

Ennerdale Show – a brief history

Origins and early years

In 1895 a group of Ennerdale businessmen and farmers, including Jackson and Jeremiah Rawling, John Smith and Ted Wallace, were looking for ways to support the village school. This concern perhaps arose because the winter of 1894/5 had been especially severe; a view from February 1895 showing the lake (then known as *Broadwater*) frozen solid under a thick layer of snow.



Ennerdale Lake frozen over February 1895.



Whitehaven News - 22nd August 1895



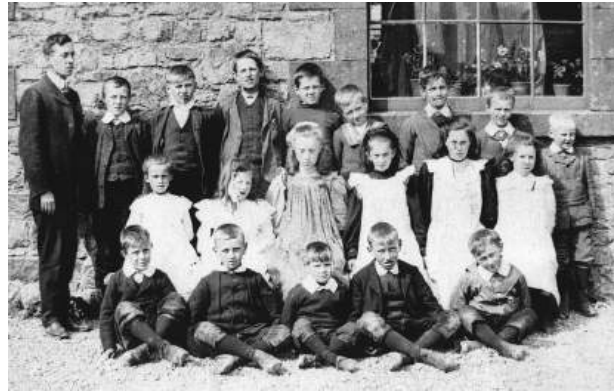
Edward Wallace

By summer 1895 the idea had become a flower show and “scholars treat” (picnic) followed by an evening ball. This was all to be held in the school room on the last Wednesday in August, before the Autumn term started.



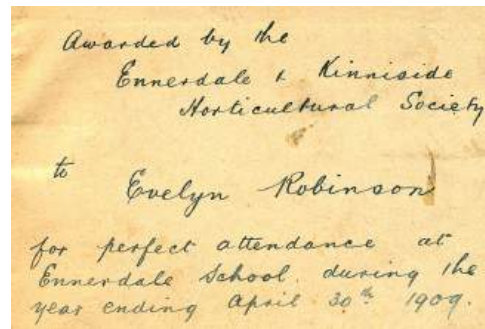
Whitehaven News - 2nd August 1900 - first livestock classes

This was so successful that it immediately became an annual event, although for the only time in the show’s history, it was, for a few years, held early in August before eventually reverting to the last Wednesday. In 1900 it was expanded to include produce and also a “sheep show” (Herdwicks of course), in a sense reviving the “sheep fairs” which had regularly been held in the valley many years earlier.



The livestock classes had of course to be outside, so Wallace Home field near St Mary's Church was used for these.

By now the support for the school included wagonette outings (e.g. to the seaside at St Bees) and the provision of books as school prizes



Popular Prices.

ENNERDALE AND KINNISIDE
HORTICULTURAL & AGRICULTURAL
SOCIETY.

NINETEENTH
ANNUAL SHOW
 Will be held at
ENNERDALE BRIDGE,
ON WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27.

The MARQUEE (in which there will be a Grand Display of Horticultural and Agricultural Produce) will be OPENED at Two p.m. by
G. G. OLDFIELD, Esq.
 (Mayor of Whitehaven).

There is a Good Entry in the Sheep and Dog Classes, which comprise: Herdwick and Half-bred Sheep, Gilties, Terrives, Fochmonds, and Shepherds' Dogs.

SPORTS.

2.00 p.m.—4.00 for BOYS' WRESTLING, under 11.
 3.45—4.45 for HOUND TRAIL.
 4.30—5.30 for WHIPPET RACE.
 6.00—6.30 for 11 Stone WRESTLING.
 (Under their different Association Rules.)

Entries for Whippet Race Close August 25th, and will be received by W. TAYLOR, Koper Street, Whitehaven.

JUDGING to Commence at Ten o'clock.

ADMISSION up to 4.00, 1s; After, 6d.

The COCKERMOUTH INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL BAND will Play Selections during the day, and for a PICNIC in the Evening.

After which
A GRAND BALL
 Will be held in the SCHOOLROOM.

The Committee provide REFRESHMENTS in the Schoolroom at a Reasonable Charge.

The Whitehaven Motor Char-a-banc will run from Leather Street and Clabor Street to and from the Show, and Wagonettes will meet Trains at Eborah and other Stations.

JAMES WILLIAMSON, Secretary.

Whitehaven News - 11th August 1913 - transport available

Extra classes and events such as working dogs, Cumberland and Westmorland Wrestling and Hound Trails were soon added. By 1913 half breed sheep classes had begun whilst the now greatly enlarged show had moved to a field near the school which would be its home until 1950.

It was also being widely advertised and special transport arranged, e.g. char-a-bancs from Whitehaven and wagonettes from local railway stations. This perhaps indicates how the show had already become an attraction not just to the local agricultural community but also to the workers in nearby industrial towns and villages. In fact the same pattern persists to this day, when a visitor to the show is as likely to work in the nuclear industry as on a lakeland farm.

The special transport no longer exists of course but Cumberland Motor Services continued to provide special or re-routed buses to Ennerdale Bridge, on show days, into the 1950s.

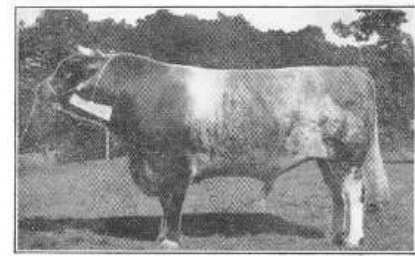
Between the Wars

The 20th show was held after WWI had started – in fact it wasn't even advertised in the Whitehaven News until 10th August, six days after war was declared! Everything then stopped for five years, with neither the appetite nor resources to hold a show, until the "Victory Show" of 1919.



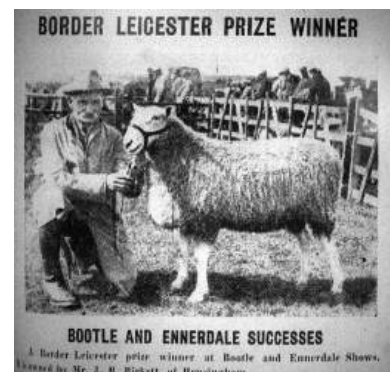
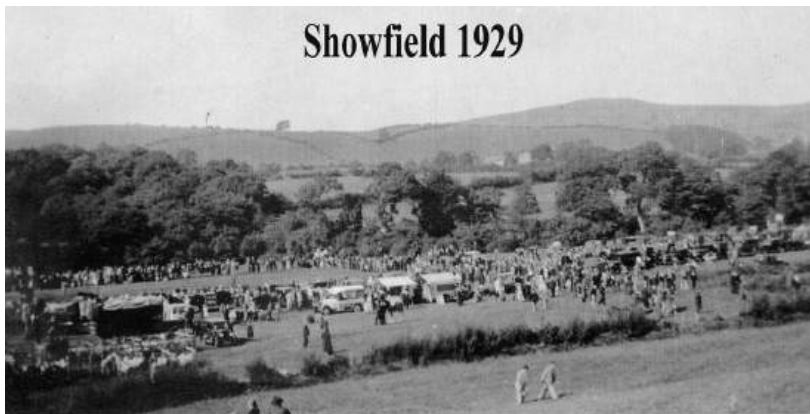
This "reorganized and extended" show for the first time included classes for working horses and shorthorn cattle. Next year working dogs were included again, hound trails were run in conjunction with the show and the first children's classes were added - for wild flower bouquets.

In 1921 a fell or cross-country race was tried, but this wasn't to become a regular item for many years. Saddle and harness horse classes began in 1922 and proper printed programmes seem to have first been sold in 1924. Next year saw sheep dog trials, more equestrian events, the first show photograph in the *Whitehaven News* and the first appearance in print of the term "*La'al Royal*" or "*Herdwick Royal*".



AN ENNERDALE CHAMPION.
Prince, the champion bull at Ennerdale Show, owned by Messrs. Tracey, of Calderbridge.

Things settled down now for several years – more industrial classes were around by 1933 although some had started as early as 1906. The earliest surviving picture of the show field was taken in 1929 and Border Leicester sheep were admitted in 1931.



In retrospect perhaps the most significant event of the 1930s was the presidency of “Mrs Heelis of Ambleside” in 1934. Better known now by her maiden name Beatrix Potter was a noted breeder of Herdwick sheep who won many trophies at Ennerdale and elsewhere around this time.

She was also an important member of the Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association and was its president –elect in 1943 but unfortunately died before she could take office.



Beatrix Potter - president 1934

Celebrations. c852

ENNERDALE AND KINNSIDE
Horticultural and Agricultural
Society

VICTORY SHOW
AT
ENNERDALE BRIDGE
ON WEDNESDAY
(August 29, 1945)

**£300 IN MONEY AND
PRIZES**

FIVE CHALLENGE CUPS

ENTRIES CLOSE ON AUGUST 20th

Special Attraction: Potato Race on
Horseback, Musical Chairs on Horse-
back, In-and-Out Race on Horseback.
Two Pony Scampers for Children.
Entries Taken on the Field.

HOUND TRAILS

HOUNDS slipped at 4-15 p.m.
PUPPIES slipped at 5-30 p.m.

Under H.T.A. Rules. Trails Guarded.
Starter and Judge:
Col. W. H. McCowan, C.B.E., D.S.O.

A GRAND BALL

In the Schoolroom at 8-30 p.m.
Music by Teddy's Band.

Prize Lists and other Information
from the Secretary, H. Williamson,
Routen, Ennerdale, Cleator. c764

Whitehaven News - 16th August 1945 - 2 days after VJ Day!



[Photo by R. H. L.]
"CRAGG MICK" A FAMOUS ENNERDALE RAM.
Herdwick Champion at four Shows in 1934, it is owned by Mr. W. N. Park.

Scaur Head and Swinside, 1953-57 and 1958-1973

The 41st Ennerdale Show of 1939 was held just days before war was declared on 3rd September. This time six years intervened before a “Victory Show” in 1945, just two days after “VJ” Day and with as many prewar classes restored as possible under the circumstances. Cattle breeds other than shorthorns were admitted in 1948 and Swaledale sheep a year later.

However an outbreak of foot and mouth disease at Embleton stopped the 1951 show from being held, whilst continuing restrictions caused the 1952 show to be cancelled as well.



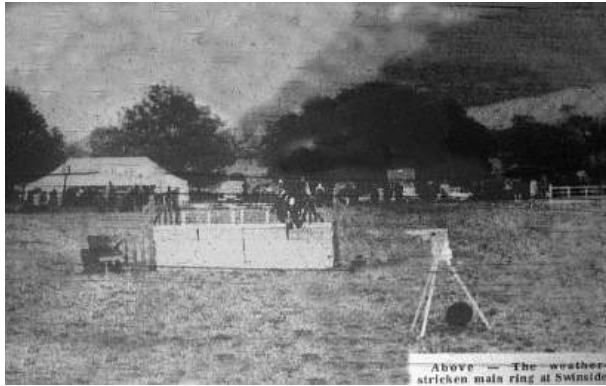
Alan Benn, of Mungreisdale, with his champion Swaledale ram.

In 1953 the 48th Show revived just about all previous classes, but at a new location, Scaur Head just south of the village. Next year saw penning competitions and various classes for Young Farmers Clubs but was also the last year for working horse categories, largely ousted by tractors.



In 1958 the Show moved a short distance to Swinside, partly because of repeated muddy conditions at Scaur Head, although the new location was not to prove a great deal better with a succession of wet and windy show days. A children's gymkhana was added to the programme in that year, followed shortly by Friesian Cattle, Blue Faced Leicester sheep and then Fell Ponies in 1971. Shorthorn classes ended in 1967 and by 1972 Friesians were the only cattle





Swinside was repeatedly unlucky with its weather, particularly bad years being the storm “disaster” of 1967 and the torrential rain of 1973.

Bowness Knott, 1974 to 1989

In 1974 Ennerdale Show moved to Bowness Knott, right on the lake shore and probably the most spectacular location ever used by an agricultural show anywhere in the UK.

However this came with a drawback that was eventually to require a further move, because the show field was at the end of two miles of largely single track road, which needed a police controlled traffic system on show days.



The new location allowed revival of hound trails (1976) and for the first time for many years fell races were staged in 1977. A much enlarged children’s section with a wider range of classes was also started, and still continues, strongly supported by Ennerdale School. In 1978 however all cattle classes ended, due to declining exhibitor interest.



1982 revived the school link in dramatic fashion. As part of a campaign to save Ennerdale Village School from closure a “Save our Village School” demonstration took place on the show field, with an accompanying banner on an adjacent rock face.

Fortunately the campaign was successful and the school has since gone from strength to strength, although many of its pupils now come from outside the valley.

In 1983 Ennerdale Show was filmed by the BBC with Melvyn Bragg (who has connections in the area) for his *Land of the Lakes* series. Unfortunately we have been unable to persuade the BBC to part with any of the material they shot!



The following year saw still more children’s classes, notably children’s pets and a children’s fell race.



The Judge, Derwent Tyson, weighs up the Herdwick entries.

The 1985 show was cancelled due to the weather, for the only time in the show’s history, because prolonged heavy rain had made the field far too wet. Unfortunately this was only the first of a series of weather affected shows, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1989, although no others were actually cancelled. In 1986 the after effects of *Hurricane Charlie* caused the main marquee to be blown down overnight, so that industrial, horticultural and children’s classes could not be held, although a temporary beer tent was improvised! Weather conditions also prevented the running of either hound trails or fell races whilst this unlucky year also suffered from some livestock movement restrictions in the aftermath of the Chernobyl incident earlier in the year.

In 1987 further atrocious weather caused cancellation of the children's gymkhana, tug of war and Grand Parade. 1988 saw a much better day, with a revival of most classes and competitions from previous years', plus sheep dog trials and Clydesdale horses – although perhaps these now should be regarded as pets rather than working animals.



QUEEN OF THE SHOW...champion Clydesdale *Queenie*, with Mrs Jackie Wilson riding bareback, from Holmrook

they were at Bowness. It does however overcome most of the disadvantages of its predecessors, being better drained than Scaur Head or Swinside and with much better access than Bowness Knott, with roads to Lamplugh, Kirkland and Ennerdale.

Cattle classes were given one more trial at the new site, then again abandoned for lack of interest by exhibitors. Hound trails, sheep dog trials and fell races continued to attract interest and other things were tried as attractions – Llamas and clay pigeon shooting in 1991 then vintage machinery in 1998. This did lead to regular competitions which became firm favourites with classes for static farm machinery, for tractors and for vintage cars and motor cycles.

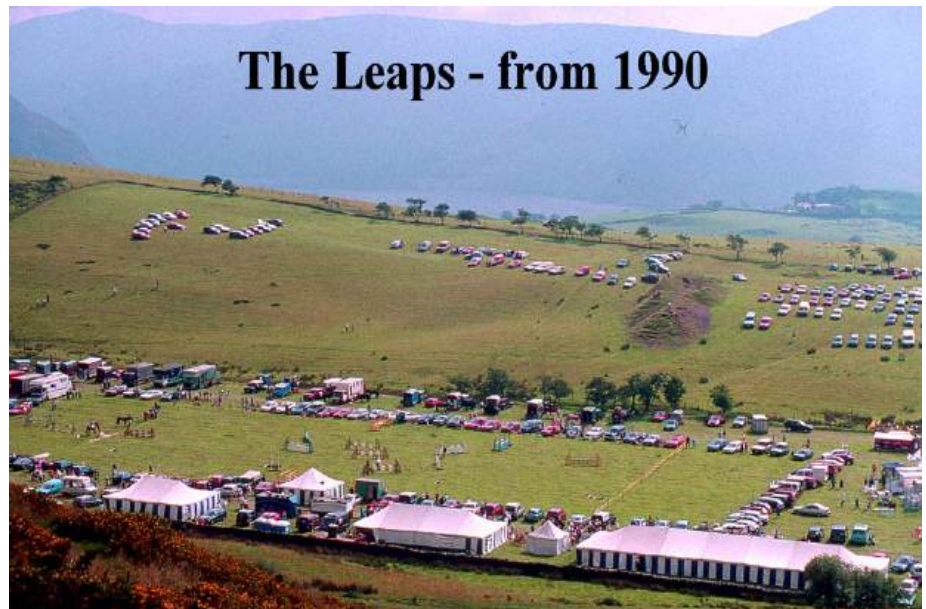


LITTLE to cheer about as the Show ground falls foul of the deluge.

Finally at Bowness 1989 was so wet that the horse jumping and Gymkhana again had to be cancelled.

The Leaps, 1990 to date

In 1990 the Show moved to its present site, The Leaps, at Kirkland – and strictly is no longer in Ennerdale Parish but in Lamplugh. The site is a largely natural amphitheatre (an old railway embankment forms part of the boundary) which offers an excellent setting, although neither the lake nor any higher fells are actually visible from the show field, as



The Leaps - from 1990



Texel and continental sheep were introduced in 1994 and heavy horse classes were firmly reinstated from 1996. This year also saw the unveiling of a memorial to veteran hound trail enthusiast Harry Kirkby This is in the form of a slate plaque in the wall at the west side of the show field.



In Millennium year 2000 the show had its “best weather for many years” with large crowds and numerous exhibitors, whilst classes for shepherd’s crooks and sticks were added to the programme



2001 was however a tragic year for farming in the UK and especially in Cumbria due to widespread outbreaks of Foot and Mouth disease which led to the slaughter of millions of sheep, cattle and pigs. No show was possible that year of course and even next year’s 95th show was severely restricted with no sheep or even horse classes due to continuing bio-security regulations. Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling however returned after an absence of some years and terrier racing – always entertaining – helped fill the gap.

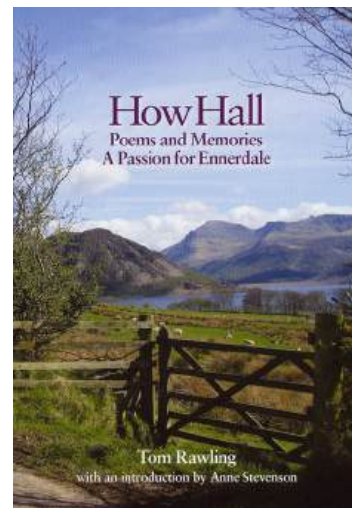


2003 at last saw a return to form, described as a “marvellous success – back to its best”.

The Centenary Show of 2007 was also a major success, on a beautiful sunny day. However a small number of F&M cases earlier in the year, spread from a research establishment in the south of England, again meant restrictions prevented any sheep competitions being held. This was particularly sad for those who recognised the significance of sheep, and especially of Herdwicks, to the history of Ennerdale Show. A ban on hound trails was lifted just days before the show and this time restrictions were not placed on horses, so apart from the absence of the sheep it was an excellent day for exhibitors, visitors and organisers in which LDHS was pleased to help by setting up an exhibition of pictures of the show's history – source of most of the material in this article.



Sheep returned in 2008 and the show has continued steadily ever since, with ups and downs due largely to the weather. 2009's show was described locally as "picturesque but soggy" – rather a generous view since our Heritage Society tent, in which we were launching *How Hall*, had been moved several feet overnight by the wind and was tied to a substantial trailer to stop it going any further! *How Hall* a book of poems and reminiscences by Tom Rawling, once of Ennerdale and whose family have been associated with the show since it started. It includes *The Old Showfield*, a description of Ennerdale Show in the late 1920s from the point of view of a twelve year old.



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2012 had “a full programme in spite of the weather”. In fact many other local shows, before and after Ennerdale, were cancelled due to the weather, so the fact that this one went ahead, albeit on a cold and showery day, meant that it certainly attracted visitors and perhaps exhibitors feeling deprived at the loss of their own more local show.

This year, 2013, had some of the best weather for several years, helping towards an excellent turnout of both visitors and exhibitors, with gate receipts to make up for some past poor years.

Perhaps this note has appeared to dwell on the weather, but Ennerdale Show is an outdoor event on the edge of the wettest part of England; it is never likely to be cancelled because of the fire risk!



*Stan Buck
Lamplugh and District Heritage Society
November 2013*

*Photos Courtesy
Whitehaven News
Ivor Nicholas
and LDHS Members*