

**AN EXTRACT FROM  
'A WALK AROUND DOWNHAM'  
By Elizabeth Wrigley  
A historical stroll around the village of Downham**

**The Squire at the Hall**

Downham allegedly had a 'chieftain' in pre-Norman times when Aufray (Alfred) the Saxon was the village 'elder'. Following the Norman Conquest several estates were held by thanes, who were ranked between nobleman and freeman, their land granted in return for military service to the king. One of these minor noblemen was Henry de Downham whose daughter, Margaret, married John de Dyneley in 1308. In 1354 the manor was granted to the Dyneleys and was held by the family for some 200 years. After a number of exchanges in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Asshetons settled in Downham Hall and have remained to the present day.

On the approach road from Chatburn, Downham Hall can be seen beyond a tree-lined drive to the right. It is the home of Lord Clitheroe of the family of Assheton and has a magnificent south view towards Pendle. The hall, not open to the public, has belonged to the family since 1558 when Richard Assheton of Leaver (the younger brother of Ralph Assheton of Leaver) purchased the manor.



**The Hall**

Downham Hall has been much altered and rebuilt over the centuries. The 'two Williams', William I born in 1758 and William II born in 1788, were both involved in much rebuilding both of Downham Hall and the cottages in the village. In 1779 the first William began alterations to the hall and later to the layout of the drive and road in front of the hall. These were re-routed around 1800 when a surprising find was made of two bodies, thought to be Roman soldiers, near the present front gates, which lie on the route of the ancient Roman road from Ribchester to Ilkley.

William II was responsible for the most radical changes to the appearance of the hall when in the 1830s a great rebuilding took place. Ralph, son of William II, continued with the building improvements on the



estate, particularly the farms, many of which were rebuilt or improved on older sites.

### **The Stocks and Houses on the Brow**

Like so many historic villages Downham retains the relic of the village stocks, although the stocks tree which overlooked the site of ancient punishment, met its demise in 1996 replaced by the lime you see today. The stocks were in use in 1803, for Jonathan Read was paid 1s 3d for repair of the stocks.

In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the top part of the village had a much different layout. There was a large cross in the road about half way between the church gates and the inn. A few small cottages lined the lower part of church brow below the churchyard. Downham had around 10 more cottages 140 years ago than today.



Top Row

### **Village Schools**

A little way along Twiston Lane, a grassy bank lies to the left beside a small copse. This is all that remains of an early village school, the predecessor to the school on Main Street. A school free to the children of Downham had been endowed in the will of Ralph Assheton in 1705.

On the main village street the school building, with a date stone of 1839, is on the left. Closure in 1985 brought some sadness to the community but the sounds of children playing can still be heard as it is now a pre-school.



Downham School (c 1839) in 1910

### **Main Street**

It is thought that Old Well Hall was the home of the village reeve (steward). Its date of about 1625 makes it the second oldest house in the village.

Downham, like many other Pennine villages, had established a substantial cottage spinning and weaving industry long before the Industrial Revolution changed the landscape. Agriculture was the traditional occupation of country people but increasingly farmers supplemented their income by diversifying and taking up weaving. The row of cottages on Main Street is linked



Old Well Hall – 1625



to the weaving trade and was largely rebuilt in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Downham handloom weavers thrived. From 1780 to 1830 the population of Downham parish increased rapidly. However, handloom weaving declined sharply with the introduction of mechanised looms in the 1820s. This left many struggling for survival.

#### **Chapel Brow/Keepers Lane/Moor Lane**

Chapel Brow is a reference to the Wesleyan chapel at the top of the brow – now the village hall. At the summit of Moor Lane (sometimes known as Keepers Lane) the chapel was built in 1816. Non-conformist practices flourished in textile communities: two Downham weavers, Daniel Slater and Richard Broxup were the first trustees of the chapel. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War it ceased to be used as a place of worship and was sold and converted to the village hall in the late 1950s.

Moor Lane led in medieval times to the common land and the moor. The higher cottage, 'Keepers Cottage', allegedly once the home of the village gamekeeper, has a date stone of 1684.

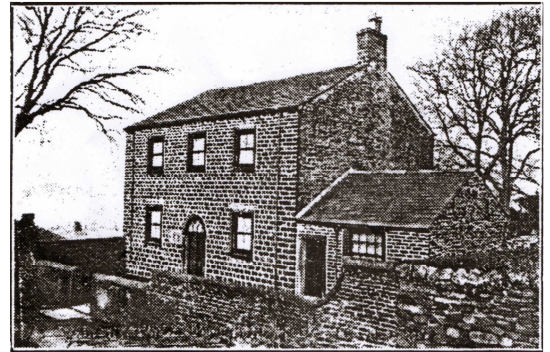
#### **Lower Hall**

Lower Hall, or Old Hall, with a date of 1580 is probably the oldest house in the village. The hall was built in Tudor times when the yeoman farmer was making a profit from the land, modernising farming methods and building the great Tudor farmhouses that are a feature of the Pendle area.

#### **St Leonard's Church**

St Leonard, the patron saint of prisoners, features in a number of old Lancashire churches. The west window near the main entrance showing St Leonard in chains is in memory of the Rev Richard Assheton (1835-1909), brother of Sir Ralph Assheton (1830-1907).

It is probable that a church has existed for over 700 years. The church is recorded in 1283 from an inventory of the chapelries in the patronage of the Rector of Whalley and existed before Whalley Abbey (1294-1536/7). When rebuilding took place in 1910 Saxon or early Norman foundations were found and the local field



Chapel 1816 to 1958



View towards the Chapel (Village Hall)



St. Leonard window 1910

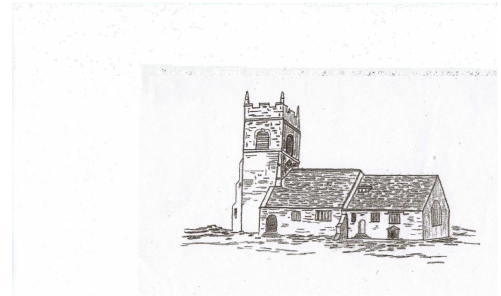
name Kirkacre (pure Saxon meaning church lands) suggests an early church. We know the dates of the more recent re-buildings but it may well be that the church has been added to or rebuilt on the same site at least four times. The early church recorded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the Saxon/Norman remains found in 1910 are evidence of an early church building; the 15<sup>th</sup> century tower could be the next version of the village church; we know that in 1800 and again in 1910/11 the church was radically altered with much of the body of the church rebuilt.

The history books shed a few details on some of the people linked to Downham Church over the centuries. In 1399, when the chapel was a dependency of Whalley Abbey, Richard le Wright was chaplain. In fact several monks and priests looked after the chapel up to the Reformation after which a single minister or curate officiated.

Depositions taken in 1563 showed that lands had been endowed by William Hirde (priest deceased) for the maintenance of the services of a priest to do the morning mass. The endowment lasted for 40 years and the priest also had to keep a school – this is the first record of a school in Downham. One priest had taken ‘the profits thereof’ and was restrained by Edward Dauncey who was in ownership of the manor for a brief period in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

During the reign of Edward VI (1547-53) when churches were stripped of their vestments commissioners removed two chalices, a cross of latten and some vestments. Allegedly an attempt was made to remove the bells but these were left. The legend that the three oldest bells came from Whalley Abbey at the Dissolution is unlikely. It is more probable by their date, the 15<sup>th</sup> century, that both the bells and the tower were established together and have remained so to the present time. The old bells bear the mark of John Walgrave, a bell founder of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The tower is described in some history notes as 14<sup>th</sup> century architecture, in others as having features dating from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Putting the history notes together there is more weight to the theory that the tower, possibly the whole church, was rebuilt in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. A description of this old church, before the body of the church was rebuilt in 1800, was of a plain Gothic building with tower, two side aisles, a north and south chapel and a middle choir.



Downham Church pre 1800



Downham Church 1800 to 1910



Nave St Leonard's Church

This old church, with the exception of the tower, was pulled down in 1800 and rebuilt. A three-decker pulpit, pews and a gallery were incorporated. The spout heads on the tower date from this time, the brass chandelier is dated 1802. A stone sundial in the churchyard has been there since 1808.

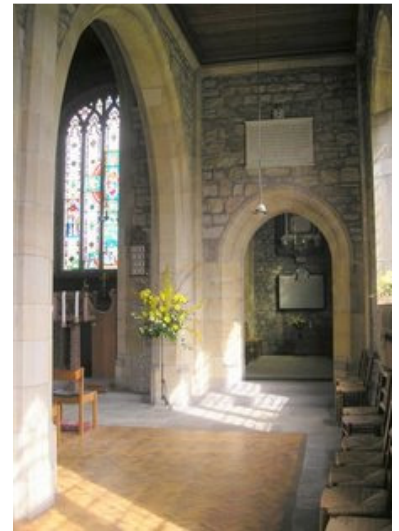
Little over a 100 years passed until the next radical change to the church building, again with the exception of the tower. The architect for the 1910 rebuilding, Sir Mervyn McCartney, created a design much more in keeping with the old tower. Building work began in the summer of 1910 and was completed in November 1911. A bible was presented to the first couple to be married in the 'new church' - Martha Banks and Frank Parker.

### **The Assheton Arms**

Formerly the George and Dragon, the inn was built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, probably on the site of an earlier village inn. An old villager once claimed that there were three village inns in the past, one on Top Row and one on Main Street, as well as the existing inn. Until about 1910 a farm had adjoined the inn; the last licensee to run both public house and farm was Joe Banks in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

References to the village inn have been made over several hundred years. An entry in the diary of Nicholas Assheton in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century relates an occasion when the whole family retired to the village inn following a family meal.

The Manor Court or Halmote was held twice yearly at the inn, usually in April and October. This was an administrative meeting, not a criminal court: the jurors dealt with the payment of rents to the lord of the manor; land transactions were recorded; local bye-laws had to be upheld and the appointment of constables and other minor officials took place at the Halmote. The officials meted out fines for petty offences and generally settled local affairs. The manor court rolls of the 17<sup>th</sup> century record several instances of villagers fined for selling ale contrary to statute, including fines for selling ale at the time of Divine Service. Many people were licensed to sell ale before the days of tea and coffee consumption when everyone, including children, drank ale with their meals. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century tea and coffee were very expensive with heavy taxes; only the



South Aisle St Leonard's



George and Dragon c 1900



The Assheton Arms today



rich could afford these relatively new beverages. The Halmote and its functions are history now – almost – except that the twice yearly collection of rents to the lord of the manor, in May and November, still takes place at the Assheton Arms, a relic of the ancient Manor Court meeting.

In 1955, when Ralph Assheton was elevated to the peerage, the George and Dragon was renamed the Assheton Arms. The pub sign features the family coat of Arms with the motto 'nec arrego, nec dubito' – I am neither proud nor afraid.



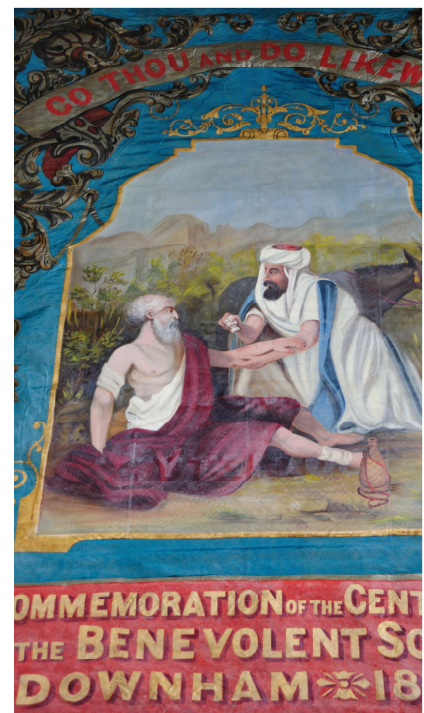
### **The Benevolent Society**

Not only in the past was the local inn a meeting place for 'business'; many groups and clubs countrywide continue to hold their meetings in pubs and hotels. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Downham Benevolent Society held their meetings at the George and Dragon.

Benevolent or Friendly Societies were early insurance societies, the product of the organised working classes. Sometimes known as the 'Downham Club' or the 'Old Sick Club', the Society provided for the welfare of its members at times when families were in penury when the main breadwinner was unable to work.

The first members of this Society were weavers and those linked to the textile industry. Later, membership was broadened to include other trades and classes of employment.

In 1885 the club celebrated its centenary but appears to have disbanded in 1913. The Downham Band played for the centenary celebrations and the banner was proudly displayed .



Benevolent Society Banner - 1885  
"Go Thou and do Likewise"



Benevolent Society Centenary    Lancs Archive DDX 28/341

## **The Post Office and Shop**

Recently the Post Office was a combination of post office, gift shop and tea rooms. It is closed at present awaiting a new phase in its life. The present post office was completed in 1915 on the site of an old barn belonging to the George and Dragon. A prolific programme of rebuilding was ongoing at this time: as well as the Post Office and church, Hillcrest cottage (the first house on the corner opposite the church) was rebuilt and the school was extended during this era. The old village Post Office was only a few yards away, one of two cottages below the George and Dragon right angles to the new Post Office. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Walter Briggs had taken up residence in the old Post Office with his wife and two young daughters; he was the first proprietor of the new Post Office.

Before he moved to Downham Walter had, for some years, been a keen photographer and publisher of postcards. He continued to produce many post cards of Downham and the surrounding area in his years at the Post Office. This was the age of the post card: in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century thousands were produced – with four postal deliveries a day, a card or letter posted in the morning could well arrive in the afternoon in the same locality.

With help from his daughters and son Harry, Walter Briggs' village shop was the hub of village life, issuing provisions for most household needs. There was employment for other locals too; Maggie Smithies worked for years for Walter and Fanny Briggs and Joe Banks, the publican's son, delivered groceries. Orders for groceries were collected every Monday and delivered by pony and cart later in the week. There was stabling behind the shop for their two ponies, cart and trap. On Wednesday half-day closing, Walter and family went off by pony and trap into the countryside to collect butter and eggs for sale in the shop. The Briggs family ran the Post Office until the late 1930s when, a year or so after Walter's death, Fanny Briggs retired and the Dugdale family took over the business. Maggie Smithies had worked for years for the Briggs family before her marriage to Jim Dugdale in 1934 and was thus well equipped to take over the business. The Dugdales stayed until the 1950s when Tom and Doris Pringle arrived in the village.

A succession of proprietors has modernised and developed the village shop, introducing the tearooms and, for a time, bed and breakfast arrangements – vital developments in an age when the village shop can no longer compete for the needs of the community and exists on the whims of the tourist trade. One of the more unusual jobs of the last proprietors was to unlock the church each day for visitors.



The Old Post Office Downham c 1900



1900 Postcard  
by Walter Briggs Postmaster Downham



Post Office and Stocks C 1915



Post Office 2010

