

A Brief History of Levens from the Parish Plan 2008

The name 'Levens', recorded as *Lefuenes* in the Domesday Book, only became popular usage after the creation of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Levens in 1836. Whilst the name was not unknown, each of the constituent hamlets now amalgamated and known as 'Levens', was usually known by its own name. The Parish boundaries have changed over the years, but the original hamlets consisted of the large village of *Beathwaite Green*, (which comprised the whole of the present village centre), the south part of *Brigsteer*, the north part of *Leasgill*, *Sizergh Cottages* and *Sizergh Fell Side*, *Causeway End*, *Cotes* and the hamlet previously known as *Newby Bridge* but now known as *Gilpin Bridge*.

Lefuenes was the manor of Levens owned by Levens Hall, but there was also the smaller manor of Nether Levens, which was held by a family called *de Levins*, which later became part of the Dallam Tower estate.

The etymology of the name *Lefuenes* is generally accepted as being from the Saxon 'the habitation of Leoffwine'.

There have been many finds of ancient relics from Iron Age, Bronze Age, Viking and Romano-British times, some as recently as 2002.

Nether or Low Levens and Levens Hall are the oldest recorded buildings in the parish and have remains of defensive walls and towers. Other buildings can be dated to the late 17th century and Underhill retains the layout of an old Westmorland longhouse.

Census records show the 2001 population as only 14 more than the 1841 figure of 993, whilst the number of households increased from 180 to 453. Both the population and household totals have significantly increased since then.

The economy of Levens has always been based on agriculture; mainly a subsistence type of farming, but this was greatly changed by the enclosure of the commons in 1815. Many inhabitants either owned or rented a strip of moss [a 'moss-end'] for cutting peat and growing oats. The supplementary income obtained from selling peats in Kendal slowly came to an end after the construction of the Kendal canal in 1819 allowed the import of coal, although there was still a peat-dealer in the village as late as 1909.

Levens was originally part of the Parish of Heversham. Our church, St John the Evangelist, was built between 1824 and 1827 and held its first service in 1828. Mrs. Howard of Levens Hall met the construction cost, and she also funded the building of a parsonage, demolished in 1964. A Wesleyan Chapel founded in 1795 was replaced with a new one built in 1888.

Education is first recorded in the parish in 1810 when Mrs Howard founded a school for girls. In 1819 a National School was opened for boys with a new boys school being built in 1824, again at the expense of Levens Hall. The boys school ceased to be used in 1907 when boys, girls and infants came together to be educated on the

present school site. The school has recently celebrated that centenary.

The village has had two previous reading rooms with the present Village Institute being bought following fund raising as part of the celebration of the coronation of Edward VII.

The playing fields are laid out on land belonging to Dallam Tower and were opened in 1938.

The parish includes two public houses, the Hare & Hounds first documented in 1714 and the Strickland Arms. There used to be an inn, the Duke of York, at Sizergh Fellside, and a beer house, the Royal Oak, in Main Street, the latter being closed in 1912.

Levens was in the former South Westmorland Rural District in the county of Westmorland, which became South Lakeland District Council and Cumbria County Council following local government reorganisation in 1974.