

**WILLIAM ATKINSON (1692-1766), OF WIGTON – A  
HITHERTO UNIDENTIFIED CUMBRIAN PEWTERER**

**Michael Finlay, N.D.D., Dip.Ed., F.S.V.A.**

Reprinted from the  
**TRANSACTIONS OF THE  
CUMBERLAND & WESTMORLAND  
ANTIQUARIAN & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY**

**Volume LXXXVI**

**1986**

This website would like to thank Michael Finlay of Cumbria for his permission to use these articles on our website.

.....

We also acknowledge the copyright of the Cumberland and Westmorland Archaeological and Antiquarian Society who first published these articles in the Transactions of the Society.

For the Pewter Society Library  
With compliments  
Michael Finlay. 12/86.

ART. XV. — *William Atkinson, (1692-1766), of Wigton — A Hitherto Unidentified Cumbrian Pewterer.*

By MICHAEL FINLAY, N.D.D., Dip.Ed., F.S.V.A.

MY attention was first drawn to the existence of a pewterer named William Atkinson, by an entry in Christopher A. Peal's *More Pewter Marks*, (The Pewter Society, 1976), published to update H. H. Cotterell's *Old Pewter, Its Makers and Marks*, (Batsford, London, 1929). The entry, under serial 135, in the former, submitted to Peal by A. Sutherland Graeme, Esq., shows the touchmark of William Atkinson (my own drawing of the mark is at Fig. 1), with the source: "On a flagon at St. Mary's Church, Wigton, c. 1725". In Cotterell, under the same serial, we find the entry: "Atkinson, William, London, 14 Aug. 1718, Y.", (signifying the date of his election to the Freedom or Yeomanry of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers).

My first inspection of the Wigton flagon, in April 1979, showed it to have similarities in design to other flagons in the Diocese, particularly that made by Abraham Crawley of Penrith, at St. Cuthbert's, Dufton,<sup>1</sup> which suggested a local origin, and as the touchmark does not appear on the London Company's touchplate,<sup>2</sup> it seemed possible that Atkinson might be a local man.

A search of the Probate Indexes at the Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle, produced his will, in which he is described as "William Atkinson of Waverton in the Parish of Wigton and County of Cumberland (*sic*), Pewterer", one of the very few known Cumbrian pewterers and hitherto unidentified. No other example of his work appears so far to have come to light.

The will, dated 16 Nov. 1765 and proved 15 Mar. 1766, shows him to have been something of a character, and is worth giving in some detail. After the usual provisions for his soul and bodily remains, and minor bequests, there follow:

Item I give unto Mary Hutton of Brough upon Sands my Clock and Caise.

Item I give unto the Minister ten shillings for preaching this Sermon that I have made, if not nothing.

Item I give unto John Jefferson of Waverton, John Hutton of brough, John, Isabel Hutton Sister Son, John Dand of Main's each of them a book caled the Christian Institutes, for carrying me to Church and to be Church at twelve a Clock, lett not a Relaiton more be invited out of town.

He appoints John Hutton of Burgh upon Sands as his Executrix (*sic*) and signs himself Wm. Atkinson, Mayor. The wax seal bears a lion passant.<sup>3</sup>

William Atkinson was born, lived and died within a few miles of Wigton. (Fig. 2). His family relationships are shown at Figure 3.<sup>4</sup> His parents were William Atkinson, (c. 1653-1725), a farmer of Moorthwaite, and his wife Ann, (buried 1733).<sup>5</sup> Their initials appear in triad form, with the date 1691, on the door lintel of their house at Moorthwaite, (Plate 1(a)). This house later became a stable when their eldest son John, (1689-1768), built on a larger house for himself and his wife Mary, incorporating their own initials with the date 1731, above the new front door. (Plate 1(b)). The stable has, in modern times, been restored as part of the house, which is still occupied. (Plate 2).

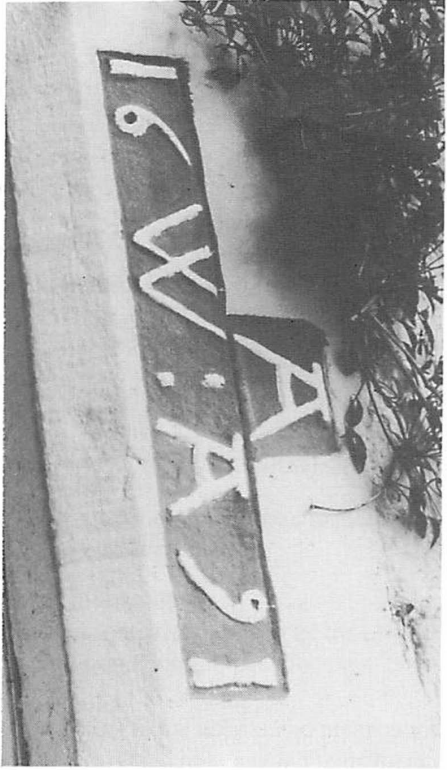


PLATE 1(a)



PLATE 1(b)

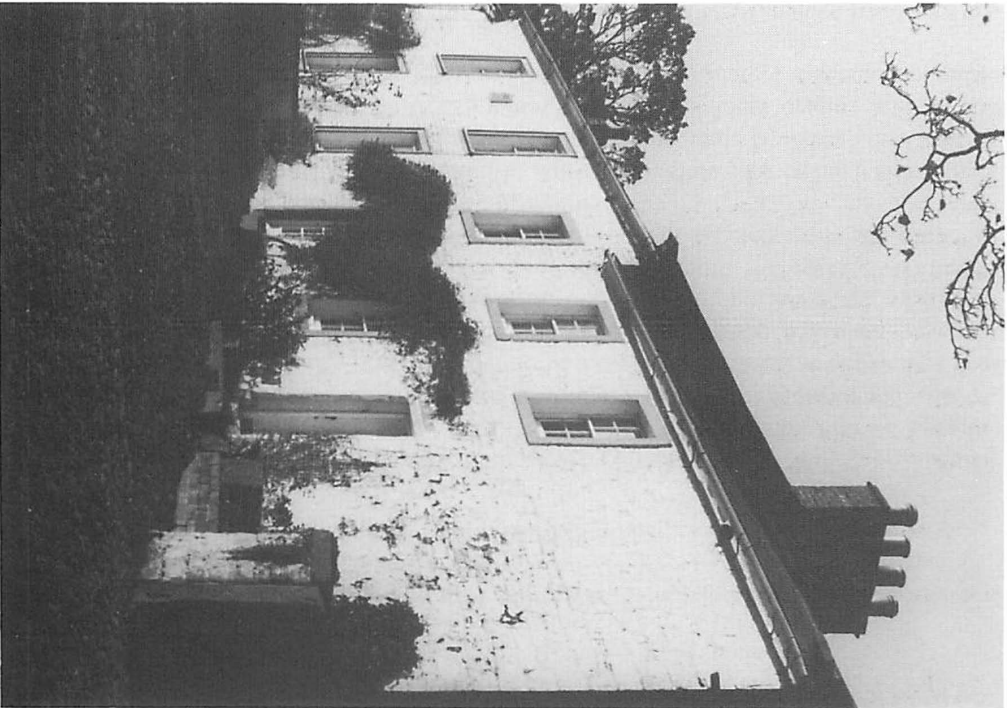


PLATE 2

William Atkinson's baptism is recorded in the Parish Register of St. Mary's Wigton:<sup>6</sup>  
26 Feb. 1692[3] – Guilielmus f. Guilielmj Atkinson de Moorthwait.

He had four brothers and sisters whose baptisms are also recorded:

24 Apr. 1687 – Amia f. Guilielmj Atkinson de Moorthwaite.

27 Mar. 1689 – Johannes f. Guilielmj Atkinson de Moorthwaite.

27 Nov. 1696 – Maria f. Guilielmj Atkinson de Moorthwaite (bur. 7 Nov. 1698).

16 Feb. 1702 – Josephus f. Guilielmj Atkinson de Moorthwaite.

John, as eldest son, inherited in 1725, his father's plough and other farming implements, subject to his mother's use for life, and presumably carried on the farm for his mother, accounting for the 1731 lintel, some two years prior to his mother's death. William inherited only £5, suggesting that he may already have received his portion, possibly on completion of his apprenticeship, in order to set himself up as a pewterer.<sup>7</sup>

In 1732, William Atkinson married Elizabeth Losh (formerly Barn), a widow, of Height, in the Parish of Westward. Their marriage bond, dated 11 Nov. 1732, describes William Atkinson as "Pewtherer" and directs the marriage to one of the chapelries of Wigton, Westward, Graystock or Threlkeld.<sup>8</sup> The ceremony took place at Threlkeld:

18 Nov. 1732 – William Atkinson and Elizabeth Losh married.<sup>9</sup>

Why they should have chosen Threlkeld in preference to the much closer Wigton or its chapelry of Westward, is not apparent, although, as has been seen from his will, Atkinson has strong views about who should attend his funeral, and the same may have applied to his wedding.

Elizabeth, his wife, had previously been married to George Losh, son of Robert Losh, both blacksmiths of Height, Westward.<sup>10</sup> The marriage is recorded at Thursby:

12 Jan. 1711 – George Losh and Elizabeth Barn.<sup>11</sup>

George Losh died in 1729 and among his property which Elizabeth inherited was a clock,<sup>12</sup> presumably that of William Atkinson's will, which passed to Mary Hutton of Burgh by Sands.

The connection, in 1766, between William Atkinson and the Huttons of Burgh by Sands, can be traced back to Moorthwaite prior to his birth, some ninety years previously. Figure 4a shows the Hutton family at Moorthwaite, from the mid-17th Century.<sup>13</sup> James Hutton (buried 1664) had two sons, James and John. The former died at Moorthwaite in 1676, leaving only daughters. John was married at St. Mary's, Wigton:

24 Jun. 1669 – Johannes Hutton et Mabella Wilson.<sup>14</sup>

but there are no entries at Wigton for their issue, and after 1676 there are no further entries for Huttons of Moorthwaite.

A few years later, in 1679, a Mabel Hutton, wife of John Hutton, was admitted in her own right to a property at North-End, Burgh by Sands, which corresponds in size to that which was occupied by one William Wilson in 1587. It would seem almost certain, therefore, that this John Hutton's wife Mabel was a Wilson prior to her marriage, inheriting the property by descent.<sup>15</sup> In addition, another William Wilson of North-End, Burgh by Sands, in his will of 7 Dec. 1672, left "my sister Mabell one Chare, one Bedstead in the Louft"<sup>16</sup> which would seem to put the matter beyond doubt.

In 1742, John Atkinson, William's brother, of Moorthwaite, was bondsman to the marriage bond of John Hutton, grandson of John and Mabel Hutton of North-End, Burgh by Sands, and Isabel Liddel.<sup>17</sup> John and Mary Hutton, two of the children of this marriage, were the beneficiaries of William Atkinson's will. (Figure 4(b)). Mary



Fig. 1 (enlarged × 2)

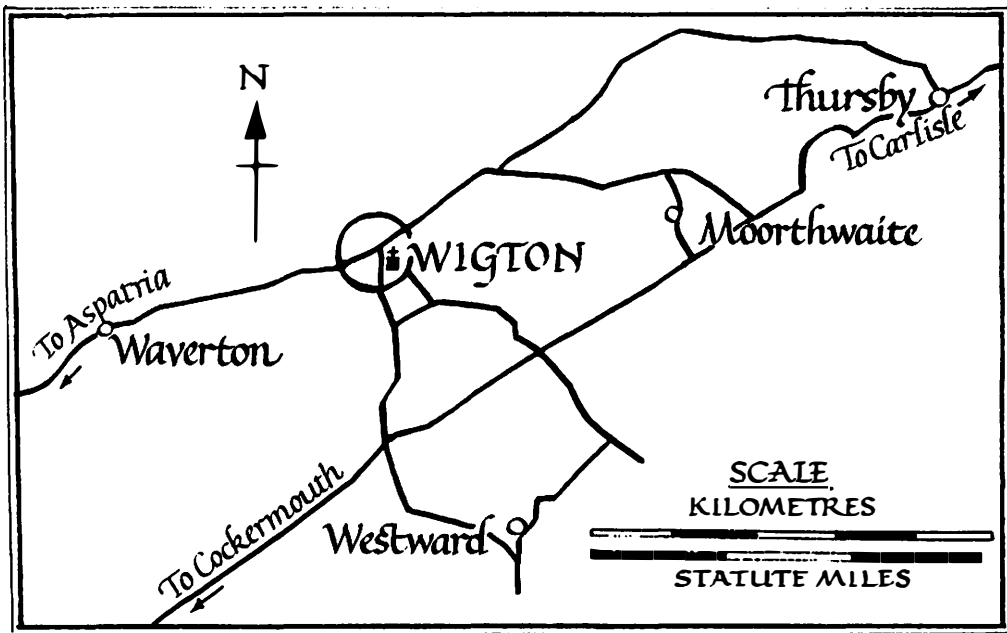


Fig. 2

Hutton, who received the “Clock and Caise”, which we can trace from its possession by George Losh prior to 1729, died in 1834.<sup>18</sup> It would be interesting to know what became of the clock after that.

The appellation “Mayor” of Atkinson’s will and reflected in the design of his touchmark presents more of a problem and has so far eluded satisfactory explanation. It may be merely that he was known affectionately by his contemporaries as “the Mayor” of Wigton, or of Waverton, neither place having an official mayor. (In Wetheral some years ago, there was such a local character, who having concerned himself with village affairs more than most, was known universally as “The Mayor of Wetheral”.) Certainly, Atkinson was never Mayor of Carlisle, nor of Appleby, the two most likely true

mayoralities. If he was perhaps a “mock” mayor, then the possibility of the village of Wreay arises. The annual election of a mock mayor at Wreay, during the Shrove Tuesday celebrations, is thought to date from about 1780, which would rule out this possibility as Atkinson died in 1766, although the precise date of its inception is uncertain.<sup>19</sup> Like the Shrove Tuesday festivities themselves, and the village “parliament” known as “the Twelve Men”, both of which date from at least *circa* 1665, is it perhaps possible that the office of mock mayor is also an earlier institution, perhaps revived in about 1780? Outsiders, from Carlisle and Dalston, for instance, were sometimes elected as “mayor” of Wreay, and one is tempted to think that this, the only such office in the locality, might be the answer to the whereabouts of Atkinson’s mayoralty, if indeed there was such, but I must emphasize that I have been unable to find any evidence to support such a speculation, and the mystery must remain unsolved for the present.

Incidentally, I can find no relationship between George Losh of Height, Westward, Atkinson’s wife’s former husband, who as a fellow metalworker in the same locality, Atkinson is almost certain to have known, and the Loshes of Woodside, Wreay, who are thought to have been instrumental in creating the office of mock mayor in about 1780,<sup>20</sup> but the coincidence is perhaps worth noting.

### The Flagon

In the terrier of St. Mary’s, Wigton, of 1749, the church’s pewter plate includes “one pewter flagon” which is probably that under discussion, (Plate 3), which can be dated as of about the second quarter of the 18th century. Chancellor Ferguson records its presence in 1882:

“Pewter flagon, height ten inches and a half, marked underneath Wigton. A mark inside consists of a figure and some indistinct letters.”<sup>21</sup>

The flagon is of slightly tapering drum design with bands of reeded ornamental moulding, a lip and a double-domed lid with a tall baluster finial; the thumbpiece is of simple “chairback” form and the “broken” handle a composite of parts of two castings from a tankard-handle mould. Its dimensions are:

height of body	214 mm.
height to top of finial	273 mm.
diameter at base	136 mm.

The maker’s touchmark, (Fig. 1), is struck in the centre of the interior base and the name Wigton is engraved underneath in italic. The latter precaution by some unknown hand paid handsomely in the early years of the present century when the flagon, which had been missing from the church for some years was returned by R. H. Williamson, of Hannington, Hampshire, into whose possession it had come, to the then incumbent, Rev. Reginald Mayall.<sup>22</sup>

### Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the Rev. R. P. H. Watson Williams, M.A., formerly Vicar of St. Mary’s, Wigton, for first allowing me to inspect and photograph the flagon, and to the present Vicar, the Rev. C. G. Johnston, B.A., for permission to publish the photograph.

My thanks are also due to the staff of the Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle, and in particular to B. C. Jones, Esq., M.A., for freely allowing me the use of his research into the farming families of Burgh by Sands. I am also indebted to Mr and Mrs Eric Bliss, for permission to take and publish the Moorthwaite photographs.

### Notes and References

- <sup>1</sup> Michael Finlay, "The Pewterers of Penrith", CW2, lxxxv, 183.
- <sup>2</sup> H. H. Cotterell, *Old Pewter, Its Makers and Marks*, (Batsford, London, 1929), in which the Touch-plates on which pewterers struck their marks on taking up their Freedom of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers, are reproduced actual size.
- <sup>3</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, P1766 Will of William Atkinson, Pewtherer.
- <sup>4</sup> Atkinson's family and other relationships have been compiled from the following main sources:  
 F. B. Swift, *The Registers of Wigton, Parts I and II*, CWAAS, 1950 and 1955.  
 C.R.O. Carlisle, P1725 Will and Inventory of William Atkinson, farmer.  
 C.R.O. Carlisle, P1766 Will of William Atkinson, Pewtherer.  
 C.R.O. Carlisle, P1768 Will of John Atkinson, gentleman.  
 Rev. James Wilson, M.A., *The Monumental Inscriptions of the Parish Church and Churchyard, Wigton, Cumberland*, (Wigton, 1892).
- <sup>5</sup> F. B. Swift, *op. cit.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, P1725 Will of William Atkinson, farmer.
- <sup>8</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, Calendar of Marriage Licence Bonds.
- <sup>9</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, PR/70/1 Register of Marriages, Threlkeld.
- <sup>10</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, P1711 Will of Robert Losh, blacksmith.
- <sup>11</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, DRC/6/136 Bishop's Transcripts, Thursby.
- <sup>12</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, P1729 Will of George Losh, blacksmith.
- <sup>13</sup> Compiled from entries in Wigton Parish Registers, as 4 above.
- <sup>14</sup> F. B. Swift, *op. cit.*
- <sup>15</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, DX/528 Rental, Burgh by Sands.
- <sup>16</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, P1672 Will of William Wilson.
- <sup>17</sup> C.R.O. Carlisle, Calendar of Marriage Licence Bonds.
- <sup>18</sup> The genealogy shown in figure 4b is mainly by courtesy of B. C. Jones, Esq., M.A., Cumbria Record Office.
- <sup>19</sup> Rev. A. R. Hall, M.A., *Wreay*, (Charles Thurnam, Carlisle, 1921), quoting Nicholas Carlisle, *A Concise Description of the Endowed Grammar Schools of England and Wales*, (1818).
- <sup>20</sup> Rev. A. R. Hall, *op. cit.*
- <sup>21</sup> R. S. Ferguson, *Old Church Plate in the Diocese of Carlisle*, CWAAS, 1882.
- <sup>22</sup> T. W. Carrick, *History of Wigton*, (Charles Thurnam, Carlisle, 1949), p. 303.

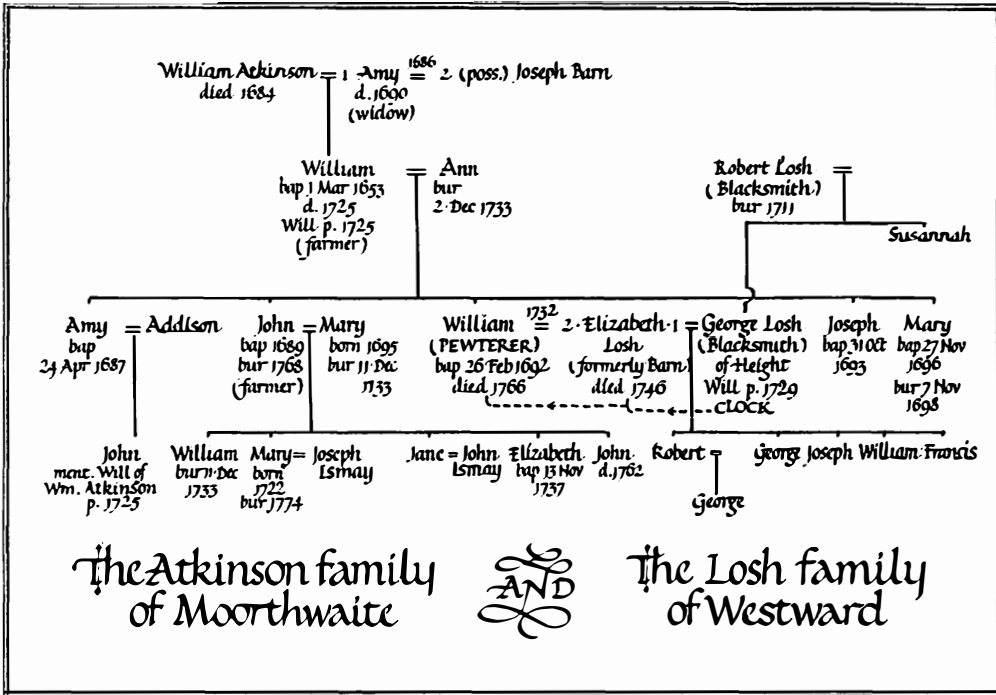


Fig. 3

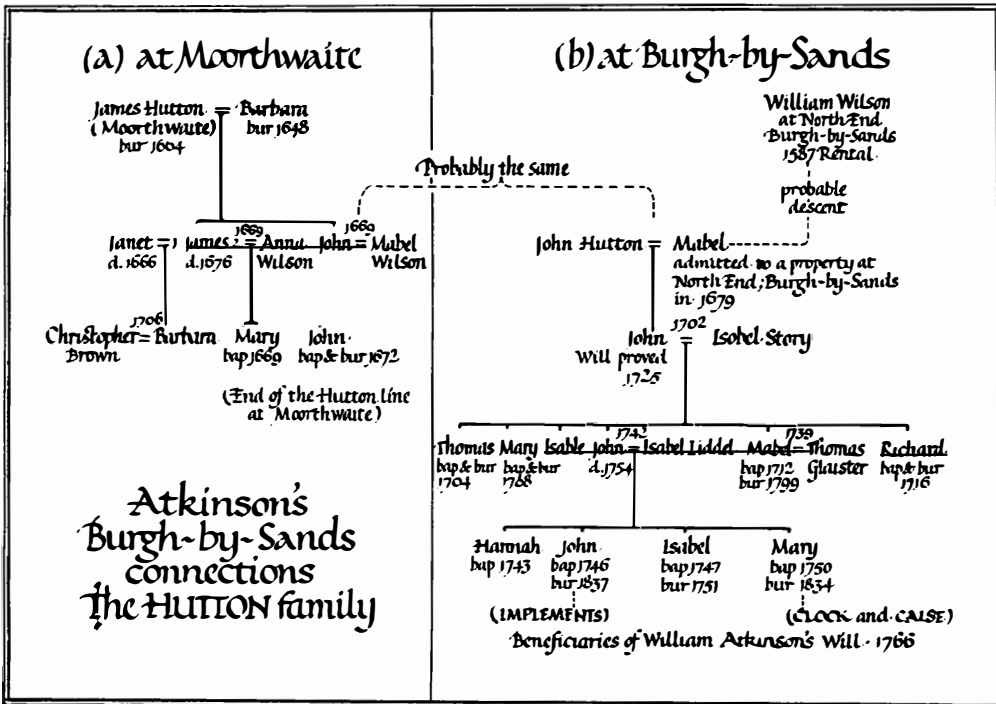


Fig. 4



PLATE 3