

Richard Thornton's Endowments Sesquicentennial Year at Burton in Lonsdale

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This note is to mention that 2004 is the 150th anniversary of the building of Burton in Lonsdale Village Hall, on the left above. It was converted in 1854 from a tithe barn into a Sunday School following a public appeal in 1853 for subscriptions which came from local property owners, principal among the benefactors was Richard Thornton (1776-1865), who the same year endowed Burton's Voluntary Aided Primary School, on the right above.

The site of the tithe barn was on church land then belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Worcester, the patrons of the parish of Thornton in Lonsdale which housed the mother church of the chapel of ease in Burton in Lonsdale. Burton became a separate parish with its own vicar in 1866. The Sunday School replaced the *'very incommodious and disagreeable'* barn premises in the yard of the Black Bull Inn (now Bull Farmhouse) which had been in use since before 1831.

The present church, All Saints which is visible behind the Village Hall in the picture, was built in 1870 by Thomas Thornton, nephew of Richard Thornton, on the site that included several cottages, in one of which he was born. On his death in 1865, Richard's estate was worth some three million pounds--*'by far the largest fortune of the century to that date'*. In a long list of charitable bequests, Richard left £10,000 *'upon trust for maintenance of schools built at my expense in Burton for poor children'*. Thomas Thornton inherited one million pounds but survived his uncle only by five years. These benefactions by the Thornton family are of considerable national interest since Richard Thornton became a millionaire and in his lifetime one of the richest men in England, earning the sobriquet *'Duke of Dantzic'* from his strategically important commercial shipping interests during the Napoleonic wars [1, 2].

The Village Hall originally was used not only as a Sunday School but also as a day school for the under 6 year olds, who were too young for normal school. At its opening in January 1854 the endowed school was intended for 46 boys and 46 girls, then the village population was over 700 with active potteries and textile making [3], [4]. The Hall was used also for various kinds of meetings, including for example in 1921 a meeting of depositors of the Yorkshire Penny Bank. It continued as the infants' department of Richard Thornton's School until about 1900, and as a Sunday School until the Second World War, since when it has served as a Community Centre, becoming a Registered Charity in 1977.

Richard Thornton's business was first based near the Southwark end of London Bridge, originally as a hop merchant when in 1798 he was admitted as a member of Lloyd's [1]. However, he moved across the river in 1815 to Old Swan Wharf, Old Swan Stairs, a little west of Fishmongers Hall. From these stairs boatmen, mostly from across the river at Southwark, competed for rowing people up and down river. Kept on the premises at Old Swan Wharf and shown to visitors, including Evans [2], were models of the schools and the church built by the Thorntons at Burton. Evans [2] describes meeting Richard a few months before his death, and similarly Thomas a few months before his.

Addendum

Burton in Lonsdale '*Borctune*' in Domesday and '*Burtona de Lanesdala*' in Pipe Rolls of 1130, was the Head Manor for Burton Chase from pre-conquest times, and had a market charter from 1306 [5]. It has remains of a motte and bailey, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, in the centre of a Conservation Area containing 33 listed buildings, including the former Earl of Derby's Courthouse [6, 7].

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1. W.G. Hoskins, *Richard Thornton A Victorian Millionaire*, **History Today**, Volume XII, 8 (1962) 574-580
2. D. Morier Evans. **Within and Without: 'The Old House in the City' Old Swan Wharf, Old Swan Stairs**. *Gentlemen's Magazine* (1870) 307-312.
3. Muriel Humphries, **Quarries, Coal, Clay and Cloth**, *Hudson History, Settle* 2003. (72pp)
4. M. and G. Woolnough, Editors, **Glimpses of Burton's Past, Burton-in-Lonsdale**, Millennium History Group, Burton-in-Lonsdale, 2000. (60pp)
5. M.C. Higham. **The effects of the Norman Conquest on north west England with particular reference to the honors of Hornby and Burton-in-Lonsdale**, PhD thesis, Lancaster University 1992.
6. T. Stephens. **The Earl of Derby's Manor**, *Yorkshire History Quarterly*, 6, 1 (2000) 42-51.
7. C.T.J. Dodson [The Earl of Derby's Courthouse at Burton in Lonsdale](#), *Hudson History, Settle* 2003, 2007 (88pp)