

# **The Thorns**

## **Introduction**

On the 2nd. of May 1840 Adam Clark was married to Hannah Crosskell, the younger daughter of George Crosskell, of the Hest Bank Inn. In May 1843 George gave his son-in-law a piece of land which overlooked the sea. Adam and Hannah proceeded to build a house which they described as "a cottage", even though it had a dining room, drawing room, five bedrooms and all the usual conveniences. By 1845 the house and the furniture were up for sale and the family moved to Ulverston.

Because the land on which the house was built was part of the Copyhold of the Hest Bank Inn, the surrender of the property had to be done in the Manor Court. Elizabeth Johnson of Manchester bought the property and was admitted tenant by the Manor Court. On the Tithe Map of 1845 Mrs Johnson owned number 112 which was a house and garden then known as "*Morecambe Bay View*", its extent was 2 roods and 11 perches and the total rent charge payable to the Vicar of Bolton-le-Sands was 2d. Those not familiar with the old measuring system should note that an acre is divided into 4 roods and each rood into 40 square perches! An acre is 4840 square yards, a rood 1210 square yards and a square perche is 30.25 square yards. You could work this out yourself because everyone knows that a perche (or rod or pole) is just 5.5 yards!

Elizabeth stayed in the house for two years only but made a considerable profit when she sold the property to Oliver Simms of Manchester who became the new owner. In 1849 Oliver Simms also bought the Hest Bank Inn and so held the whole of the copyhold.

Here are some Manor Court documents and For Sale notices relevant to the construction of the property:

We find that William Field of Cartmel, merchant, in consideration of five shillings, paid to him by Adam Clark of Hest Bank, bookkeeper and George Crosskell of Hest Bank, yeoman and innkeeper, in consideration of ten shillings, paid by the said Adam Clark and of the natural love of the said George Crosskell for his son-in-law the said Adam Clark, did this day surrender all that parcel of ground lying at the south end of the close called the Croft, number 112, situate at Hest Bank, of one penny rent. [Manor Court Documents. 1843. May]

### **For Sale Notice**

Saturday May 3rd. 1845. Marine Residence for Sale. To be sold by auction by Mr. Bower. At the Royal Oak Inn in Lancaster on Wednesday 7th. May 1845, at seven o'clock in the evening.

All that Newly Erected Dwelling House, with Garden adjoining Situate at Hest Bank about three miles from Lancaster and now in the occupation of Mr. Adam Clark, owner. The house contains Dining and Drawing Rooms, five Bedrooms, and the usual Conveniences, and commands most beautiful views of Morecambe Bay, the Westmoreland and Cumberland Mountains, and surrounding scenery, for extent of prospect seldom equalled.

The above is Copyhold of inheritance under the Manor of Slyne-with-Hest, and subject to the annual payment of one penny. For particulars apply to the owner; or at the office of Mr. Lodge, solicitor, Lancaster.

Also upon the Premises, on the following day, Thursday the 8th. day of May next, the sale to commence at one o'clock in the afternoon, All his Household Goods and Furniture.

Consisting of Four-Post and Camp Bedsteads, with hangings, Feather beds and Bedding, Mahogany and Painted chairs, Chests of Drawers, card and other Tables, Chimney and Dressing Glasses in Gilt and Mahogany Frames, Washstands, Tables, Chamber and Toilet Ware, Carpets and Kitchen Utensils and Also Two cases of Birds, and A Stuffed Fox.

The whole may be viewed the day previous to, and on the morning of the Sale day.

[May 3rd. 1845.]

Surrender this day by Adam Clark late of Lancaster, bookkeeper, but then of Ulverston, spirit dealer. In consideration of £280 paid to John Lodge, sol., of Lancaster, gent, by Elizabeth Johnson late of Manchester but now of Hest Bank and £50 paid by the said Elizabeth Johnson to said Adam Clark making £330. All that parcel of land lying at the South-end of a Close called The Croft situate at Hest Bank and also all that cottage re lately built by Adam Clark thereon. Elizabeth Johnson admitted tenant. [Manor Court 23rd. August 1845.]

Elizabeth Johnson of Hest Bank, widow, for £560 surrenders her plot of land and home at Hest Bank to Olive [Oliver] Simms of Manchester, Esq., who is admitted tenant. [Manor Court 23rd. August 1845.]

Oliver Simms pays £500 to William Field and £450 to George Crosskell, who surrenders the Hest Bank Inn to Oliver Simms, then admitted tenant. [Manor Court Feb. 1849.]

## ***The Ransome Family***

According to the census of 1851 Oliver Simms and his daughter Frances occupied the house but sometime between then and the next census in 1861, probably in 1857, he sold out to Mr Thomas Ransome who had a large family. Thomas Ransome was an Industrial Chemist from Manchester and, as we shall see, not only was he a most interesting person but at least one member of his family became world famous. That was his grandson Arthur Ransome author of "Swallows and Amazons"!

Before we look into the connection with Arthur Ransome we can see the progress of the family through the census returns. The first record is from 1861 where the house is listed as number 58 Canal Side. There are two houses referred to as Canal Side: Prospect House (Canal Warehouse) number 62 Canal Side where we know Timothy Longton was living, and number 58 although not named must be Morecambe Bay View. Thomas Ransome would certainly need a fairly large house to accommodate his family.

Thomas Ransome, aged 36, Chemist Master, Manchester.  
Hannah Ransome, aged 35, wife.  
Cyril Ransome, son, aged 9, scholar.  
Edith Ransome, aged 8.  
Jessie, aged 4, born in Hest Bank.  
John, aged 2, born in Hest Bank.  
Jane M. Jackson, sister, aged 41, Fund holder. (Having financial resources.)  
Nathan Jackson, brother in law, aged 30, Clergyman without the care of souls. Bowden, Cheshire.  
Mary Woodhouse, female servant, aged 22, cook.  
Elizabeth Hodgson, female servant, aged 15.  
Mary Edmundson, aged 18, female servant. [1861 Census Return]

I rather liked the description of the unemployed brother in law as "clergyman without the care of souls".

By 1871 Thomas Ransome's wife Hannah had died, probably after the birth of their daughter, also named Hannah. Thomas had started to manufacture chemicals locally and employed several local men and boys:

Thomas Ransome, head of household, aged 46, born in Manchester, farmer of 6 acres and Pharmaceutica and Manufacturing Chemist, employing 6 men and 3 boys.  
Edith, daughter, aged 18.  
Jessie, daughter, aged 14.  
Mary, daughter, aged 8.  
Lucy, daughter, aged 7.  
Thomas, son, aged 2.

**Hannah, daughter, aged 1.  
Harriet Wilson, aged 28, cook.  
Ann Williamson, aged 21, housemaid.  
Emma Beswick, aged 15, nursemaid. [1871 Census Return]**

There is no doubt that Thomas was a very productive man! By the 1881 census he had remarried, this time to Anne from Yorkshire, and he had started a new family:

**Thomas Ransome, head, aged 56, Manufacturing Chemist.  
Anne, wife, aged 36, born in Yorkshire.  
Edith, daughter, unmarried, aged 28.  
Mary Maud, daughter, aged 18.  
Lucy Hoyle, daughter, aged 17, scholar.  
Hannah Gertrude, daughter, aged 11.  
Ethel Margaret, daughter, aged 9.  
Philip Shepherd, son, aged 6.  
Edward Lancel, son, aged 3.  
Mariah Bennett, aged 23, cook.  
Mary A Long, aged 19, housemaid.  
Frances Harrison, aged 19, nursemaid.[1881 Census Return]**

After 1880 Thomas seemed to slow down a little, he was, for example, chairman of the Slyne Reading Rooms and he did his jury service. In 1890 Thomas Ransome was recorded as foreman of the Jury in an inquest held at The Hest Bank Hotel. A boy named Edmund Packer had been killed by an express train on the vehicle crossing at Hest Bank Station and the episode was witnessed by Thomas' son Edward who was also a friend of Edmund.

By the census of 1891 all the servants had gone from the household and the two unmarried eldest daughters had also left. The chemical business was carried on by two of the sons, Thomas and Philip:

**Thomas Ransome, Hest Bank. Manufacturing Chemist and Scientist, aged 66.  
Ann, wife, aged 46.  
Mary Maud, single, aged 28.  
Thomas, son, aged 22, Scientist, employed by father.  
Ethel Margaret, daughter, aged 19.  
Philip Shepherd, son, aged 16, Science Pupil, employed by father.  
Edward Lancelot, aged 13, scholar.  
Alfred Oswald, aged 8.[1891 Census Return]**

We can identify people in Slyne-with-Hest who could possibly have worked for Thomas Ransome:

**1871 Jacob Stanley, aged 46, living at Derby House, Chemist from Burnley.  
1881 Jacob Stanley, Derby House Bookkeeper.  
1891 Jacob Stanley Chemist and Clerk at Chemical Works.  
John K. Lund, aged 50. Master Foreman, Chemical Works, living somewhere in Hest Bank in 1871.  
Christopher Heaton, aged 56, labourer in Chemistry. Living in Slyne in 1871.**

Thomas Ramsome was clearly a very accomplished man and appears to have taken a leading role in local education. He is recorded as presenting magic lantern shows and giving scientific talks in the area and from the reports he must have had an excellent rapport with the children.

**Magic Lantern- On Friday evening 9th. inst. Thomas Ransome Esq. of Hest Bank, very kindly gave a treat to the children of Bolton-le-Sands with the magic lantern. The scenes were very good, and what made them more interesting to the young people was that some of them were taken from this locality- such as the interior of the Lancaster Parish Church and a view of Lancaster Castle. The other views were chiefly**

taken from Palestine and the east, and were ably explained by the Rev. Charles Henry Gibson, curate. The performance closed with some comic views. A vote of thanks was proposed to Mr. Ransome, for his kindness by the Rev. Gibson, and three cheers, which we need scarcely state, was unanimously and vociferously responded to. [January 17th 1863, Gazette.]

Bolton-le-Sands. Thomas Ransome, Esq. lecture on The Sun and the Moon.

On Friday evening, the 20th. inst. Thomas Ransome, Esq.; of Hest Bank, gave in the 'Girls School' the first of two lectures upon the 'Sun and Moon' illustrated by diagrams, illuminated by the Oxy-calcium Lantern, to a numerous auditory who were much pleased with the lucid manner, in which Mr. Ransome explained his subject. [ Gazette Feb. 28th. 1863.]

## **Arthur Ransome**

The connection with author Arthur Ransome comes from a listing in the Lancaster Royal Grammar School Registry concerning Cyril Ransome who was the eldest son of Thomas. Cyril had a glittering career as a mathematician turned historian and academic, and was the father of the famous author.

Cyril Ransome, eldest son of Thomas Ransome.

Was nine years old in 1861, he entered Lancaster Royal Grammar School in the summer of 1862, and was in the upper sixth in 1869, aged 17. He won The Greg Gold Medal, prize money was five guineas for the most proficient student in Mathematics. Victoria School 1869. He was the eldest son of Thomas Ransome, manufacturing chemist of Hest Bank. He attended Merton College Oxford, (postmaster) 1869. 1873-5. BA. 1874. Ist Class Maths Mods and Hist. Finals. MA. in 1876.

Second Master Cowley Military College. Professor of Modern Literature, Yorkshire College, Leeds 1878-96. Private Tutor at Rugby.

Author of:

York and Lancaster Plays of Shakespeare.

Rise of Constitutional Government in England.

Outlines of English Political History.

Our Colonies and India, how we got them and why we keep them.

Battles of Frederick The Great.

He married Edith Rachel Boulton of Whitehall Gardens, Clifton road, Rugby.

Father of Arthur Ransome, novelist, Modern English Biographer. Swallows and Amazons.

[ Lancaster Royal Grammar School Registry]

It is remarkable that in the autobiography of Arthur Ransome there is quite a lot of information on his grandfather Thomas. There is also interesting information on great grandfather John Ransome who was the surgeon present at the death of Huskisson MP for Liverpool. Huskisson was killed by the first train on the opening day of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway!

It is best to quote directly from the Autobiography of Arthur Ransome who was born in 1884 and died in 1967:

*I was born in Leeds, but the Ransomes are an East Anglian family (Quakers). Thomas Ransome, my grandfather, was the son of John Atkinson Ransome, who late in the eighteenth century left his brothers to discover ways of chilling steel and making plough shares and other agricultural instruments, and to found the Ipswich firm of Ransome and Rapier, while he went north to Manchester and became a surgeon celebrated in his day. His bust was to be seen over the Manchester Medical School of which he was one of the founders, and he was the surgeon brought from Manchester on the foot plate of an engine too late to save Huskinson (MP) after he had been run over at the opening of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway.*

*He gave his son the best possible scientific training and his friend Playfair took my grandfather as a young man into his own laboratory. But my grandfather never carried*

*anything through or profited by his exceptional gifts. For example, being interested in photography and finding the wet plates then in use both troublesome and messy, he devised dry plates for himself. Then, when other photographers were using cumbersome stand-cameras, he invented and built for his own use a camera that could be used in the hand. He made not a penny from either of these inventions but grew interested in large-scale chemical processes and, with no business sense whatever, set up as a "manufacturing chemist". The results of this were disastrous and my father (his eldest son), who had won himself a series of scholarships (at Merton and elsewhere), handicapped himself for many years by paying off his father's debts.*

*When my grandmother died, leaving my grandfather with children in the nursery, he married the young woman who was looking after them and proceeded to raise another family, the youngest of whom was about the same age as myself. My grandfather became interested in boats (another early memory is of being held up in the arms of my step-grandmother to see a flickering light far out in the darkness over Morecambe Bay, and hearing her say ; "Do you know what that is? That's your grandfather late with the tide and stuck on the sands again".) Then he became interested in electricity, in mechanical inventions of all kinds, and was always very busy at what he was doing, but never at anything that would keep his family in bread and butter. He was a first-rate field-naturalist, as interesting a companion on a country walk as any small boy could wish, and a very good ingenious fisherman. He early saw the advantage of stiffer, shorter, quicker-striking rods over the long whippy things then in use, and the disadvantage of quicker-striking rods to anyone who, like himself, always fished with horsehair casts. He therefore made a practice of adding a foot of whale bone to the tip of his stiff rods, with very good results, the stiff rod giving quickness in the strike and the little bit of whale bone provided just enough elasticity to save the horsehair from too rugged a pull. He was acute in considering all business except his own, and when I first came to fish the Beela [my father's and my grandfather's favourite river] in 1930 or thereabouts, the old keeper, Tom Stainton, told me of a remark of my grandfather's sixty years before. Tom was appointed keeper on the Beela by the little club who controlled that water, and one of the committee raised the question as to what was to be done about a superannuation fund. "Superannuating!" exclaimed my grandfather. "No man appointed beck-watcher on the Beela will ever want to be superannuated". "And by gum," said old Tom to me, "I never have and never will."*

A somewhat different view of Thomas Ransome is given by Hugh Brogan, the biographer of Arthur Ransome. He writes about the effect Thomas' life had on his son Cyril and subsequently on Arthur:

*Thomas Ransome was a flibbertigibbet, who had thrown away a promising scientific career to make his fortune out of one hare-brained scheme after another, and it seemed that his grandson was going the same way. Cyril Ransome's father-in-law, Edward Baker Boulton, was not much better: he had been a sheep farmer in Australia, but cared only for water-colour painting. He retired to Clifton to indulge the passion.*

*It was a disturbing heredity, and although we now know that Arthur would mint it into gold, his father Cyril thought his boy showed signs of being a muff.*

*This grandfather, Thomas, (succinctly described in Arthur's autobiography as a man "acute in considering all business except his own") had burdened Cyril Ransome with his debts, which took years to pay off.*

*Cyril was constantly worried that Arthur took after his father.*

*Perhaps there had been too much talk of grandfather's debts. A small boy might well conclude that a large fortune was the best and most important thing in life. Being an ingenious Ransome--the delinquent grandfather was a talented inventor, and the collateral line of the family manufactured farm machinery--he set busily about making one.*

*When Arthur thought to be a professional magician or breed rabbits to sell as a small boy his father was shocked.*

*Alas in almost everything I did with enthusiasm my father (Cyril) saw not so much with enthusiasm as the traits which in his own father he most deplored.*

*Arthur Michell Ransome was born in January 1884 in Leeds. His father had married Edith Boulton and Arthur was followed by, Cecily, Geoffrey and Joyce. Cyril Ransome died in 1897, aged 45, he had fallen over a grindstone and damaged a bone in his leg, eventually the leg was amputated at the knee then at the thigh. This did not stop the disease and he died a few weeks later.*

*He had been disappointed in me, but I often thought what friends we could have been had he not died so young. But at the funeral he (Arthur) was horrified at himself, because, mingled with sorrow, was a feeling of relief.*

[The Life of Arthur Ransome, by Hugh Brogan.]

All this does make us think twice about Thomas Ransome, he was clearly not as black as his son Cyril painted him, he appears to have given his children a very good education and kept them in some style! He also seems to have been involved in the village and delighted people with his lantern shows. The fact that he married twice and had a lot of children was fairly common in the last century, the family obviously thought that Arthur took after him and if he did he certainly turned his originality into success where his grandfather had failed.

### ***Edith and Jessie, daughters of Thomas Ransome***

The two eldest daughters Edith and Jessie were also amazing women, they left Hest Bank for China in 1894 and according to Arthur, who visited China in 1926, had some incredible experiences.

*In Peking I visited my aunt Edith, whom I had last seen in 1894, when with my aunt Jessie, she was setting off to China as a missionary, and I had said enviously how lucky she was to be going to China. She replied, rather severely, that she was not going there for pleasure. Aunt Edith now a very frail old lady, living in a charming room on the ground floor with latticed windows and a door opening into the garden, spoke of the goodness of her Chinese friends and of the devotion with which they were nursing her and of the happiness she had found in China. These aunts were in Peking during the Boxer rising and had been decorated for heroism. One of them had a Boxer arrow through her bonnet during the siege.*

From a letter written by Edith Ramsome to Arthur's mother, after he visited her in China.

*Deaconess Edith Ransome, was still labouring as a missionary in Peking: she was delighted to see him again, and wrote to tell his mother so, adding: "I hope his hair will grow before he sees you. He had it cut by a Japanese barber, who shaved his head till he looked like a Buddhist priest!!"*

Edith would have been 73 years of age in 1926, she left Hest Bank with her sister Jessie in 1894 aged 41 years, her sister being 37. Both had spent most of their lives in Hest Bank at their father's house. A journey which involved travelling to China by two maiden ladies must have caused quite a stir in the village and much comment, they seem to have had a spirit of adventure similar to their father and their nephew Arthur, it is a pity that we do not know more about them but maybe more will come to light.

This is all that Arthur tells us of his Ransome relations in Hest Bank, Thomas' sisters living in Windermere, appear to have lived on Railway Shares left to them by their father, I can only assume that Thomas did likewise for he lived in Hest Bank from the 1850s until at least 1896. Although he had debts which Cyril paid off, he must have had a private income which covered his day to day costs. As I was reading about Thomas Ransome, I could not help thinking how many youngsters he must have thrilled in Slyne-with-Hest and Bolton-le Sands and how he would have enjoyed living in the 1990s where his genius and inventiveness would have been appreciated. The late Victorians, with their great sense of duty, often did jobs they hated for the whole of their lives and this was expected from them by society. Thomas in doing what he enjoyed was clearly irresponsible, especially as he could not make it pay, but must have enjoyed his life enormously and made a great impression on people in the village.

### ***This Century***

The next inhabitant of the Thorns, following the Ransomes, was a Mr J. P. Matthews who was recorded as a mineral water manufacturer. The chemical manufacturing buildings may have continued in use in this enterprise. Just before the start of the first world war in 1913 Mr John H. D. Ellershaw took over the property and I have no further information until 1960. In that year Michael Bates of the well known local firm of Solicitors came into the residence and the Thorns remained with his family until recently when it was converted into a home for the elderly.

[Notes; Copyhold: A form of land tenure, so called because the holder had a copy of the record of his holding in the manorial role. By the 15th century most villeins had become copyholders as most of the services they owed to their lord were commuted to money payments. "£10 copyholders"- those with land worth £10 annually-were given the vote in 1832 and "£5 copyholders" in 1867. The last feudal obligations attached to copyhold were abolished in 1935.

Boxer Rising: A branch of the White Lotus sect in China which took a prominent part in the rising against foreigners in 1900.]