

Chapter VII

Thirlmere

Amongst all his other duties Hardwicke continued to keep a watchful eye on any scheme which would detract from the beauty of Lakeland. Very little escaped his notice, as when the Barrow Waterworks put forward a scheme to dam the River Duddon. This was sacrilege to Hardwicke, especially as his hero Wordsworth, had written as many as thirty four sonnets extolling its beauty. Loughrigg, where he had spent many happy hours in the company of Alice and Edith Fletcher (later to become his wife) during his convalescence, after his breakdown in health, through driving himself too hard in his work at Soho, was threatened with quarrying. This he objected to most forcefully, with success. He also opposed the building of a coach road on the south side of Rydal Water and the closing of the path to Stock Ghyll Force. The last named is a lovely waterfall in a wooded ravine behind Ambleside. It was very popular with the early tourists. Seeing its potential Mr. Mackareth bought the site at the end of the nineteenth century, put a fence round it and charged admission. Hardwicke expressed his anger in verse and brought up the question of right of way. A committee was formed and the site was bought back after the gates had been pulled down. To repay the money borrowed for this scheme a small charge had to be made until enough was collected.¹

During this eventful period of activity another and greater threat to the Lake District loomed. The Manchester Corporation, in its search for an extra water supply, focused its attention on the very beautiful Thirlmere valley and in 1878 applied to Parliament for powers to convert the lake into a reservoir.²

¹Wyatt, John, The Bliss of Solitude, Ellenbank Press, 1991, p172

²Originally Ullswater was considered, but rejected because of possible lead contamination from the mines at Glenridding, the lower elevation and higher population.

Thirlmere at that time was a long narrow lake, almost divided in two by a narrow, marshy strip.¹ The water was fairly shallow, with a marshy area around it which was a haven for wild life. Surrounding it were native British trees of oak, ash, birch, alder, beech and sycamore. There were numerous wading birds including herons, living in their natural habitat. Gray described the lake as,

"narrow and about three miles long, resembling a river in its course; little shining torrents hurry down the rocks to joint it, with not a bush to overshadow them, or cover their march."²

While Harriet Martineau writes of the Thirlmere area,

"The rocks behind are feathered with wood, except where a bold crag here, and a free cataract there, introduces a variety. There is a clear pool in the midst of grass, where, if the approaching tread be light, the heron may be seen fishing, or faithfully reflected in the mirror."³

With such a threat to such a lovely valley a protest meeting was held in the Prince of Wales Hotel, in Grasmere with all speed. The outcome was the formation of the Thirlmere Defence Association with Mr. Robert Somervell of Windermere playing a leading role, using the library of his home as headquarters of the movement. It would be expected that Hardwicke would have been heading the opposition, but once again he was faced with a conflict of interests. Although he supported the Association and it has been stated that he founded it, he also had sympathy, after his experiences in the slum areas in London and Bristol with the need of big cities to have a plentiful supply of good water to promote health and hygiene.⁴ At the same time as he accepted this need he deplored the inevitable destruction, not only of scenery but of

¹When the level of water falls in hot dry summers the division is clearly seen

²Gray's *Journal*

³Martineau, Harriet, *Description of the English Lakes*, 1858

⁴Wyatt, John, *The Bliss of Solitude*, p103

farms, cottages, the local hostelry and school. Many important and influential people supported the Thirlmere Defence Association, such as John Ruskin, William Morris, Edward Thring and the Bishop of Carlisle.

The case against the proposed Manchester plan was clearly set out and published in pamphlet form, together with an excellent coloured map.¹ Two questions were considered, a) Would the proposed scheme, "destroy the charm or diminish the beauty of the valley of Thirlmere" and b) could it be proved that Thirlmere or any other valley in Lake District, being taken and used in such a way, was an unavoidable necessity. It was stated:-

"There is no valley in the District which is at once seen by so many visitors, and is so entirely free from modern erections out of harmony with the surroundings. The western shore of the mere is perhaps the most beautiful we have; it is not the simple grassy slope that borders so many of our lakes, but a series of bays divided by little rocky headlands, crowned with dwarf trees and rich in wildflowers and ferns. And these headlands, which are of a moderate height, would, with the most insignificant exception, be entirely submerged by the proposed elevation of the water level.

The coach road, on the opposite side, skirts the borders of the few quiet farms which lie at the head of the valley, and winds delightfully along the eastern shore. For this road, with its picturesque windings, is to be substituted a brand new one cut on a dead level along the mountain side.

The outlet of the lake must be reached on foot, and combining, as it does, certain elements of severity and grandeur, with the charm of a lonely and picturesque loveliness, forms one of the sweetest glens in Cumberland. And this precise spot will be the site of the gigantic embankment necessary for impounding the water, and raising the level of the lake 40 or 50 feet."

¹R.O. Kendal WDX/422/2. These are records from Mrs. Rawnsley at Allan Bank, Grasmere, deposited by Mr B.L. Thompson, Troutbeck, 5/6/74

In addition to these objections was the intention of Manchester to "modernize the valley", i.e. to submerge the small Wythburn Church and replace it with a larger, more modern building, while the beautiful western shore was to be cleared of, "useless encumbrances of rock and wood" so that a clear road would give an uninterrupted view of, "the marvels of engineering skill", of the Manchester engineers!¹

Worse still, the raising of the water level would increase the area from the present three hundred and thirty five acres to seven hundred.² In summer when most visitors were in the region the water levels would fall exposing to view what had been submerged in winter, leaving an unsightly mess and ugly margin. It was also pointed out that the aqueduct of seven or eight miles was a possible danger to residents and their property as it, "hung suspended" above them.

The second question, dealing with the necessity for the scheme, was stated in the pamphlet as being overstated. Manchester Corporation was said to have more water than was needed and intended to sell the water to a large portion of South Lancashire and North Cheshire. Figures are quoted to prove this statement.³

Finally, it was pointed out that there were nearer areas to Manchester from which water could be obtained.⁴ These would not be liable to so much damage as the small, delicate, exquisite Thirlmere valley, or indeed any part of the Lake District. The Thirlmere scheme, it was thought, would set a dangerous precedent. This in fact has happened.⁵

¹Described by Wordsworth in his poem, "The Waggoner", written in 1805 and published in 1819, as "Wythburn's modest House of prayer As lowly as the lowliest dwelling".

²As the pamphlet stating the case was being prepared, there were alterations in the engineering plans which enlarged the area to 800 acres.

³p16 of the pamphlet

⁴The final aqueduct was 95.75 miles long

⁵The Haweswater Reservoir which necessitated the drowning of Mardale, 1936

In the centre of the battle lay the hamlet of Wythburn, known locally as "The City", together with Armbboth and Legburthwaite. The vicar of Wythburn at the time was the Reverend Basil Ranaldson Lawson, born 1807 who was the fifth son of Reverend Dr. George Lawson, vicar of Heversham, Westmorland 1797-1842, also teaching at Heversham to supplement his income. When Basil had completed his school education, probably at Heversham, he went to St. Bees Theological College, which was founded in 1816 by Bishop Law of Chester and was ordained priest by the Bishop in 1838. He then became a curate in the Parish of Spalding, Lincolnshire 1838-1843 and seems to have been Chaplain to the gaol, the Spalding House of Correction. In 1849 he returned north to be vicar of Wythburn, which, together with Borrowdale, Newlands, Braithwaite and St. John's in the Vale, was a chapel of the mother church, Crosthwaite, Keswick, to which Hardwicke came, thirty four years later.

The small chapel had been founded in 1554 and there is some evidence of a building in existence about 1640 but the whole was rebuilt in 1740 as a simple stone building with thick walls. It was not until 1867 that Wythburn became a separate parish. Before that time, burials and marriages took place at St. John's in the Vale. Reverend Lawson was a dedicated and much loved priest who enjoyed all the country pursuits around him. Hardwicke, who had also lived in Lincolnshire, described him as, "The Good Shepherd of his flock". This kind, gentle man found himself in the forefront of the Thirlmere battle and protested vigorously on behalf of his parishioners, whose homes were under threat of destruction by flood.

The area might have suffered some changes, even if Manchester had not appeared on the scene, as there was a fair amount of lead mining in the area due to the discovery of an outcropping mineral vein on the flank of Helvellyn Low Man, which led to the development of the Wythburn mine, with the inevitable influx of miners, who were "outsiders" to the area. As a result of this activity there would have been some mine spoilation in the valley. Furthermore, tourists were visiting the Lakes, bringing with them

new influences. Changes were coming to the established way of life but these would not have led to the destruction of the community.

The opposition to the scheme seemed to be going well, through the efforts of the Thirlmere Defence Association, but the Manchester Waterworks Committee led by Sir John James Harwood, the Chairman, was by no means idle. Manchester needed eleven thousand acres in order to take in the whole watershed of Thirlmere. This necessitated gaining total knowledge of the land and its owners. Local people refused to give information, so that Committee resorted to engaging three well known local men to gather this by various means, which caught people off guard. The three men were Mr. David Pape of Keswick who bought cattle and had access to farms; Mr. Thomas Dixon Lancaster, a builder who could give valuations and Mr. Henry Irwin Jenkinson, the Guide Book writer, to whom local folk readily gave information, thinking it was for his writings.

One of the main landowners who stood in the way was Thomas Leathes Stanger Leathes, who owned Dalehead Hall estate and was Lord of the Manor of Legburthwaite¹ and owner of Thirlmere, sometimes known as Leathes Water. The Committee thought Dalehead would make an excellent headquarters for members, managers, designers and architects. Mr. Leathes threatened the Committee with severe measures if they were found on his land. Eager to see the margin of the lake, Alderman Grave and Sir John crawled on hands and knees past the Hall to survey the estate. It was a very wet day and in soaking wet clothes they had to return to Keswick, where they were staying. They both had to stay in bed with colds for the best part of a week.

Mr. Leathes died on the 19 June 1876 and the property which had belonged to the family since 1577, passed to his son, George, who had lived in Australia for over twenty years. He was more interested in the income to be gained from his inheritance than in any sentiment for his ancestral home. The next landowner to

¹Sometimes written as Legberthwaite

agree terms was Sir Harry Vane. He reserved the shooting and sporting rights over Armboth Fells for the rest of his life. This left Countess Ossalinsky, who held Manchester Corporation to ransom. She owned five farms which consisted altogether of eight hundred and fifty acres; seven hundred and fourteen acres on Armboth Fells with a number of sheep and stints. She was a local girl of the Jackson family who married a Russian or Polish count, when she was eighteen. On the death of her father in 1825, she inherited the estate but did not live at Armboth House, choosing instead to reside at Chestnut Hill. Her husband proved to be a scoundrel, his title open to question, although she retained it after he went abroad, where he died in 1859. She did not derive more than £500 per annum from all this property and the Corporation's valuation was £20,000 to £25,000. She had independent valuations made which ranged from £72,000 to over £100,000. The Corporation finally paid £77,000, but suggested that a Bill be put forward in Parliament for Local Government powers to appoint an arbitrator to deal with such cases.

The next move made by the Waterworks Committee was to send Sir John James Harwood to the area surrounding Thirlmere to hold a series of meetings with residents. Two Councillors (Batty and Hugo Shaw) were already there and joined him. Meetings were held at Rigg's Hotel, Windermere; Queen's Hotel, Ambleside; Grasmere and Keswick. At these meetings, the promises of money and increased work were dangled in front of the residents. The construction of the project would provide work for many, especially labourers and carters, while there would be an upsurge in trade for shopkeepers and other traders, with farmers getting better prices for their milk, butter and other produce. Butchers would prosper, as there would be a great demand for meat to feed the men doing heavy manual work. Opposition from most of the local people crumbled to such an extent, that Sir John was able to send his report by the night train to London, for Sir Edmund Beckett to use at the Select Committee the following afternoon.

The Thirlmere Water Bill then went through the different stages of Parliamentary Procedure, the second reading taking place on

the 12 February 1878. Mr. E.S. Howard (M.P. for East Cumberland) moved the rejection of the Bill and the Hon. W. Lowther (M.P. for Westmorland) seconded this. There were thirty three Petitions against the Bill. In spite of all these efforts the Bill passed the third reading and received Royal Assent on the 23 May 1879.

After all these negotiations it would be reasonable to expect work on the project to begin at once. This did not happen. There was a depression in trade around Manchester and the surrounding district, which, together with several wet seasons, lessened the demand for water. There were still plenty of technical difficulties to overcome, such as dealing with about two hundred owners, as well as four hundred lessees and tenants, each of whom had to be compensated for grass, crops, fences etc. The delay caused more questioning as to the need for the scheme. To counteract this, contracts for the work were advertised, ten of them, plus separate ones for ironwork, castings, drain pipes, valves, girders, gates and cranes. Arrangements were made for the expected work force which consisted of thirty two large and nine smaller temporary huts at Legburthwaite, Armbboth and Wythburn. Some workers would have lodgings in local homes, as far afield as Grasmere. Later, when the work began, a big room was built at Legburthwaite and a teacher engaged to cater for the education of the workers' children, as many brought their families with them. Trouble was expected by residents as to the behaviour of these navvies, but this did not develop to any serious extent. Another room was built at Wythburn and both rooms could be used for social and recreational purposes, with books, newspapers and magazines provided by the Manchester Corporation. In times of winter storms and snowfalls, soup and hot meals were provided for all. Lady Bective took an interest in the welfare of the workers and their families and caused a permanent mission hall to be built. In connection with the mission was a hospital, housed in a nearby house under the direction of Miss E. Pauline and an assistant. As the work proceeded the hospital moved to sites near to the work. Religious services were held and no doubt the Reverend Lawson, who had fought hard to oppose the scheme,

although elderly, being a good and sincere man, helped when possible. He had a curate from Ireland¹ to assist him in his last two years until he died in 1892. There were deaths and accidents amongst the workers, even during the time before the work proper began, perhaps even marriages, so the little Wythburn Church, which escaped destruction in the flooding, was kept busy. His successor was the Reverend Winfried des Voeux Hill who suggested that a collection be made for a beautiful memorial window depicting, "The Good Shepherd". The navvies who got on well with the Reverend Lawson supported this. Hardwicke said at the time, "Honoured by and an honour to the parish which he served."²

Meanwhile, the rumblings of opposition to the Thirlmere scheme continued, not only from the Defence Association but also from some members of the Manchester Corporation, on the grounds of expense and whether it was really necessary, when, in 1884 a period of drought settled the matter. Work had to begin with all speed and Mr. G.H. Hill was appointed as the Engineer. Members of the City Council wished to visit the site to see how the money was being spent. Consequently, on 22 August 1890, forty members travelled to Thirlmere to inspect the site and took the opportunity to lay a foundation stone on the embankment and made a private subscription, to present a silver trowel to the Chairman, Sir John James Harwood, as he was chosen to carry out the ceremony. It took until August 1894 before the project was completed. During that time a watchful eye was kept on the work by those concerned with preserving the beauty of the Lake District and Thirlmere in particular, in whatever ways they could manage. Hardwicke, although keeping a low profile in the campaign was alert to the need for vigilance.

¹Rev. William Edward Hallam, eldest son of the Rev. Canon Hallam M.A., Rector of Tomb, Diocese of Ferns, County Wexford. Married Rev. Lawson's daughter. They moved to Newent in Gloucester

²Details of Rev. Lawson's life from, Thirlmere Across the Bridges to Chapel 1849-1852. From the diary of Rev. Basil R. Lawson, by Margaret Armstrong, published by Peel Wyke 1989

By the side of the road running alongside Thirlmere and in the middle of the construction work stood a dark coloured rock which had come to be known as "The Rock of Names", because the one inch high initials of six poets had been carved upon it, when they had a picnic.¹ Wordsworth was the tallest so his initials were at the top, W.W.; underneath was M.H. - Mary Hutchinson, who became his wife; his sister Dorothy - D.W. was next; followed by S.T.C. - Samuel Taylor Coleridge; J.W. - John Wordsworth, the sailor brother and S.H. - Sara Hutchinson. Hearing that the rock was in danger of annihilation, Hardwicke gained permission to remove the boulder totally for placing in a safe place, probably the Wordsworth Institute at Cockermouth. The stone was of lava and volcanic ash and although he took skilled masons from Keswick to do the work, they were unable to make any impression upon it. Since the construction work could not be held up, the stone was blown up by dynamite. On hearing of this, Hardwicke was angry and upset. He and Edith spent two days searching amongst the rubble for fragments of the rock and when they had managed to find most of it, four men constructed a cairn under the direction of Hardwicke, which was placed higher up above the original position.²

Finally, after four hard years, the work was completed with a straining well and pumping station masquerading as a mock castle. The opening date was fixed for Friday, the 12 October 1894, when the members of the Council and their guests travelled to Windermere on a special train, continuing in carriages through Ambleside, Rydal and Grasmere to Wythburn. There was great excitement among the residents, who lined the route to see the Lord Mayor, wearing his chain and badge of office, together with the other dignitaries in carriages. Grasmere people gave them a great welcome, hanging up displays of flags and bunting. Special guests had been invited to join them at the pumping station, where the ceremony was to take place. Among them were

¹Described by Dorothy Wordsworth in her Journal, the 4 May 1802.

²It remained there until 1984 when the N.W. Water Authority handed it over to the Dove Cottage Trust in Grasmere. Now it is in the garden behind the Wordsworth Museum.

Hardwicke, Dr. Bardsley (Bishop of Carlisle) who was a native of Manchester, Sir Joseph Savory (M.P. for North Westmorland), Mr. James Cropper (chairman of Westmorland County Council), Mr. W.H. Hills (Ambleside) and Mr. G.H. Hill, the scheme engineer.

Hardwicke opened the proceedings with a long prayer containing many Biblical allusions to hills, water, floods, springs, clouds and rivers.¹ Those who had died during the construction were remembered.

"And now, O God, we dedicate this gift of gathered waters unto Thee and to our brothers' service. We pray Thee to bless these waters to many generations. Let this river of God flow through the far-off city to cleanse and purify; to help and heal. Pour it with full refreshment for the bodies of our fellow-townsmen. Speed it with light and joy and gladness for their souls. Send it with cheer and comfort to their homes, with health and life into their dwellings ... "²

The Lord Mayor then paid tribute to Sir John James Harwood and asked him to speak. Sir John recalled the progress of the undertaking, from when they were regarded as vandals and the influx of so many navvies caused alarm. There had, however, been very little trouble and fears had been foundless. The residents had benefitted and prospered through increased trade, the area had been improved by Manchester Corporation. Travelling had been improved by the building of the new road on the west side of the lake, five miles long and wide enough for two coaches to pass. He ended by hoping that friendship between Manchester and Cumberland people would grow and develop, "to the end of time." The Lord Mayor then asked him to turn the wheel which caused the water of the lake to enter the aqueduct, which he did, to loud cheers. The Bishop of Carlisle pronounced the Benediction. The party then drove along the new road on

¹e.g. Psalms 121, 104, St. John 4 v. 13-14

²Full text see Harwood, Sir John James, History and Description of the Thirlmere Water Scheme, Henry Blacklock & Co., 1895, pp170-1 which contains many details in this chapter. Sir J.J. Harwood was Chairman of the Waterworks Committee.

their way to lunch in the temporary schoolroom at Bridge End. Loyal toasts were given, with Hardwicke proposing the toast of "The Waterworks Committee of the Manchester Corporation."¹ He remembered those who had died before the completion of the scheme, five remained, of which three were present - Sir John Harwood, Alderman Shaw and Alderman Thompson. Their work was compared with Rome at the height of her powers and found to be greater, indeed a labour of love, "to a great and struggling population." Hardwicke went on to refer to the initial opposition to the project as people tried to protect their homes and land and also the beauty of the area, with its links with the great poets, Wordsworth and his sister, Coleridge and De Quincey. He felt that all regretted the destruction of certain well loved things, especially the Rock of Names, the old road and Pack Horse bridge. Nevertheless, Manchester was now, "bound indissolubly to Cumberland by the stream of water." Continuing, he praised the kindness, generosity and unselfishness of Manchester and trusted there would be continuing efforts to preserve the beauty, "of this Land of Lakes." Hardwicke wished that the Queen or a member of the Royal family could have been present, but continued with praise for Sir John Harwood, whom he linked with King Arthur, Excalibur and the Knights of the Round Table, love rising from the lake, not war. He stressed how hard Sir John had worked on their behalf also referring to his friend, Mr. Hill, the engineer. Hardwicke ended by reading one of his sonnets² which he had written in honour of Sir John.

In reply, Sir John felt that he could not find language to respond to such an eloquent speech but expressed his thanks and stressed the strong link with Cumberland.

Alderman Sir Boskin T. Leech proposed "The Guests" and coupled the toast with the name of Sir John Hibbert K.C.B., M.P. (Financial Secretary to the Treasury and Chairman of the Lancashire County Council). He then responded by saying how they had overcome all

¹Ibid, pp175-7

²p176. Indeed, Hardwicke wrote 4 sonnets, which were passed among the crowd. Another one is on p78 of E.F. Rawnsley's, Canon Rawnsley

difficulties and had in fact, "improved nature" and hoped everything would continue to be done to preserve, "the Lake District from any kind of injury." He also referred to Sir John's splendid work and hoped a fountain would be erected as a memorial to him in Manchester. He then proposed the health of the Lord Mayor of Manchester and went on to extol the virtues of local government, stressing the example of Manchester.

The party then drove to Keswick, returning on the special train to Manchester, where another ceremony took place the next day, with large crowds, bells ringing and bands playing. The Chairman turned on the water to a temporary fountain in Albert Square and received a Congratulatory Address from the mayor, Aldermen and Citizens of the City of Manchester.

There was much finishing off to be done. Manchester Corporation had agreed in Section 13 of the Act to plant "indigenous forest trees and underwood" to beautify Thirlmere's scarred shores. In 1908, 2,000 acres of alien conifers were planted. Access to the lake was denied. This went unchallenged until 1985, over ninety years later, when Mrs. Susan Johnson of West Cumberland, took the North West Water Authority, which had taken over from the Manchester Corporation, to court for not carrying out the Act properly. She won her case and while the planting cannot be carried out all at once, gradually native broadleaf trees are being introduced. In 1982 a new purification plant was installed and the public are allowed to have free access and the "Trespassers will be prosecuted" signs removed.

As the level of the lake rose the valley was flooded. Homes and farms were drowned, together with the famous Nag's Head Inn. The church survived as it stood on higher ground. The school was closed and finally demolished to make a car park for those who come to climb Helvellyn.

Wordsworth said the little church had two bells in its belfry but Hartley Coleridge thought it had one. In 1894 Hardwicke deplored the new belfry built by Manchester with well dressed stone. He wished the fairies would take it away in the night.