

Ashes Farm 1597-2000

Joe Scott - October 2000



Ashes farm today

Ashes was one of a Nether Staveley group of freehold farms, large by local standards, which were probably established in the later Middle Ages. The others were Broadfold, Hollin Hall and Asthwaite Hall (later New Hall). Enterprising yeomen cleared forest land and set up farms, perhaps paying money rents to the lord, perhaps paying by service in the wars, probably a bit of both. The first surviving document to mention the Ashes is the inventory of William Wilson who died there in 1597, when the farm was already two or three hundred years old. Most other local farms were held by “custom of the Manor”, giving the tenants less independence and obliging them to pay more to the lord. The owner of Ashes paid a fixed “free rent” of 1/10d a year to the Lord (the Crown for most of this period) for his freehold farm of 29 “customary acres” (perhaps 47 modern acres), but was usually owner or tenant of other land as well, and also had the right to share the extensive rough grazing, peat-mosses and woodland resources of the unenclosed common.

Philipsons at the Ashes 1597-1760

The Philipsons had been an important family in south Westmorland since the fifteenth century. In the seventeenth century the main branch owned Calgarth, Crook Hall and Hollin Hall. It was a Christopher Philipson probably from the Hollin Hall branch who married the daughter of William

Wilson of the Ashes (d. 1597), and so came to own the Ashes. The farm was passed down to various descendants of this Christopher until 1760 when the last of them, Robert, died intestate, leaving two married daughters who sold the Ashes.

From the inventories of William Wilson made March 1597 and his son-in-law Christopher Philipson made December 1600, we get a view of Ashes farm at the beginning of the Philipson period. In December 1600 there were four milking cows, seven young cattle, 110 sheep, two horses and three oxen. In the barn was corn worth £10.6.8 and hay worth £3.13.4 – it was a prosperous yeoman’s farm by the standards of the time. Wilson appears to have done business in the cloth trade, since he had “shears, shear-bords, tenters and working gear”(tools used in cloth finishing) as well as pieces of cloth worth £1.5.0. The most interesting feature of William’s inventory, however is the last item “Corne £100” an enormous amount, if a suspiciously round sum.. There is another item “corne unthreshed £2.0.0.” which is likely to be the stock still in hand in March from the 1596 harvest, but the £100-worth is clearly of a different order. The likely explanation is that William was dealing in corn, which could be highly profitable - the harvests of 1597 and 1598 were disastrously bad and so the price was high. Perhaps the old barn, which has mullioned windows which could date from that period, was built to store his stock in trade as a dealer. (but why windows in a barn?) The west end of the house, with its stone stair, may also be 16th century.. Among Christopher’s possessions was “one sword, 2 shillings”. Perhaps as a younger son of the Hollin Hall Philipsons he had been off fighting in the wars before marrying Wilson’s daughter and settling down at the Ashes.

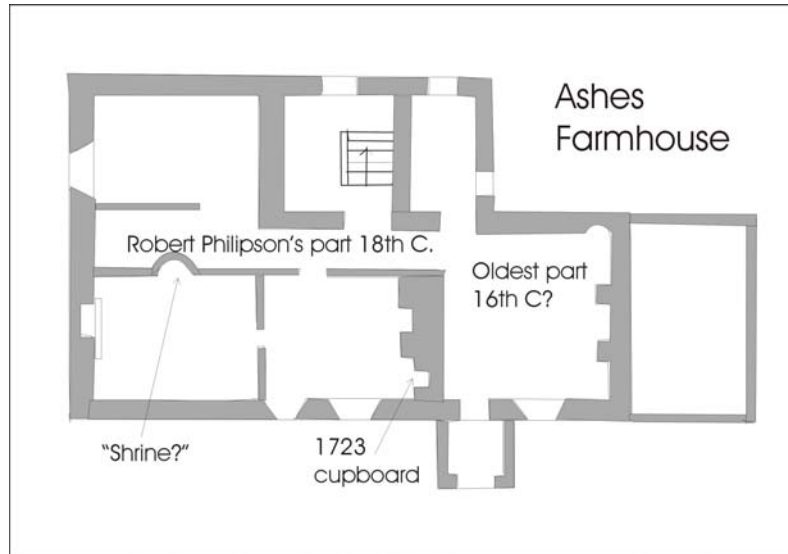
On 19th October 1635, the Windermere ferryboat sank and Christopher Philipson, gentleman, of the Ashes, was among the 47 people returning from a wedding party at Hawkshead who were drowned.

He was probably a grandson of the earlier Christopher. His widow Jane inherited the land and it was passed on through various Philipsons until 1760, with intervals when it was held by trustees. The inventory of the Christopher who died in 1693 gives us an impression of solid prosperity. The farmhouse now had 8 rooms, the “house” or kitchen, the parlour, the old man’s chamber, the parlour chamber, the kitchen chamber, the servant maids’ chamber and the men servants’ chamber, plus the kitchen loft. There were goods also in the outhouse and the old barn as well as £30.00 worth of bigg (barley), hay and oats. Stock included 25 head of cattle, 104 sheep, and there was wool and yarn, no doubt spun by the servant maids, to the value of £3.00. Goods included books, a silver bowl, brass and pewter worth £4.1.2 and gold and money, £8.4.6, but the most important indicator of wealth was “bills, bonds and mortgages - £267.0.0.” Since there were no banks or building societies at that time it was usual for the richer people to lend money and to do business on credit. Christopher owed £170 odd in legacies under the will of his father who had died a year earlier, but he was a rich man by local standards and at least twice as wealthy as the Christopher of a century earlier, even making a large allowance for inflation.

In the early eighteenth century the Philipson family got into difficulties, most of their lands had to be sold, and between 1710 and 1725 Ashes passed through the possession of various trustees and mortgagees, but finally Robert Philipson, probably a great nephew of the Christopher described above, bought out the claims of others for the substantial sum of £481. He was a lawyer with a practice covering the whole Kendal area, so Ashes was a convenient centre. It was Robert who made the house what it is today. His initials and those of his first wife Sarah are carved on the spice cupboard door with the date 1723, so perhaps he had moved in before he bought out the trustees. He rebuilt the east end of the house. Presumably a farm manager or farm servants ran the farm for Robert, and lived in the old part on

the west end. Robert’s part has an elegant sitting room with an elaborately carved fireplace bearing the family coat of arms and a carved oak staircase. In the sitting room is a semicircular alcove, which

is said to have been a “shrine.” Formerly enclosed by doors, its has carved heads of angels above, a



shell-like carving inside, and has been thought to be a Catholic shrine in use when Roman Catholic worship took place in secret. There is evidence from 1678 and 1692 that no Philipsons were openly Catholic, but Robert may have been a secret Catholic, or the “shrine” may have some other explanation.

Robert also built or rebuilt the new barn in 1737, with its carved datestone bearing the initial of his second wife Jane – Sarah had died in 1732. The date 1737 is also painted inside this barn on the roof timbers with the name “George Browne”. George, from Townend Troutbeck, was Robert’s cousin and legal assistant and often stayed at Ashes. Among the Browne papers in Kendal is the catalogue for the 1762 sale of Robert’s library, 173 books on law, religion, history and Latin, Greek and English literature.

Robert died in 1760 leaving Ashes to his two daughters and their husbands, who sold it for £1941.1.0. (The sale included other land as well.)

Ashes 1760-1860

In 1760 John Rowlandson paid £1400 for Ashes and he and (after John’s death in 1792) his son William owned it until the 1820s. John called himself “yeoman of the Ashes”, so presumably he lived and farmed there. William was an excise officer and let the land, though he kept for himself “the house, garden peat-house and shop, and all timber and woods” and the right of access to get stone, wood, bark and charcoal. At this time woodland was increasingly valuable, providing fuel for the Furness iron industry, and timber for the new bobbin mills. The 10 acres of Ashes Coppice and other smaller pieces of woodland had already been enclosed from the common by

Robert Philipson. In 1822 Rowlandson's tenant, William Dockray, paid a rent of £90 a year for the farm, was not to plough more than 10 acres in any year, had to use all manure on the land, cut no peat on enclosed ground, and apply 100 bushels of lime a year to the land. This was an age of rapidly rising local population, which meant a good market for farm produce, so improvement in farming techniques paid off. The most important of the improvements was enclosure of the commons; the Nether Staveley and Strickland Kettle Enclosure Act was passed in 1816, giving the Ashes 124 additional acres, including the land now occupied by the Ashes Lane caravan site. The newly enclosed land had to be walled and improved to bring it into full use which could cost as much as £8 an acre, so all but 55 acres of the Ashes allocation had by 1836 been sold off to wealthy Kendal landowners James Gandy and Jacob Wakefield.

In the Corn Rent map of 1836 we find John Clark, yeoman, owner and occupier of 153.319 acres. He had bought or inherited from William Rowlandson by 1829. In 1836 90 of John's acres were pasture, 24 meadow, 10 woodland and 29 arable. Although some of the arable would lie fallow in any one year, John had to grow enough oats to feed his family, barley to make malt for brewing and winter fodder for his sheep and cattle. Before the coming of steamships and railways there were no imported feeding stuffs for animals and not much for humans. So there was plenty of hard work with plough and sickle and flail in this age before the coming of farm machinery. By 1836 a cottage had been built beside the barn for a labourer and his family.

John Clarke died in 1850, but at the time of the 1851 census Sarah his widow aged 78 was still there in part of the house with her granddaughter and a farm servant, William Hogg. In the other part lived a builder called Heaps, his wife, her sister, four children and a servant. In the cottage was William Riley, agricultural labourer, aged 53, from Burnley, his wife and five children. Sarah Clarke died in 1860.

Ashes part of a large estate

By 1860 the railway (built 1847) could bring wheat and other foodstuffs cheaply from other parts of the country and from the 1870's steamships began to bring food from American prairie farms, so it was hard for the owner-occupier yeoman farmer to stay in business, and many sold out to wealthy land-owners. This is

what happened to Ashes when Sarah Clarke died. From 1860 until 1953 Ashes was run by tenant farmers, not owner-occupiers. In 1881 the farmer was James Douthwaite, farming 159 acres with his son-in-law James Ellwood and two living-in farm servants, and his wife Jane was helped by her daughter and Harriet Blenkinsop, general servant. No doubt all seven of them were busy on the farm at hay harvest and other times, helped perhaps by John Moor, retired farmer aged 75 who lived in the cottage. Of the owners in this period the only evidence is a return of 1875 naming Garret Braithwaite as owner of 156 acres let at a rental of £122.4.0. p.a. In 1910 Ashes was owned by this same Garret and 146 of its acres were let to James Fishwick for £117pa.

Farm profits continued their long decline in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but the development of tourism was beginning to offer alternative possibilities even on the fringe of the Lake District. The Fishwicks, with Robert Philipson's elegant accommodation available, took summer visitors at Ashes from the 1890s – it was a regular summer visitor who arranged for that latest marvel, an indoor flushed toilet to be installed.

Harold Mather

It was another visitor in the late 1890's who brought in the next large change at Ashes. Harold Mather was a Bolton accountant and part owner of the large cotton firm W. Mather & Co. The firm needed coppice wood for its bobbin-turning machinery, and Mather came to Staveley to buy woodland, and stayed at Ashes. In 1910 he was to buy New Hall with nearly 90 acres of woodland, and later he bought Ashes, perhaps because of its coppice wood. But by this time he had another reason for interest the farm. He decided in 1911 to build himself a cottage beside Sidegarth coppice in the New Hall ground overlooking Ashes, and in 1922, when he was 60 he extended it into a country home suitable for a retired gentleman and his family. Ashes became the "home farm" of the growing "Sidegarth Estate" – Mather bought several other local farms, Glen, Borwick Fold and Middle Fairbank. In 1919 he needed a new manager at Ashes and asked Walter Carradus, who worked there, to take over. "He said he would provided he was in complete charge of the cattle. He did the buying and selling. They were very good friends from then on," – *Audrey Carradus*

Harold Mather could afford to invest in the farm,

and the Ashes herd of pedigree shorthorns was very successful. Up to 15 bulls were kept "Father certainly knew how to put meat on a bull when he was going to show it. Half a dozen raw eggs at either end of the day – and crowdies, boiled barley mixed with handfuls of oatmeal and rolled into balls. The bulls loved them. He was champion at all the Royal Lancaster Show and all the local shows, Kendal, Burton, Penrith....A lot of the stock went abroad – I've got photographs of a quite famous bull that went to South Africa." Mather had four daughters, and when they left home they still enjoyed fresh farm produce – "All the sisters got allowances of butter, eggs and cream every week, put on the rail at Staveley station. – I think I still have a butter box." Walter Carradus' son John grew up on the farm at this time and was a great favourite with Mather. "He [John] left school at 14 [in 1941] and couldn't wait to get on the farm. That pleased Mr Mather. He offered to pay for his education if he wanted to carry on, but he said "Well I'll shake your hand – I'm so pleased you've decided to go into agriculture." During the war Ashes resumed arable farming which had died out locally between the wars. "You were forced to grow so much wheat, which it wasn't a good area for. The first crop we grew you had to intersow it with barley, and it all had to be weighed separately. Should have been for bread, but it wasn't fit for human consumption. They gave you £26 a ton if it was, but if it wasn't you bought it back for £16 a ton. You got £10 an acre for growing potatoes."

Ashes since 1945

In 1945 Harold Mather died and his daughters sold much of his land but kept Ashes, and Walter Carradus became tenant instead of farm manager. Then in 1952 John Carradus took over the tenancy, but four years later the Mather daughters decided to sell, and their agent suggested to John that if he made a reasonable bid the farm would be sold to him. Against advice from friends that there was no money in farming he bid the suggested moderate figure, so once more in its long history Ashes became an owner-occupied farm. By now the pedigree shorthorns had been sold and the main stock were ordinary milk cattle. "The milk went wholesale. It was taken to the top of the lane and set on a stand there in big churns. It was picked up there every morning at 8 o'clock, at least four ten-gallon churns. We started milking always before six." No arable crops were grown, but there were 95 head of cattle of various ages, and John employed two men on the farm as well as extra labour at hay-time. "You could always

get men from the village – night men. You got all your hay ready to bring in for evening and then all these men would come from the village and load it and bring it into the barn - one night's work. It was so much an hour."

In 1971 John sold part of the land to the new Ashes Lane Caravan Site, gave up the milking cattle and rented off part of the land, but continued with sheep and a few bullocks until he died in 1999.

By this time it was difficult to run a South Lakeland farm like Ashes profitably, and the area had become so important as a centre for holiday and retirement homes that the Ashes buildings were far more valuable for this than as the centre of a working farm. So the long history of Ashes as a farm came to an end. But in its long history it has also served as a convenient base for a corn dealer (Wilson), a lawyer (Philipson) and excise-man (Rowlandson) and its convenient position and interesting buildings give it an assured future in the 21st century.

Sources used

As well as oral evidence from our late member, John Carradus, and from his widow, Audrey, this paper is based on the Ashes deeds deposited in Kendal Record Office (KRO) by Audrey.

Other sources used include:-

Sale documents of 1946 and 1971, at Ashes,
Inventories of William Wilson and two Christopher Philipsons in the Lancashire Record Office
J. Palmer "Historic Farmhouses in Westmorland" p.8
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The Browne Papers volXVI WT/TE KRO
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