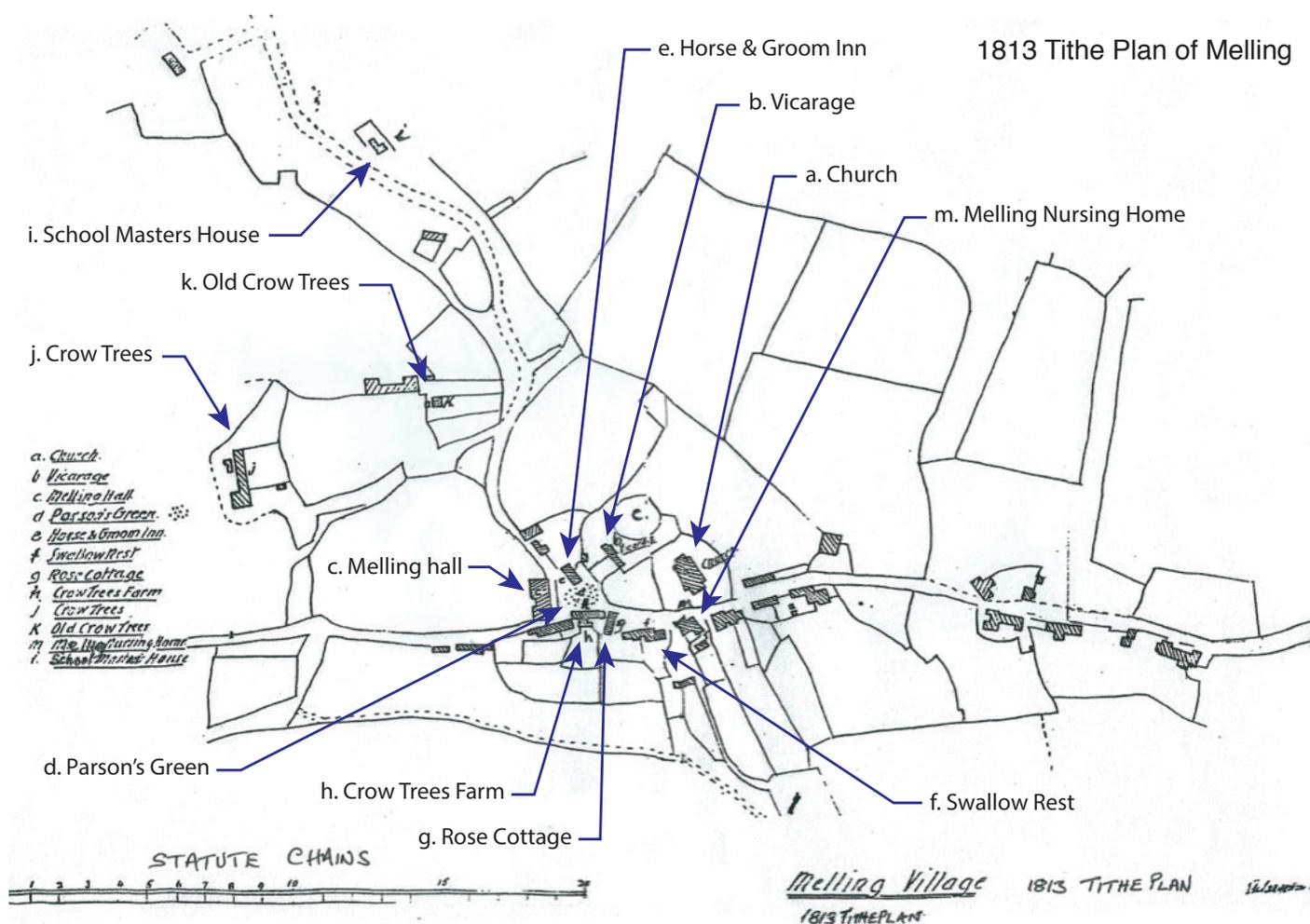


Melling Wet and Melling Dry

MELLING WET: THE HORSE AND GROOM

On a sketch of the **1813** Tithe Plan of Melling there is a house named the **Horse & Groom Inn**, on **Parson's Green**, opposite Crow Trees Farm:



On a map of **1844**, however, there is no sign of any building where the inn once stood, and apart from the roadway, there is no open space between Melling Hall and the grounds of the Vicarage:

How did these changes come about, and what became of the inn?

THE NAME: the sketch of the '1813 Tithe Plan' was made some time after that date; in 1813, the inn was not called The Horse & Groom, but The Black Bull (until 1813) and then The Bay Horse (until 1833).

THE LAND: in 1825, William Gillison Bell (1763-1829) of Melling Hall, formerly of St Petersburg, and a member of the United Company of Merchants trading to the East Indies, purchased and enclosed the land known as Parson's Green, making it part of the grounds



Melling 1844

of Melling Hall. A Special Session of the Lancashire Quarter Sessions was held on 17 October 1825 'at the Bay Horse, House of Margaret Lawson, notifying the closure of the path at Melling and subsequent sale of said land to William Gillison Esq' (County Archives, Preston).

THE HALL: the central part of Melling Hall, dating from the 1740s, was all that existed until the 1820s, when William Gillison Bell added substantial wings to the west and the east, giving the Hall the appearance it has today.

We can gain an idea of the original appearance of Melling Hall from a sketch made around 1820 by Mr Bell's son, also named William Gillison Bell (1803-1867). A copy of this sketch has the caption: by the 'late William Gillison Bell esq when a boy [...] illustrating later confiscation of land by [his father] William Gillison Bell'.

THE INN: the inn on Parson's Green stood close (too close!) to the proposed east wing of Melling Hall. Mr Bell bought the inn and had it pulled down; he transferred the licence to a house (now known as the Homestead) which he owned, on the other side of the main road.

1760S-1833: HENRY AND PEGGY LAWSON

It has not been possible to establish the date at which the Bay Horse Inn on Parson's Green was demolished, and the licence transferred to the Horse & Groom at the

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In the early 1800s, Melling's inn had two changes of name, as reported or announced in the *Lancaster Gazette*:

- In **1807** (announcement): a house is to be auctioned 'At the house of Henry Lawson, the Black-Bull, in Melling' (10 January);
- In **1824** (announcement): an auction is to be held 'at the house of Mrs Lawson, the sign of the Bay Horse, in Melling' (10 January); this suggests that, at some time after Henry Lawson's death in 1813, his widow Margaret ('Peggy') changed the inn's name;
- In **1835** (report): after a pigeon shoot on Melling Moor, 'a dinner followed at Mr A. Robinson's, the Horse and Groom, in Melling (29 September); so the name of the inn was changed after the death of Peggy Lawson in 1833.

Misnomer [1]: In 1841 (report): Mr Robert Maudsley, farmer, of Hornby, fell from his horse, causing severe concussion; 'he was conveyed to the Bay Horse Inn [sic], Melling', and now remained 'in a very precarious state' (25 December). It is of course possible that some locals continued to call the inn by its previous name.

Misnomer [2]: In 20thc. accounts and memoirs by local residents, the Horse & Groom is sometimes referred to as 'the Horse & Farrier', but this is not supported by 19th c. reports and accounts in the *Lancaster Gazette*. During the 19thc. there were inns with the name 'Horse & Farrier' in Upper Bentham, Halton and Newton, but not, it would appear, in Melling. Handed-down memories of the inn may also have been influenced by the name of the Horse & Groom innkeeper in 1870-71: John Farrer.

Homestead, but we must suppose that it was at some time between 1825 and 1835.

Thanks to announcements in the *Lancaster Gazette* between 1807 and 1833, we know that the inn was kept by Henry Lawson and his wife Margaret (known as Peggy), and that after Henry's death in 1813, Peggy Lawson continued as innkeeper until her death in 1833.

In 1833, Mrs Lawson's death was announced in the *Lancaster Gazette* of 28 September as follows: 'on Thursday last, at Melling, in the 97th year of her age, of Mrs Margaret Lawson, who retained her memory and faculties to her last. This extraordinary individual has kept a public house upwards of seventy years'.

From these and other announcements in the *Lancaster Gazette*, it is clear that the Horse & Groom, like many rural inns up and down the country in the 19thc., was the centre of local social and economic life, amply illustrating its function as a 'public house'.

Henry and Peggy Lawson had a son, John, born in 1764, and a daughter, Mary, born in 1777. Neither of them married; both continued to be associated with Melling, and with the Horse & Groom, long after 1833.

John became a shoemaker. In 1841 he was lodging with a widow, Jane Jennings, and her six children in Bridge Lane, Lancaster, and in 1851 he was a lodger in the house of William Robinson, a landed proprietor, and his family. When he died, aged 94, in 1858, his abode was given as ... The Vicarage.

In 1841 Mary Lawson, 'of independent means' was staying with the Kitchen family in Wrayton (10 children), and in 1851 (an 'Annuitant') she was the sole occupant of a house between Crow Trees Farm and 'Gill House'. In 1853, the Kendal Mercury reported the death, 'at Melling, at a very advanced age [76], [of] Miss Lawson, formerly of the Horse & Groom Inn, Melling'.

After Peggy Lawson's death, the inn, now renamed the Horse & Groom, had, as we shall see, a bewilderingly rapid turnover of tenant innkeepers...

'MINE HOST' AT THE HORSE & GROOM	
1835-1840	Arthur Robinson
1840-1841	Nicholas Cannon
1843	Thomas Carter
1845-1847	Jim Wharton
1849-1850	James Smith
1850-1854	Isabella Smith
1857-1858	Richard Bowman Buller
1859-1860	William Parkinson
1860-1866	Robert Hutchinson
1869	William H Garlick
1870-1871	John Farrer
1875-1876	Alice Procter/Proctor

1835-1840: ARTHUR ROBINSON

The *Lancaster Gazette* of 29 September 1835 carried a report of a pigeon shoot on Melling Moor, 'a diversion novel to this part of the country'; 'A booth was pitched on the Moor, which had never such a decoration before'; 'a dinner followed at Mr A. Robinson's, the Horse and Groom, in Melling, and the evening was spent with great hilarity'. But in 1840 the Horse & Groom 'now in the occupation of Mr Arthur Robinson', is to let, with outbuildings and 30 acres. (*Westmorland Gazette*, 15 February)

1840-1850

We know of three tenant innkeepers for the 1840s: Mr Nicholas Cannon (1840-41), Mr

We can also catch glimpses of life in and around the Horse & Groom during this decade:

- In **March 1844**, a ‘tremendous gale swept with the expedition and tidiness of an experienced housemaid, the sign board from the front of the domicile of mine host [not named], of the Horse and Groom Inn’. (*Lancaster Gazette*)
- In **November 1844**, a wrestling contest was ‘conducted with a cheerful urbanity and kindness by mine host [not named] of the Horse and Groom, not witnessed every day’. (*Lancaster Gazette*)
- In **November 1847**, the tenant of the Horse & Groom, ‘Jim’ [Wharton] was called on to be an impromptu witness at a hastily-arranged wedding. (*Westmorland Gazette*)

Thomas Carter (1843), Mr Jim Wharton (1845-47), and Mr James Smith (1849-50).

1850-1860

We know of three innkeepers for the 1850s: Mrs Isabella Smith (1850-55), Mr Richard Bowman Buller (1857-58), and Mr William Parkinson (1859-60).

Isabella Smith became the innkeeper in 1850, following the death of James Smith; in 1851, aged 47, she had four children aged from 3 to 21, and two lodgers (stone masons). A piece of ‘Local Intelligence’ in the *Lancaster Gazette* dated 13 August 1853 gives us an interesting insight into mid-19th c. rural life: ‘Prolific Cow. Our neighbour, Mrs Isabella Smith, innkeeper, Melling, has an aged cow that calved on Wednesday morning last, three fine bull calves, which are alive and doing well.’

The first female tenant since Peggy Lawson, Mrs Smith faced an unpleasant situation on 8 February 1854, when ‘An attempt was made to plunder the Horse & Groom, Melling, but fortunately without success’ (*Kendal Mercury*). More happily, in September 1854, Mrs Smith (spelled ‘Grith’ in the *Westmorland Gazette* report!) was granted a new licence (by Mr William Gillison Bell, chairman of the Justices, sitting at Hornby), but in October 1855, the Horse & Groom, tenant Mrs Smith, was to be let (*Lancaster Gazette*).

The next tenant, Richard Bowman Buller, was in place by January 1857, but his tenure – indeed, Mr Buller himself - was short-lived. In October 1858, the Horse & Groom, ‘now occupied by R B Buller’ was to be let (*Lancaster Gazette*, 9 October). The reason for this was soon apparent: it was not uncommon for inquests to be held in public houses, but the inquest at the Horse & Groom in October 1858 was into the death of the landlord himself,

aged 26. According to the report in the *Lancaster Gazette*, 30 October, 'It appeared in evidence that the deceased was much addicted to drinking, and had not been sober for several days'. Verdict: 'Died suddenly from apoplexy'. An occupational hazard, perhaps – but Peggy Lawson (1737-1833) must have turned in her nearby grave.

All we know of William Parkinson's tenancy is that The Horse & Groom, occupier William Parkinson, is to let in November 1859 (*Lancaster Gazette*), and that in May 1860 the *Lancaster Gazette* refers to 'the house of Mr Parkinson, Horse & Groom, Melling'.

1860-1869

We know of two innkeepers for the 1860s: Robert Hutchinson (1860-66), and William H Garlick (1869).

Robert Hutchinson was in occupation by November 1860, when the *Lancaster Gazette* refers to the Horse & Groom as 'the house of Mr Robert Hutchinson'; in the 1861 census he is a 'Victualler', born in 1810 in Winster, Westmorland, living at the Horse & Groom with his wife Mary and their three children.

In May 1862, he was fined 'for allowing James Burrow of Wennington to become drunk in his house' (*Lancaster Gazette*), but he still had his licence when, in September 1866, William Gillison Bell, the owner, advertised that it, and a number of outbuildings and 52 acres of land, were to be let (*Lancaster Gazette*).

Three years later, the Horse & Groom was once again to be let; a notice in the *Lancaster Gazette* for 16 October 1869 gives the occupier as Mr W H Garlick.

1867-1871: CHANGE AT MELLING HALL SPELLS CHANGE FOR THE HORSE & GROOM

By 1869, the owner of the Horse & Groom was no longer William Gillison Bell of Melling Hall, who had died in 1867; his death was followed by that of his son George Constable Gildart Bell in 1868, and of his widow Harriet Bell in 1869.

These deaths in the Gillison Bell family, and the disputes which preceded, accompanied and followed them, marked the end of an era: between 1869 and 1871, Melling Hall, along with other property including the Horse & Groom, was advertised several times for sale by auction, or to be let. Eventually, early in 1871 it was reported that 'Melling Hall has been satisfactorily sold by private treaty' (*Westmorland Gazette*, 11 February) - to William Rome (1822-1887), a Liverpool ship owner, as a summer residence for his family of nine children.

1870-1876

During these final years of the Horse & Groom, there were at least three tenancies: those of John Farrer (1870-71), Alice Procter/Proctor and her brother Robert (1875), and John Alvey (1875-76).

The *Lancaster Gazette* dated 25 June 1870 informed its readers that the Horse & Groom 'now in occupation of Mr J Farrer' is to be sold by auction, along with Melling Hall and 10 other lots. Following the sale of Melling Hall in February 1871, the Horse & Groom 'of Freehold Tenure, now in occupation of Mr J Farrer' was again put up for sale by auction (*Westmorland Gazette*, 23 September 1871).

It is not clear when Alice Procter's tenancy began, but we know when it ended: 'The licenses [sic] of the "Horse and Groom" public house at Melling was transferred from Alice Proctor to John Alvey'. (*Lancaster Gazette*, 22 May 1875)

A short handwritten account of the Procters' tenancy, dated 1932, illustrates the limitations of undocumented, handed-down memories: 'The Procters Robert and Alice lived probably almost all their lives in Melling. At one time they held the Inn known as the Horse and Farrier [sic!] where the Nursing Home now is, leaving sometime in the early 1860 decade'. Despite gaps in the documented record (notably between 1866 and 1869), it seems unlikely that the Procters' tenancy began before 1871.

In 1875, Robert Procter left the inn, but apparently not the ale: the note of 1932 says of him that 'When he very occasionally got over his cups he was more than a load for one man to see home, his usual expression on these occasions being "I can spin me own top, I can so!".'

MELLING DRY: THE SHAKESPEARE HEAD

According to a handwritten note of 1939, the inn was bought in 1870 [sic] by Miss Catherine Remington (1816-1898; an aunt of Rev Henry Remington): 'After a few years, she came to reside in it herself, to control the liquor traffic, taking out a six-day licence'. In 1876, she let the alcohol licence lapse, and 'changed the name to the '**Shakespeare Head**', the sign representing the poet's head with the quotations "Why should men put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains" and "Oh thou spirit of drink by what name should we call thee; since we know no otherwise we will call thee the spirit of evil." This sign was said to be in existence about the year 1900. Later she turned it into a temperance hotel, &, advertising for a Christian man & his wife as Managers, appointed Thomas Wells & his wife'.

It is difficult to verify the facts and dates in this note, which raises a number of questions:

- Did Miss Remington buy the **Horse & Groom** in September 1871, when it was put up for auction, or later?
- At what date did Miss Remington move into the **Horse & Groom**?
- When did she obtain a six-day licence?
- When did Thomas and Margaret Wells take over the management of the '**temperance hotel**'?
- For how many years did Mr & Mrs Wells manage the **Shakespeare Head**?
- At what date did the Shakespeare Head cease to function as a '**temperance hotel**'?
- At what date did Miss Remington move from the **Shakespeare Head** to Church Gates?

Part of the story can be pieced together from public records, as follows:

In April 1881, the census return shows three residents at 'The Shakespeare': Catherine Remington, 'Teetotal innkeeper', assisted by a housekeeper and a general labourer.

In 1882, in Barrow-in-Furness, Thomas Wells married Margaret Robinson, of Ulverston. They came to Melling, where their daughter was born in 1884; by 1885, they had moved to Cantsfield, where their son was born in 1885. The 1891 census shows them to be living at Gate House, Cantsfield. Thomas worked as a shoemaker, and died in 1936 at the age of 79.

Meanwhile, by April 1891 Catherine was no longer living at the Homestead, but had moved to Church Gates: on the census return for April 1891, the Homestead (no longer 'The Shakespeare'!) is listed as 'unoccupied', except for 'no 2 Homestead cottage', occupied by

John M Ward, widower, a retired signman born in Nottingham, together with a son and daughter both born in Melling.

THE HOMESTEAD AFTER 1898

Miss Catherine Remington died in 1898; from 1898 to 1913, John Parkinson (a market gardener – strawberries) was the owner-occupier of the Homestead, with his wife Ellen.

In August 1913, John Parkinson put the Homestead up for sale (together with a cottage,

stable, coach house, etc), and it was bought in November 1913 by Isabella Thompson, a widow (the conveyance is in the Melling archive). This was shortly after a convicted fraudster had been sentenced at Lancaster Quarter Sessions to 5 years' penal servitude for obtaining food and lodgings by false pretences from John Parkinson of 'the Homestead' (*Manchester Daily Citizen*, 15 October 1913).

In 1925, the Homestead was bought by Miss Constance Bertha Peel of Crow Trees, 'who converted it into a Nursing Home to the great benefit of the village and surrounding district. Later she bought 3 adjoining cottages & added them to enlarge the Home' (handwritten notes of 1939, in the Melling archive). Miss Peel was the sister of Walter Spencer Peel.

1931: 10 electors, all female, are registered at 'the Lunesdale Convalescent and Nursing Home'. In the Registration of September 1939, there are 18 entries for the Nursing Home, including Nurses and (mainly female) patients.

Our story now returns to Melling Hall: 'Sir Henry Darlington's old home at Melling Hall is now an hotel' (*The Tatler*, 13 January 1965).

MAKING MELLING WET AGAIN

In October 1946, Mr George Victor Johnson purchased Melling Hall for £10 000 from Col Sir Henry Clayton Darlington (1877-1959).

Early in 1948, Mr & Mrs Johnson applied for a full alcohol licence. In their application, they stated that between April and December 1947, 20 000 principal meals, and 4 500 afternoon teas had been served. A petition in support of the application had been signed by 107 out of 140 adults in the parish, including a signature from every house but one. Signatories included the Rev W J A Burrow, the schoolmaster, the postmistress, the president of the Village Institute, and the chair of the Parish Council. The licence was granted. (*Lancaster Guardian*, 6 February 1948)

But in June 1952, Melling Hall was once again for sale. The new proprietors were Mr & Mrs Hill, and 'Opening Night' was on 14 February 1953. Between 1953 and 1958, Melling Hall was the venue of choice for, among others, the Hornby branch of the National Farmers' Union, the Vale of Lune Young Farmers' Club, and the Lunesdale Harriers Boxing Day Meet.

In 1955, Melling Hall was the venue for the sale of a house by auction – just as the Horse & Groom had often been, a century earlier.

But ownership of Melling Hall continued to change hands: in 1956, the proprietors were Mr & Mrs Pullen, and the following year Melling Hall was 'for sale with vacant possession'.

After several changes of proprietor between 1953 and 2001, Melling Hall was controlled from 2001 to 2003 by 'Melling Hall Limited'.

MAKING MELLING DRY AGAIN

The alcohol licence was not renewed, and Melling Hall was divided into three dwellings.

But that is another story...

DON February 2020

WHATEVER NEXT?

'... cabaret at the Melling Hall Hotel'

Feature on Morecambe, The Stage, 21 August 1975

When an alcohol licence becomes poetic licence:

'Easter breaks in 17th century manor house hotel'

Advertisement for Melling Hall Hotel in the Liverpool Echo, 8 April 1995

The closing years:

'Lune Valley. Melling Hall Hotel Easter 2/3 day breaks'

Advertisement in the Liverpool Echo, 15 March 1996

