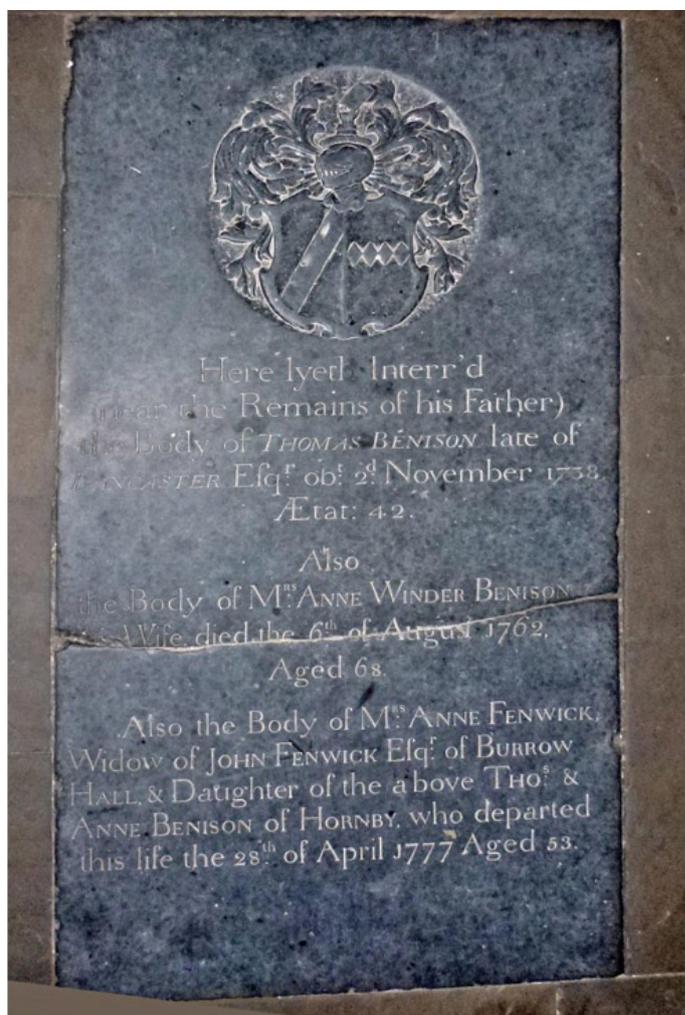


Below is the entry in the Parish of Melling Register for the marriage of John Fenwick to Ann Benison in 1752. The marriage took place in her own home. Note the term 'Spinster' was not used for 'A gentlewoman', rather the term 'Dame' was used.



Above is the entry for her burial in 1777. The registry is stark in its entry, in that she was buried, with her parents, inside Melling Church, in the prime position in front of the altar. It must be remembered That Melling Parish Church was The Prime Church for the district at that time. Hornby Saint Margaret's was classed as a 'chapel'.

The photograph below is the actual grave in the aisle of Melling Parish church.



A question often asked is why is a woman of the Catholic faith buried in the Church of England Parish Church? The answer is that the grave was firstly of her father, who was a wealthy man and of high standing in the area, and a Protestant. Another interesting thing is that Ann's mother's inscription includes the name of her first husband 'Winder'.

But the story doesn't quite end there.



John Lingard

A later incumbent of the Catholic mission in Hornby was John Lingard (1771-1851). He was born in Winchester to parents who came from Lincolnshire. He was a bright boy, who was educated at the English College at Douay in Flanders. He was ordained a priest in York in 1795, and accepted the position at Hornby in 1811.

He was a noted historian and whilst at Hornby he wrote his "History of England" and many other books and learned papers.

The revenue from the books helped him to finance the building of a chapel attached to the house in Hornby.

This is the Presbytery in 2020. The entrance to the chapel can be seen on the left. The chapel itself is built on the back of the house.

To the right of the main door can be seen the plaque in memory of John Lingard, Author and Historian.



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Booklet entitled "*Ann Fenwick of Hornby (A Woman of the Penal Times)*" by The Bishop of Lancaster.

Mr. JAC Beeson, Churchwarden of Melling Parish Church.

