

# THE CROFT FAMILY OF CLAUGHTON AND LITTLEDALE



Although the surname Croft is found throughout Lancashire these days (and also in other parts of England as well as Australia and America), it's origin can be traced back almost a thousand years through Lancashire and Westmorland. The following article is taken from my website

**[www.croftfamilyhistory.com](http://www.croftfamilyhistory.com)** where I have documented my own family line from its origins in the Norman Conquest to the present day.

Stephen Croft

## THE ORIGIN OF THE CROFT FAMILY IN LANCASHIRE

The village of Dalton, near Burton in Kendal, which is now in Cumbria but was historically part of Lancashire, was the ancient home of the Croft (de Crofte) family. The area is quite wooded even today, and in medieval times when the Croft family were there it would have been a wild and untamed place. Dalton Hall (or 'Old Dalton Hall' as it is more commonly referred to, as there is a much newer Hall now nearby named Dalton Hall) lies half a mile or so to the south of the main road which runs through the township connecting Burton and Kirkby Lonsdale. The building, now a farmhouse, is predominantly 17<sup>th</sup> century; the date stone above the door reads 1666. This building would have been built by the Legh family, who held the manor of Dalton at this time. Adjoining are the remains of an earlier fortified tower, part of which can still be seen across the yard from the present rear door. These are the remains of the original medieval home of the Croft family of Dalton, probably built during the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the days when it was occupied by the Crofts the building was a Towerhouse, a form of Fortified Manor House where all the accommodation is in one tower, often having a parapet along the top of the tower, turrets and other defensive features. Although the residential buildings form one tower, this would usually have had a court of ancillary buildings. This was a high status building and a manorial centre. This building may well have replaced an earlier earthwork and timber castle of the motte and bailey or ringwork form as previously described. The old village around the hall is now totally gone, said to have been depopulated by the plague, but traces are still visible lying between the road and the Hall. In 1894 Dalton was transferred from Lancashire to Westmoreland, and has subsequently become part of Cumbria.

The first member of the Croft family in Lancashire was Roger de Crofte who was Lord of the manor of Dalton around the time of Henry II (around 1180). His origin cannot be proven, as no record survives. He may have been born in Dalton, or in Croft/Southworth in Winwick (near Warrington) (another manor controlled by the family) or possibly, as there is no reference to his father holding any lands in Lancashire, he was the first of the Croft family to move north from Croft Castle in Herefordshire.

This gives us two possibilities for the origins of the Croft family in Lancashire. Firstly, it is possible that since they were Norman tenant Lords of Croft and Southworth, (holding the parish for the Lord of Makerfield), they simply took their name from their Lordship of this parish. This would imply that although the earliest record of the Croft name is actually of Roger de Crofte of Dalton, they must have held Croft in Winwick first, perhaps for several more generations. The other possibility is that the Croft name was brought north by a member of the Croft family of Herefordshire, perhaps one of the brothers of Hugh de Crofte, in the early/mid 12th century. As Croft in Winwick does not appear in the Domesday Book (1086) we cannot say for certain that it existed at this time, and it is therefore possible that the name was given to the place after the arrival of its new Lord from Herefordshire. I feel that there is simply not enough evidence either way to say for certain, but two factors which support the theory of the name coming from Herefordshire are as follows:

In his definitive history of the Croft family of Herefordshire, *The House of Croft of Croft Castle*, by OGS Croft (of Croft Castle) in 1949, the author states "I think there can be little doubt that these Lancastrian Crofts were a branch of Croft of Croft Castle; the contemporary Christian names - Gilbert, Hugh, Roger and John are persistently repeated; furthermore they are all described as de Croft and a member of the family is twice described as John de Croft de Dalton in 1338". He seems convinced of the link between the two families, but I feel his points could be argued against - these contemporary names could be mere coincidence as they were in common use throughout Norman families at this time, and the description of John de Croft de Dalton could also refer to his origin in Croft in Winwick. I don't think OGS Croft was aware of Croft in Winwick at the time of his writing. He certainly doesn't mention it!

The second factor supporting the Lancashire - Herefordshire link is the Coat of Arms of the baronet family of Croft of North Yorkshire. It is certain, and well known that the Crofts of North Yorkshire descended out of Lancashire in direct line from the Lords of Dalton, however the arms of this Yorkshire branch are identical to those of Croft of Croft Castle, being granted in 1818 on creation of the baronetcy. So it must be presumed that Sir John Croft, 1st Baronet of Cowling Hall, who was awarded the arms, certainly thought himself to be a descendant of the Crofts of Herefordshire, and found no argument from the College of Arms, who awarded them. However, again there is a counter-argument: the Crofts of Dalton already had a coat of arms, totally different to those of Croft Castle- a design of black and silver diamonds, dating back to the Middle Ages. Sir John Croft seems to have completely ignored this in favour of the Herefordshire arms! OGS Croft also comments on these different Arms - "The Crofts of Dalton, being a branch of Croft of Croft Castle, would have been entitled to the ancient arms of that family, even if slightly differenced, so why have a completely different Coat of Arms?"

So, it seems impossible to definitively state the origin of the Crofts of Lancashire, and must remain a matter for conjecture. All that is certain is that they were of Norman origin, Lords of the Manors of Dalton and Croft in Winwick dating back to the 12th century, and *perhaps* came there from Croft Castle, Herefordshire.

One of the earliest records of Roger's existence in Dalton was when he granted 15 acres of land in Dalton in marriage with his daughter in 1195. Although the name of his daughter is not recorded,

the marriage is referred to in a pleading of 1292 when Roger de Burton claimed estovers of housebote and heybote (the right to take wood from an estate for necessary household use and for the repairing of hedges and fences) in 600 acres of woodland in Dalton against Roger, son of Henry de Crofte. The jury found it proved that about the time of King Richard I (around 1195) the Lord of Dalton married his daughter to the Lord of Burton, who afterwards had several children. Roger de Crofte of Dalton once went to Burton and found his daughter and her children without any fire, having nothing to burn whereupon he allowed the estovers in question. The plaintiff of 1292 withdrew his claim, but Roger de Crofte allowed him and his heirs to take fifteen cartloads of dry wood yearly.

Before 1194, Roger was succeeded by his son, Gilbert de Crofte, who was the tenant at a survey in 1212. Gilbert was also the Lord of the manor of Croft near Warrington. He held this manor by the service of falconer, and it was held of him by Hugh de Crofte and the heir of Randle. The identity of this Hugh de Crofte is not known, but he was certainly a near kinsman. Gilbert also held the manor of Southworth by a rent of 20s. Very soon afterwards, before 1219, Gilbert granted Southworth to Gilbert son of Hugh de Crofte and this Gilbert, taking the local surname, was the founder of the Southworth family, who held the manors of Southworth and Croft until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The modern village still bears the name 'Croft'.

The Crofts remained at Dalton, increasing the size of their manor generation by generation. By the mid 1400's, they held not only Dalton, but also Over Kellet, Yealand Conyers, Leighton Conyers, Yealand Redmayne, a share of the manor of Claughton, as well as various lands around Warton and Farleton in Cumbria.

The Croft name eventually died out in Dalton, when James Croft died in 1457 leaving no male heirs.

His daughter Mabel Crofte married Piers, son of Sir Piers Legh of Lyme in 1455, and his other daughter Alison married Geoffrey Middleton in 1438.

A division of the Croft inheritance was agreed upon in 1489, the manor of Dalton being assigned to Piers Legh, son of Piers and Mabel. The manor remained with the Legh family for three hundred years, until the death of Peter Thomas Legh in 1797, when it went to his sisters. It was then sold to the Rev. Geoffrey Hornby in 1803. Much of the remainder of the Croft estate, including Over Kellet, Yealand Conyers and Leighton went to the Middletons (of Leighton Hall), descended from the marriage of Alison and Geoffrey 1438. The Middletons continued to hold the estates for several centuries. After the division of the manors of the Crofts of Dalton, the junior branch of the family at Claughton increased considerably in importance.

## CROFT OF CLAUGHTON

This parish, with only a single township, is the smallest in the county, having an area of 1581 acres! It is bordered on the north by the River Lune, flowing through a green and level valley. The main road from Lancaster to Hornby runs through the valley. The parish church of St. Chad (now disused) stands by the road, as does the more ancient part of the old Hall (the later, Jacobean part of the Hall was moved stone by stone up the hill half a mile or so in the 1930's). At one time, around the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Claughton was regarded as a hamlet of Caton, and as late as 1717 Caton-with-Claughton was considered a single township.

In the early 12<sup>th</sup> century the manor of Claughton was held by the Kellet family, but was subsequently divided. It is difficult to trace the exact descent of the manor, but the first Croft interest was probably when Alice de Kellet (daughter and co-heir of Gilbert (Orm) de Kellet) married Henry de Crofte of Dalton around 1220. Thus a moiety (half share) of the Lordship descended to the Crofts of Dalton.

Roger de Crofte died in 1255 holding 4½ oxgangs of land in Claughton of the King by a rent of 26d. The other moiety was held by a family named Claughton, who were descended from the other co-heir of Orm de Kellet, his other daughter Godith.

In 1297 Roger de Crofte of Dalton and William de Claughton each held a plough-land (8 oxgangs) and 2 oxgangs of land in Claughton and Over Kellet by a rent of 5s 9d, and were stated to be jointly seised of the lordship of Claughton. Subsequently, in 1324, a third lord is named John Fleming. His portion appears to come from a charter by which Gilbert de Kellet granted a third part of Claughton to Adam, his brother. Henry de Crofte of Claughton held a third share at this time, given to his father in 1309 by his brother, Roger de Crofte of Dalton. He had granted his brother Henry all his part of the manor at a rent of £10 of silver during the grantors life, and afterwards rendering only the services due to the chief lords.

It would seem that ownership of the manor of Claughton changed hands on a regular basis, as in 1346 John de Crofte of Dalton held 2⅔ oxgangs of land, Henry de Crofte of Claughton held 3 oxgangs, Edmund de Hornby held the same and William Doggeson held 1 oxgang. The Hornby part of the manor seems to have been acquired from the Claughton family.

The manor was held similarly for several further generations: Henry de Crofte of Claughton, brother of Roger de Crofte of Dalton who first granted the moiety to his brother in 1309, was succeeded by his son, Henry. He too was succeeded by a son named Henry who was followed in turn by his son, John de Crofte. John died in 1416, still holding a third part of the manor. It seems that the family also owned property in nearby Wennington at this time, as in 1370 John de Crofte complained that various persons had broken into his house at Old Wennington. It is possible of course that this house was the family home, as it is not certain when the Crofts took up residence in Claughton Hall.

Several more generations led eventually to Thomas Crofte, born around 1500. When Thomas Crofte died in 1556, his inquisition shows a considerable increase in his estate. This must have been a prosperous period for the family, for on his death he had not only the third part of the

manor, with messuages, the water mill, land etc. in Claughton, but also other lands and properties in Tatham, Melling, Gressingham, Bolton, Over Kellet and Ireby. He had four sons; his heir Henry, born in 1526, and also Gabriell, Edward and William.

Henry Crofte, son of Thomas, increased the estate still further, acquiring another third of the manor in 1565. When Henry died in 1570, he was succeeded as lord by his brother, Gabriell.

Gabriell, born in 1532, was Queen Elizabeth's auditor in Ireland in 1561, again showing the increased importance and prosperity which the family was enjoying at this time. It is a little surprising that they were doing so well at this time, the family being staunch Catholics, and thus subject to the persecution of the time! Claughton Hall, the home of the Croft family, although very ancient in parts, shows major building having been undertaken around this time. This is in accord with the apparent prosperity of the family at this time. Gabriell also acquired a third share of the manor of Poulton during this period, he purchased more lands in Over Kellet from William Redmayne in 1568, and in 1581 yet more messuages and land from Marmaduke Redmayne and Ambrose Pudsey. He also purchased the Middleton share of the advowson as well as the remaining third of the manor of Claughton, thus become sole lord of the manor of Claughton. The Blackburn family must have been connected to the Crofts by marriage, for at some point around this time Marmaduke Blackburn, wishing to be relieved of the care of his estate on account of his age, apparently demised (transferred) his estate in Capernwray (Over Kellet) to Gabriel Crofte, "his near kinsman" and went to live at Gabriel's house in Claughton. The Crofts did not keep this estate however, as it is seen in subsequent generations to belong to the Blackburn family once again. In 1587 Gabriell granted the manor, lands, water mill and advowson of the church to trustees for division between his brothers, Edward and William, the former to have possession of the Hall. Gabriell died soon after. In 1590 a settlement was made between William Crofte and his wife Jane, and Edward Crofte and his wife Elizabeth.





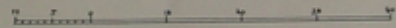
Modern photos of Cloughton Hall (16<sup>th</sup> Century Manor House - Original Position)



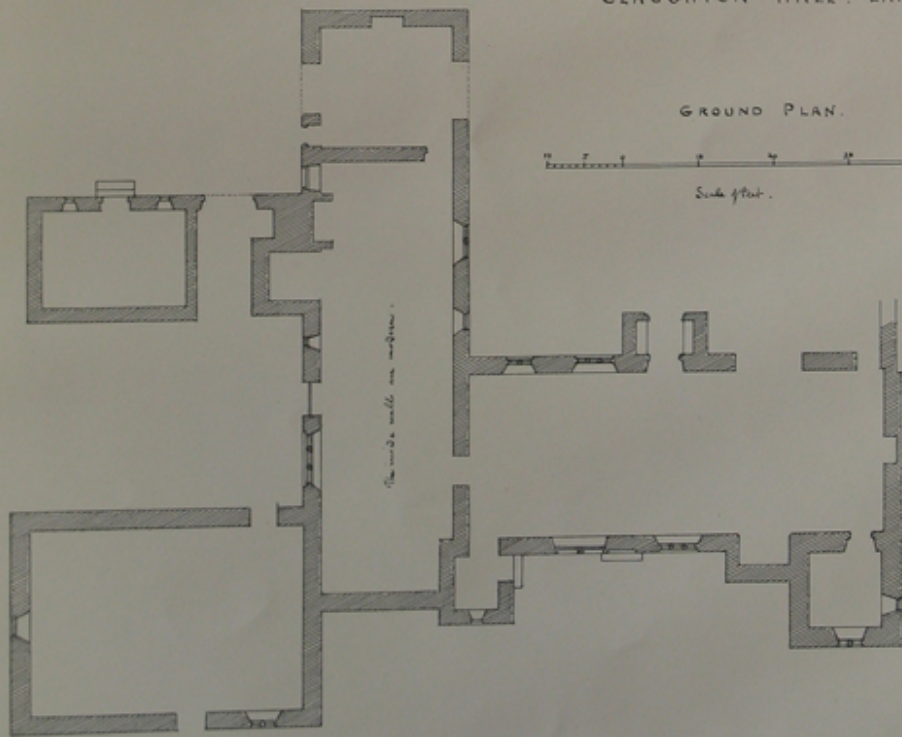


CLAUGHTON HALL, LANCASTER.

GROUND PLAN.



Scale feet.



Sketches of Cloughton Hall from the Abbey Square Sketch Book (1872)





Claughton Hall in its original position - photo taken around 1910

Edward Crofte continued to increase his estate, particularly in the nearby village of Gressingham, in 1591 purchasing four messuages and land in Gressingham, and making a further purchase in 1595. In an agreement dated 1592, Edward Crofte is listed as owning The Overhall in Gressingham, purchased by Gabriell Crofte, deceased brother of Edward Crofte, from Edmund Scambler, then the Bishop of Peterborough. The document goes on to state that the Overhall is for the use of his wife Elizabeth until their second son Gabriel is 21 years old, then to go to him for life. Other properties held by Edward are listed to pass to his other male heirs. It would appear that this is indeed what happened, as in 1630, 16 years after his death, Edward's widow Elizabeth appears in a document as "Elizabeth Croft of Gressingham", paying £9 a year as composition for the two thirds of her lands which should have been sequestered for her recusancy (adherence to the Roman Catholic religion). Their second son, Gabriell must have died, as there is no further mention of him, nor of their third son Nicholas, baptised at Caton in 1596, however their son Lawrence prospered. He appears in several documents in the 1620's and 1630's, as Lawrence Croft of Gressingham, gentleman. The lands in Gressingham stayed in Croft hands until 1655 when they were sold by Lawrence Croft and his wife, Mary, to Lancelot Pickering.

Returning to Edward, Lawrence's father, in June 1568 Edward became rector of Heysham, the patron being his brother, Gabriell. However, in 1583 Edward resigned as rector, becoming a recusant (this explains his widow Elizabeth being fined for recusancy in 1630). His brother Gabriell remained as patron however, until his death in 1587. In 1600 Edward also held the advowson of Heysham church, although in 1606 it seems to have been held by his brother, William. It was during the time when Edward was lord of the manor, in the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, that a major addition to the hall was built. The exact year of construction has not been recorded as far as I can find, but the large west wing of the house, consisting of two large square towers and a central hall, is certainly of this period. This later addition to Claughton Hall was subsequently moved in 1932, stone by stone, up the hill to a more scenic location! The earlier 16<sup>th</sup> century part of the Hall remained in its original situation.

Edward Crofte had at least seven children; Henry, Gabriel, Nicholas, Edward, Lawrence, John and Jane, born between 1590 and about 1610. When Edward died in 1614, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Henry Croft. Henry died in 1625, and was succeeded by his brother, another Edward, as Lord of the manor. It would appear that both his brothers Gabriel and Nicholas had died at some point before this. Up to this time, the family had remained faithful to the Roman Catholic religion, despite persecution. In 1607, lands in Claughton, Poulton, Gressingham and Over Kellet had been sequestered for the recusancy of Edward Croft senior. However, Edward (jun.) and his wife Frances subsequently conformed, and in 1632 he compounded for the arrears due to his recusancy, just as his mother, Elizabeth of Gressingham, had had to do two years earlier. This marked the end of the period of prosperity for the family, for in 1641 the estate was put into administration, and was mortgaged and subsequently sold, Francis Sherington of Worsley becoming at least part owner. The Croft family continued to hold the manor however, for Edward's son, John Croft, still held the manor on his death in 1694.

The manor eventually left Croft ownership in 1702 when it was purchased by Thomas Fenwick of Burrow. His family held it until 1898 when it was sold to the Claughton Manor Brick Company who still hold it to the present day. Members of the Croft family continued to live in Claughton after losing the manor; there are Croft gravestones in Claughton churchyard dating from 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and at least one branch of the family farmed at West End Farm in Claughton until comparatively recent times. A Nicholas Croft who died in 1692 leaving a widow Elinor and a son Henry had land in Claughton and Gressingham. The epitaph of Gabriel Croft of West End, who died in 1795 states that he "spent his youth in a merchant's office in Liverpool, but preferring books to riches retired to Claughton and devoted his leisure to Homer, Virgil and Horace." Other branches of the family lived in the surrounding area, in Caton, Littledale, Hornby, Farleton and Wray, and some remain to the present day.



Claughton Hall (Rebuilt in 1932) with its 17<sup>th</sup> Century Towers and Great Hall

Returning to William Crofte, youngest son of Thomas Crofte and brother of Henry, Gabriell and Edward; as has been previously mentioned, his first wife was called Jane. She was still living in 1597 as both William and Jane are named in a claim of rent in Poulton in that year. She must have died fairly shortly after this however, as William remarried Mary Gascoyne, daughter of John Gascoyne, in 1602. William would have been at least 60 years old by this time, but Mary must have been considerably younger, as William and Mary had a daughter, also called Mary, born in 1604. Their marriage is celebrated in an impressive coat of arms, carved in stone, showing on the left side the arms of Croft, and on the right side the Gascoyne arms. This was originally located in the wall of the Croft family's private chapel, which was attached to the church in Claughton, but when the church was rebuilt in 1818, the arms were fortunately saved and placed in a prominent position in the west wall of the new building.





Arms of Croft and Gascoyne on Claughton Church (dated 1602)

Less fortunately, it seems that the parish records dating before 1701 were lost at the time of the rebuilding, either through carelessness or neglect, and as such all baptisms, marriages and burials between the 1580's and 1700 cannot be verified! In 1602 William made a settlement of all his lands in Caton, Littlefield, Deep Clough and Tongue Moor on his new wife and his issue by her, and on William's death in 1606 all his lands and property accordingly went to his daughter, Mary. Particular mention is made of William's lands in and around Caton, which he had inherited when the estates were divided between himself and his brother Edward in 1587, although William certainly had property elsewhere in the area, such as Farleton, Gressingham, Whittington, Newton and Docker, but the tenure of some of these is not known.



## THE CROFT FAMILY IN CATON (LITTLEDALE)

Most of the township of Caton is hilly, the land sloping north from Clougha Pike and Ward's Stone, 1836 ft above sea level, to the wooded valley of Artle Beck, then rising again to Caton Moor, at about 1000ft, then descending to the Lune. By the riverside is a level tract of land where the village is situated with the church at Brookhouse a mile and a half to the east and the hamlet of Caton Green still further east on higher ground. The village of Brookhouse, containing Caton church, is in fact the original village of Caton, the present village of Caton being fairly modern. The hillside district south of Artle Beck is called Littledale. The main road running through the township is that from Lancaster to Hornby, the same road which runs through Claughton. Another road runs nearly parallel to the main road, but on higher ground, and passes through Brookhouse and past the church and Caton Green to Claughton.

Mason, the friend of the poet Gray, described the view looking east from Caton towards Claughton and beyond: "Ingleborough, behind a variety of lesser mountains, makes the background of the prospect: on each hand, up in the middle distance, rise two sloping hills, the left clothed with thick woods, the right with variegated rock and herbage; between them in the richest of valleys the Lune serpentines for many a mile, and comes forth ample and clear through a well-wooded and richly pastured foreground. Every feature which constitutes a perfect landscape of the extensive sort is here not only boldly marked, but also in its best position."

The Gernet family of Heysham held the manor of Caton from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, as well as pasture land in Caton, afterwards known as Littledale. The branch of this family holding the manor adopted the local name and became 'de Caton' in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Ownership of the manor changed hands through the centuries, moieties passing to the Curwen family and the de Lancaster family. The Lancaster moiety eventually passed to the Lords Mouteagle, by whom it was held in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Their home was called Caton Hall, and in 1539 this was acquired by the Baines family. In 1596/7 William Parker, Lord Mouteagle, sold his part of the manor of Caton to William Crofte of Claughton. This did not include the hall as the Crofts of Claughton did not require a manor house in Caton, living only a short distance away at Claughton Hall. Thomas Baines who held Caton Hall complained in 1598 about the Crofts fishing in the Lune, "as many as seven salmon having been taken at a time!"

William Crofte died in 1606 holding twelve messuages, land etc. in Caton. As previously mentioned, he had, in 1602, settled his manor of Caton with Littlefield, Deep Clough and Tongue Moor, lately purchased from Lord Mouteagle, on his new wife Mary and his issue by her. This transpired to be a daughter, Mary, born in 1604. William's daughter Mary married first William Lascelles of Brackenbury, and later John Leyburne of Cunswick. In 1630 Sir Henry Compton purchased the moiety of Caton from John Leyburne and Mary, the manor thus leaving Croft ownership. As a point of interest, Sir Henry Compton was a Royalist and recusant, and had his estates, including Caton, sequestered in the Civil War, for which he compounded.

The parish records for St. Paul's church in Caton begin in 1585, but no Crofts appear until 1596 when William Crofte bought his part of the manor. Most probably members of the Croft family were baptised, married and buried in Cloughton Church until this point. (It's a shame that parish records for Cloughton do not begin until 1701, previous records having not survived, as details of baptisms etc. cannot therefore be verified as previously mentioned.) Many members of the Croft family were buried "in Ecclesia" or, in other words, within the church at Caton. This may have meant that they had a family vault, confirming them to be an important family in the area. Unfortunately, along with many other ancient churches, St. Paul's was completely rebuilt in Victorian times (1865), only the ancient tower surviving. All traces of any Croft graves or monuments were destroyed.



Caton Church Prior to 1865



Caton Church in Modern Times

The first member of the Croft family to appear in the baptism records at Caton is Nicholas Croft, son of Mr. Edward Croft, in 1596. Edward Croft was lord of the manor of Claughton at this time, and brother of William Croft who had purchased the manor of Caton from Lord Mounteagle around this time, so it is fitting that he should be the first member of the Croft family to use the church for baptism. No other Crofts were baptised there until 13 years later in 1609, although two burials of children (of Henry Croft) occurred in 1589 and 1592, indicating that members of the family were already living in Caton before William purchased the manor. From 1609 there are regular entries in the Caton registers, suggesting that the members of the family living in this area had stopped using Claughton church in favour of Caton. The member of the family who was baptising children here in the early part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century was Gabriell Crofte (and his wife, Ellin). They had around ten children in Caton. It is highly likely that this Gabriell and Henry (previously mentioned) were brothers, as in Henry's will of 1623 there is a mention of "his brother Gabriel". It is impossible to be certain about the identity of their father as they would have been baptised around 1570, either at Caton before records had begun to be kept, or at Claughton church and therefore in the 'lost' records of St. Chad's. What is certain however, is that they were members of a branch of the Croft family of Claughton; hence the traditional family use of Henry and Gabriell as Christian names. The marriages of neither Henry nor Gabriel appear in the Caton church records, so it is a fair assumption that they both married at Claughton. Henry did not use Caton church to baptise his children, so again we can assume that he used Claughton, and even Gabriell's first child, also named Henry and born around 1600, was not baptised at Caton (presumably at Claughton again). As the family was resolutely Roman Catholic during this period, it is also possible that Caton church was shunned in favour of Robert Hall Catholic Mission (about 10 miles away). As the Croft family had their own chapel at Claughton however, I feel it is more likely that this would have been used. Incidentally, it was around this time when the letter 'e' began to be dropped from the name Crofte, increasingly becoming 'Croft.' Henry died in 1623, and his brother Gabriell died in 1636. Both were buried within the church, suggesting that the family had a high standing in the area. Gabriell's will describes him as being "of Tongmoor". Tongmoor (Tonguemoor) was the name of the house/farm where Gabriel and his family lived, and was situated in the hamlet of Littledale, about 2 miles from Caton. Of the 10 children that I know to have been Gabriell's, a combination of Parish Register entries and wills describes most of them as being either "of Littledale" or "of Tongmoor". Two things can be deduced from the Caton church records regarding the Crofts of Littledale. The first is that as every Croft entry in the records can ultimately be traced back to Gabriel, it is clear that he and his brother Henry were the only two members of the Croft family in the area during the early 1600's. It is also certain that these two brothers came to Caton (Littledale) as adults, and were therefore the first generation of Crofts to inhabit the area. This must be the case, since if the family had been in the area before this, there would be some Croft entries in the Caton parish records not attributable to Gabriell, but to another brother, uncle etc. It is likely that Henry was eldest son and Gabriell was the second son, as this was the family tradition of naming, and they were probably born in one of the nearby villages inhabited by the Croft family in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Hornby or Farleton are the most likely, as they are close to both Claughton and Caton/Littledale, and there is documentary evidence of Crofts living in both these places in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. I currently have no proof of Gabriell's origin however, but maybe at some point evidence will come to light! It is worth noting that Tonguemoor House was a large, historic house, which supports the

supposition that Gabriell was not far removed from the Crofts of Claughton Hall. Also, It seems that Tonguemoor was actually owned at the time by William Croft of Claughton Hall, as in 1602 William made a settlement of all his lands in "Caton, Littlefield (Littledale), Deep Clough and Tongue Moor" on his new wife and his issue by her. Particular mention is made of William's lands in and around Caton, which he had inherited when the estates were divided between himself and his brother Edward in 1587. This suggests that the Crofts of Claughton Hall owned much of Littledale, including Tonguemoor, so it would seem that Gabriell was a tenant at Tonguemoor, his landlord being his cousin from the big Hall!



Map of Caton and Littledale 1763



Regarding the Crofts in Littledale, the family begun by Gabriell in the early 1600's continued in this area for at least 5 more generations, until the mid 1700s, after which the family is dispersed to the surrounding villages. Tonguemoor itself remained in the family until at least about the year 1700, which is the last document I have found which refers to a member of the Croft family as being "of Tonguemoor". It is likely that the family also had other property and land in Littledale at the same time. Those members of the family which are described in parish registers and wills as being "of Littledale" may well have lived at Tonguemoor, but it is more likely that they lived elsewhere within the hamlet. As the family grew with each generation, it is hardly likely that they all continued to live in the same house; it would have been very crowded! It should be noted that Littledale was a rural community, with no village centre, and consisted of only a handful of farms, as is still the case today. So by the late 1600s, it is possible that members of the Croft family were a prominent family in Littledale, occupying several farms.

## Tonguemoor

Tonguemoor House was a very ancient and historic building, dating back to at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, and possibly much earlier. Sadly, I have been unable to find any photographs or drawings of the house, which was demolished in the 1970's to make way for a new building. I have however found quite a few references to it on documents and maps from the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Tonguemoor House stood in a prominent position in the Littledale valley, and consisted of the main house, large barn and another building attached to a large walled garden, typical of a Tudor/Elizabethan dwelling. This layout can clearly be seen on OS map of Littledale dated 1844-45, and on a later OS map dated 1895, the same buildings are evident, now situated next to the recently built Littledale Hall.

Littledale Hall was built next to Tonguemoor by Rev. John Dodson. He was the vicar of Cockerham until 1849, and on retirement moved into Tonguemoor. In the 1851 census he is living with his family and servants at Tonguemoor, and is described as "Landed Proprietor." He had Littledale Hall built in the mid 1850's, and in the 1861 census he is resident at his new Hall, with Tonguemoor now occupied by servants and their families. John Dodson died in 1890, and Littledale Hall and Estate passed to William Priestley, a Bradford businessman.

The Littledale Hall Estate, as it became known, was put up for sale in 1934. By this time the Estate comprised pretty much the whole of the Littledale Valley, about 2000 acres, as can be seen from the sale brochure and plan.

# CATON · LANCASTER

AMIDST WONDERFUL SCENERY.

THE  
Freehold Agricultural and Sporting Property  
distinguished as

## Littledale Hall Estate

extending to

About 1,903 Acres

comprising:

The Charming Residence of Littledale Hall

with

TONGUE MOOR HOME FARM

SIX VALUABLE FARMS

TWO COTTAGES and SAWMILL

Producing an Estimated and Actual Rental of £878 10s. p.a.

To be Sold by Auction as a Whole or alternatively in 11 Lots (unless previously sold by Private Treaty)

At The King's Arms Hotel, Lancaster.

On MONDAY, 29th OCTOBER, 1934,

At 3 o'clock.

Auctioneers:

Messrs. JACKSON STOPS & STAFF

Survey House, Bond Street, Leeds

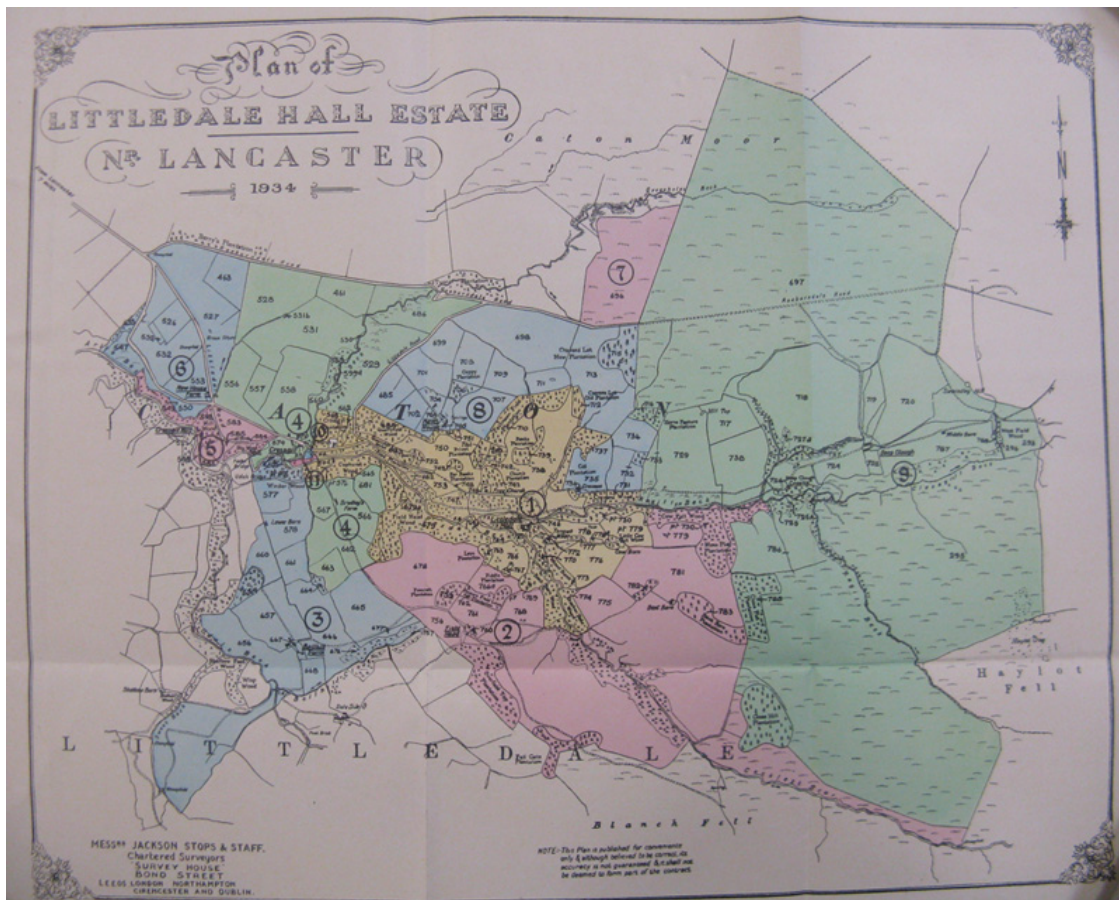
ALSO AT LONDON, NORTHAMPTON, CIRENCESTER, DUBLIN AND EDINBURGH

Acting in Conjunction with

Messrs. PROCTER & BIRKBECK

32, Market Square, Lancaster (Tel. 108).

Solicitors:—Messrs. GERALD & ARTHUR MARSHALL,  
10, New Square, Lincoln's Inn, London, W.C.2.



*MODE OF OFFERING: The Estate will be offered as a whole and if not so sold the Lots will be offered as catalogued.*

With possession of House and Grounds and early possession of Home Farm.

LOT 1  
(Coloured yellow on Plan).

Area about: 179 acres 3 roods 24 poles.

The Charming Moderate-sized Residence

known as

**Littledale Hall**

Littledale, Caton, Nr. Lancaster.



Situated about 505 feet above sea level, occupying a sheltered, picturesque and secluded position, amid charming scenery.

"Oh Littledale with all thy charms,  
Who is there that can tell,  
The splendour of thy hills and dales,  
Where nature's work doth dwell?"

The Residence is approached from the main road by a gateway and drive about three-quarters of a mile long, which passes alongside a stream of grandeur, beauty and fascinating rugged scenery, rock clad banks with pine trees and other ornamental trees and clumps of beautiful shrubs.

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As can be seen from the photograph, Littledale Hall is a handsome Gothic style Building, typical of the Victorian period. Tongue Moor is situated just behind and to the left of the Hall, sadly not photographed for the sale.

Back now to the family - As already stated, Gabriell and his wife Ellin had 10 children. These were: Henry (bapt. not found, ~1600), Elizabeth (bapt. Caton 1610), Robert (bapt. not found, ~1612), Thomas (bapt. not found, ~1615), Mary (bapt. Caton 1615), Ann (bapt. Caton 1620), Margaret (bapt. Caton 1622), Gabriell (bapt. Caton 1625), William (bapt. Caton 1628) and Ellinor (bapt. Caton 1630). It's interesting that the baptisms of Gabriel's first three male children were not in the Caton Parish Church. I assume they were either at Cloughton in the Croft's chapel, or at Robert Hall Catholic Mission. All his children after his third son were, however, baptised at Caton. Something must have persuaded him to begin using the local Parish Church. Looking at Gabriell's family in turn, the records tell us the following:

Henry Crofte, eldest son of Gabriell, "Yeoman of Littledale", married twice (both times in Caton church). By his first wife, Elizabeth Walker, who he married in 1621, he had two sons, William (1622) and Lawrence (1629). Henry married again in 1638 to Ellin Foxcrofte (a widow), and had



four more children, Ellinor (1641), Gabriell (1642), Robert (1646) and William (1649). We must assume that his first wife, Elizabeth, had died at some time previous to this, although there is no burial record in Caton. My own family line descends from Henry's second son, Lawrence. There is no further trace of him in the Caton records other than his baptism, but he reappears some years later as an adult in the village of Whittle-le-Woods, near Leyland, some 25 miles south of his birthplace.

Elizabeth, Gabriell's eldest daughter - no records other than her baptism have come to light.

Robert, Gabriell's second son, married Helen, and died in 1675.

Thomas, his third son, married Alice, and it would seem continued to live and farm at Tonguemoor, as the burial records of both him and his wife refer to them as being "of Tonguemoor", and in his will of 1686 he is described as "Husbandman" "of Tonguemoor". As far as I can tell, they only had one child, also named Thomas, born in 1642. He married Alice Hynd in 1673, and continued to live and farm at Tonguemoor until his death in 1686 (he and his father died within a few weeks of each other, perhaps of the same illness). His offspring (three daughters and one son) were the last members of the Croft family to live at Tonguemoor, as there is no further mention of Crofts there after about 1700. Sadly, Tonguemoor survived until the 1970's but was then demolished, and very little now remains; the large walled garden and attached building being the only survivors.

Mary, Gabriell's next child, married and became Mary Coulston.

Ann, his next daughter, died in 1694 at the age of 74. She is described in her will as "spinster of Haylat". Haylat (aka Haylot) was, and still is, a farm on the edge of Littledale, on the border of Roeburndale.

Margaret, his next daughter, married and became Margaret Jackson, and his youngest daughter Ellinor married and became Ellinor Clarke.

Gabriel, his fourth son, married Jane (surname unknown), but it seems he died childless at the age of 46. In his will of 1671, he is also described as "Husbandman of Tonguemoor", so it seems that he shared the farm with his elder brother Thomas.

William, Gabriell's fifth son, married Dorothy Foxcrofte in 1654. Once married he left Tonguemoor, but remained in Littledale. He is described in one document (dated 1668 when he would have been aged 40) as "William Crofte of Littledale, Webster". So it would seem that he and his wife were not farmers but weavers. Several more documents refer to William and Dorothy buying and selling property and land in Littledale; in particular a messuage and tenement called Lamb Close, a messuage and tenement called Broadwoodhead, two closes called Cowe Hill and Lower Close and a deal involving 1 messuage, 1 barn, 1 stable, 2 gardens, 10 acres of land, 4 acres of meadow and 10 acres of pasture in Littledale. It seems that William had become quite successful! It may be that William had married wisely, as Dorothy's father and brother also owned properties and land in the same area. However, this could also be pure coincidence, as Littledale is a very small place. William and Dorothy had eight children that I know of, two sons and six daughters, born between 1654 and 1673. The only one who I know the fate of is his eldest son, Thomas. He married Margaret



(surname unknown), remained in Littledale and had a family of two sons and daughters (William, Anne, Henry and another Ann - the first one having died as an infant).

In 1758, the will of William Croft (son of Thomas) describes him as being “of Daleside”, which is a neighbouring farm to Tonguemoor. This William, and his wife Elizabeth (Walmesley) had a family of their own at Daleside - Thomas, Margaret and John. On William’s death in 1758, Daleside was bequeathed to his younger son John, his eldest son relocating to Hornby. John remained at Daleside until his death in 1775, after which the farm must have been sold, as by 1786 it was occupied by John Townson, and there is no further mention of the Crofts there after this time. On a map dating from 1763, Tonguemoor House is clearly marked, and is obviously the most predominant building in Littledale, as it is the only dwelling actually marked on the map. South West of Tonguemoor, on the border with the fell, the phrases “Townson’s & Croft’s Wisps” and “Crofts” can be seen. This is the position of Daleside farm and its land.



Detail of 1763 map of Littledale



Daleside farm itself is still standing, but has been unoccupied for many years, and is now in a poor state of repair. Unfortunately, as with many other properties, it is now owned by the Estate of the Duke of Westminster, and is thus unavailable to be bought and renovated. The likelihood is that, as with many other buildings on these vast estates, it will be allowed to gradually fall down.



Daleside Farm





The roof structure of one of the barns at Daleside

As previously mentioned, the various branches of the Littledale Croft Family gradually dispersed during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, some going to Melling and Hornby (just beyond Cloughton), while some continued hill farming and moved from Littledale towards Wray and Roeburndale, living at Park House, Haylot , Deepclough, Smeer Hall and Craggs at various times during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. These branches can be traced via the census returns, and descendants of this Littledale family spread throughout the Lune Valley to Kirkby Lonsdale, Warton, Silverdale and Borwick. In addition, remnants of the original Croft family of Cloughton Hall can still be found in the Lune Valley.