

# THE MULTIPLE ESTATE: A FRAMEWORK FOR THE EVOLUTION OF SETTLEMENT IN ANGLO-SAXON AND SCANDINAVIAN CUMBRIA

Angus J. L. Winchester

In general, it is not until the later thirteenth century that surviving documents enable us to reconstruct in any detail the pattern of rural settlement in the valleys and plains of Cumbria. By that time we find a populous landscape, the valleys of the Lake District supporting communities similar in size to those which they contained in the sixteenth century, the countryside peppered with corn mills and fulling mills using the power of the fast-flowing becks to process the produce of field and fell. To gain any idea of settlement in the area at an earlier date from documentary sources, we are thrown back on the dry, bare bones of the structure of landholding provided by a scatter of contemporary documents, including for southern Cumbria a few bald lines in the Domesday survey. This paper aims to put some flesh on the evidence of these early sources by comparing the patterns of lordship which they reveal in different parts of Cumbria and by drawing parallels with other parts of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Central to the argument pursued below is the concept of the multiple estate, a compact grouping of townships which geographers, historians and archaeologists are coming to see as an ancient, relatively stable framework within which settlement in northern England evolved during the centuries before the Norman Conquest. The term 'multiple estate' has been coined by G. R. J. Jones to describe a grouping of settlements linked by common overlordship and its attendant dues and services to a central place, a seigniorial seat represented in physical and institutional terms by the overlord's hall and court.<sup>2</sup> Such settlement groupings were identified initially by their institutional and tenorial features which, it was argued, were ancient and bore similarities to early Welsh patterns.<sup>3</sup> More recent work has drawn attention to their geographical and economic characteristics whereby the frequent combination of an upland and a lowland component in a multiple estate, as noted by Jones for Burghshire on the Pennine flanks in Yorkshire,<sup>4</sup> suggests that such estates were fundamental to the early exploitation of resources, dividing the extensive upland pastures of the north between groups of communities centred on lordly seats in the adjacent lowlands.

The antiquity of the multiple estate as a tenorial feature has been argued on various fronts. The ubiquity of such settlement groupings in the

eleventh and twelfth centuries in northern England and southern Scotland, their similarities to ancient Welsh patterns, and the frequent correspondence between the boundaries of hundreds and parishes and those of multiple estates all point to the conclusion that such estates provided a framework within which settlement evolved in the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian periods.<sup>5</sup> It is against this background that the Cumbrian evidence will be viewed.

## THE TERRITORIAL STRUCTURE OF EARLY MEDIEVAL CUMBRIA

The counties of north-west England were created in the later twelfth century by combining earlier territorial divisions to form new, larger units. These earlier divisions — Kendal, Furness, Copeland, Allerdale — covered clearly defined geographical areas, their boundaries following the major rivers and watersheds, with the result that each contained both a share of the upland Lakeland massif and a block of the peripheral lowlands [Fig. 7.1]. These large territorial divisions are recorded both as the rural deaneries into which the parishes in the dioceses of Carlisle and York were grouped and as the 'wards' (*ballivae*) which take the place of hundreds or wapentakes in Cumberland and Westmorland and are recorded from the thirteenth century. In several cases the same units recur as the great baronies established after the imposition of Norman control. They were regional divisions of great durability in the early Middle Ages, and G. W. S. Barrow has argued, taking their use as rural deaneries as evidence of antiquity and noting the division of south-west Scotland and much of Wales into similar early territorial units, that they were ancient entities, possibly Celtic in origin.<sup>6</sup>

Returning to the tenurial characteristics of these large territories, it seems that their use by the Normans as baronies may obscure an earlier pattern of overlordship. The evidence for land tenure in the area in the eleventh and twelfth centuries suggests that these ancient divisions often embraced smaller settlement groupings, estates which were themselves comparable to the multiple estates of other parts of northern England. In Furness, for instance, Cartmel, the territory east of the river Leven, was a separate entity mentioned in 677 and from 1189, if not earlier, tenurially independent of the remainder of Furness. The rest of Furness, under the control of Furness abbey as sole tenant-in-chief from 1227, was nevertheless held as two great fiefs a century earlier.<sup>7</sup> Copeland similarly contained three subdivisions which were ancient liberties and multiple estates: the barony of Egremont (also termed the barony of Copeland); the honour of Cockermouth, said by tradition to have been separated from the remainder of Copeland c. 1100; and the seignory of Millom, apparently listed with earl Tosti's estates in Furness in Domesday Book but thereafter held of the barony of Egremont, though jurisdictionally independent. Kendal, a unitary barony by the later twelfth century, nevertheless contained three major settlement groupings in 1066: Gillemichael's estate centred on

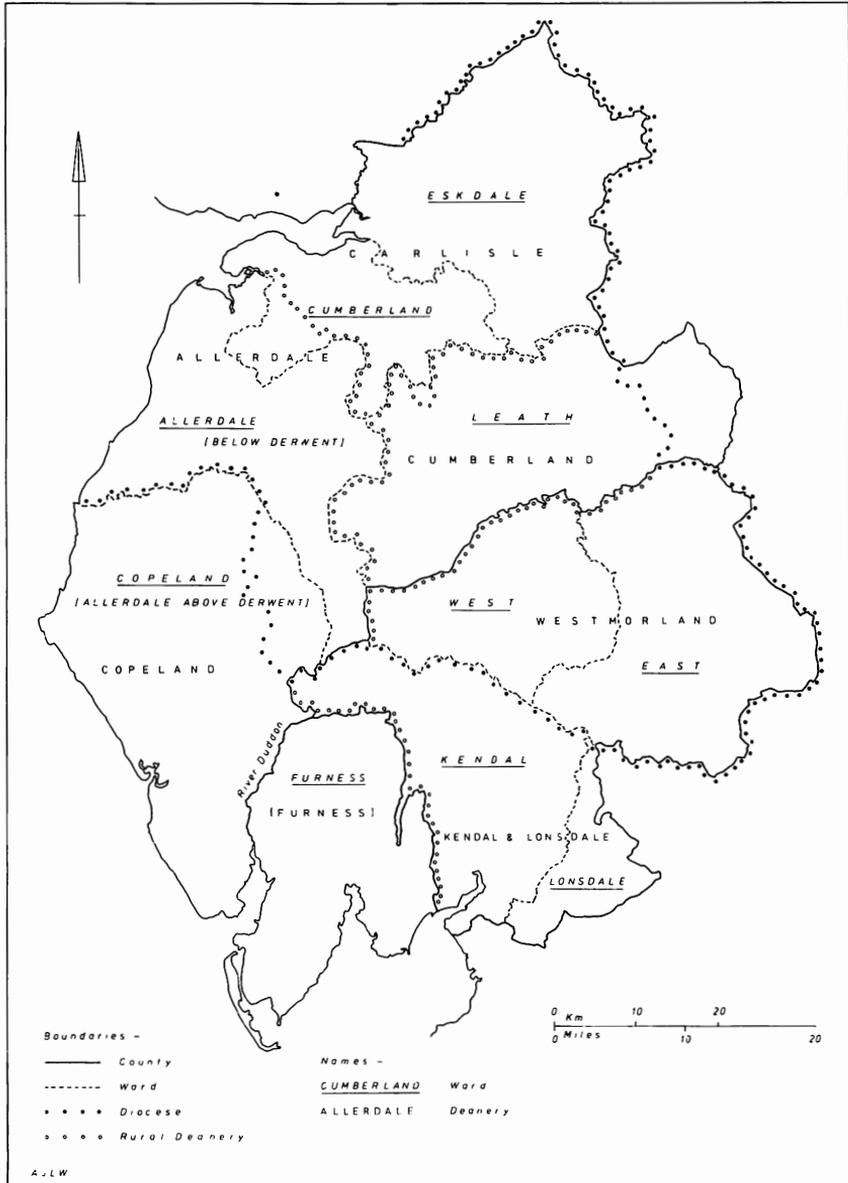


Fig. 7.1 Cumbria: ancient secular divisions.

Strickland (near Kendal), Tosti's holding centred on Beetham, and a group of settlements listed as part of Torfin's manor of Austwick, in the West Riding of Yorkshire.<sup>8</sup>

The division of the Lake District into parishes reflects these smaller multiple estates rather than the larger territorial divisions described earlier. The pattern is one of vast parishes reaching up into the heart of the Cumbrian mountains and anchored to churches in the peripheral lowlands, which are probably ecclesiastical sites of great antiquity. In Cope-land, for example, the parish churches of Brigham, St Bees and Millom lie within a couple of miles of the estate centres of Cockermouth, Egremont and Millom respectively. Their extensive parishes respect the boundaries between the multiple estates and encompass large parts of the upland area of each estate. In Kendal barony [Fig. 7.2] some correspondence is found between parish boundaries and Domesday estates. Although there is not a watertight relationship between parish and estate, the members of

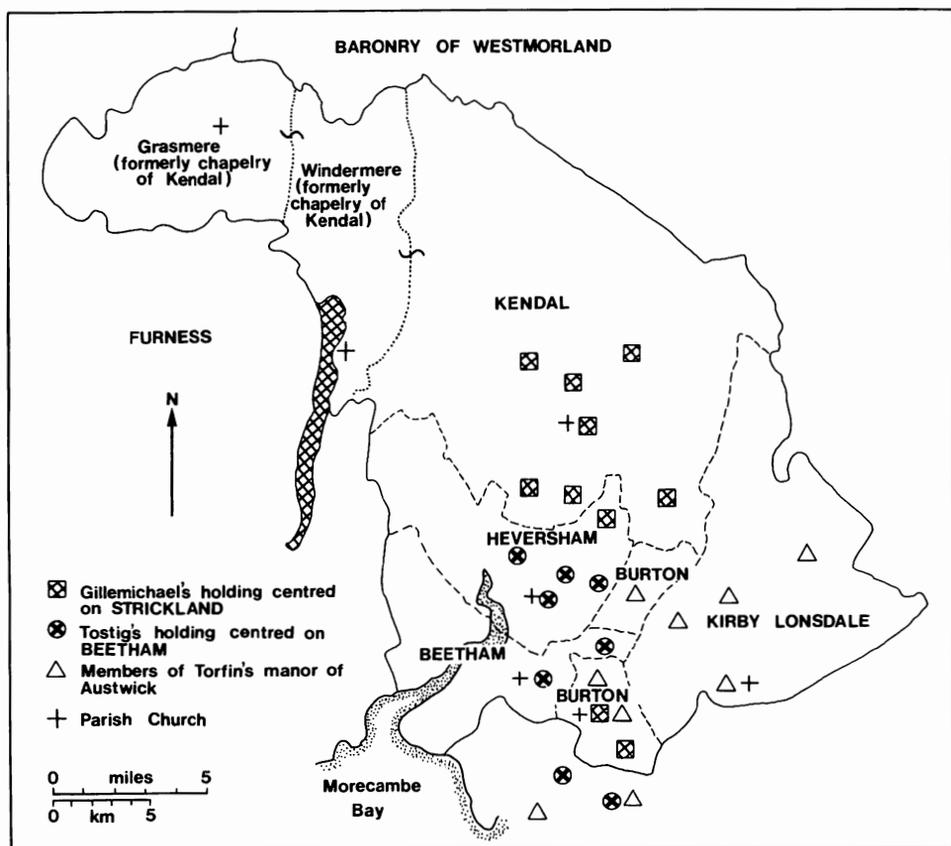


Fig. 7.2 Kendal barony: Domesday estates and parish boundaries.

Gillemichael's Strickland estate lie, with one exception, only in the parishes of Kendal and Burton, those of Tosti's Beetham estate only in Heversham and Beetham parishes, and those of Torfin's holding only in Kirkby Lonsdale and Burton parishes.

## THE INTERNAL STRUCTURE OF CUMBRIAN MULTIPLE ESTATES

### Upland and Lowland Components

A striking feature of the multiple estates identified in the Lake District is the existence in each of contrasting upland and lowland components. The upland element, covering the estate's portion of the Lakeland massif, was retained by the lord of the multiple estate as a private 'forest' or, strictly, free chase. In the lowland component the lord retained direct control over relatively few settlements, mostly those near his seat, the majority of vills being freehold estates bound by dues and services to the overlord at his court.

The pattern is seen most clearly in the three multiple estates in Copeland [Figs 7.3; 7.4].<sup>9</sup> The honour of Cockermouth consisted of two quite separate entities — the 'five towns of Copeland', a lowland area in which most settlements were subinfeudated, their lords rendering the ancient due of 'cornage' to the lord of Cockermouth; and Derwentfells, the upland block between the rivers Cocker and Derwent, which remained free chase in the thirteenth century, although it contained several subinfeudated estates within its bounds. It is striking that none of these freeholds in Derwentfells was held by cornage; indeed some (Brackenthwaite, Embleton, and Wythop for example) are known to have been granted to undertenants in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The barony of Egremont exhibits a similar pattern. The western valleys of the Lake District remained as free chase, the 'forest of Copeland', retained in hand by the lord of Egremont. Along the coastal lowland most vills were freeholds, many again rendering cornage and 'seawake' (*vigilia maris*), a payment in lieu of a coastal guarding service found only along the Irish Sea coast of Cumberland and arguably an ancient custom.<sup>10</sup> Freeholds other than by cornage and seawake lie along the margins of the Lakeland fells and are probably, like those in Derwentfells, a late generation of subinfeudated estates carved from the edges of a formerly more extensive free chase. In Millom seignory, although only an incomplete reconstruction of early tenurial patterns is possible, the same contrast between upland and lowland is found. The upper Duddon valley was retained as 'forest' as late as the sixteenth century, while many of the lowland vills along the coast appear to have been freeholds under the lords of Millom in the thirteenth century.

The pattern is repeated elsewhere in the Lake District. Furness was divided into 'Furness Fells', the upland portion in which most land was retained by Furness abbey as tenant-in-chief, and 'Plain Furness', the

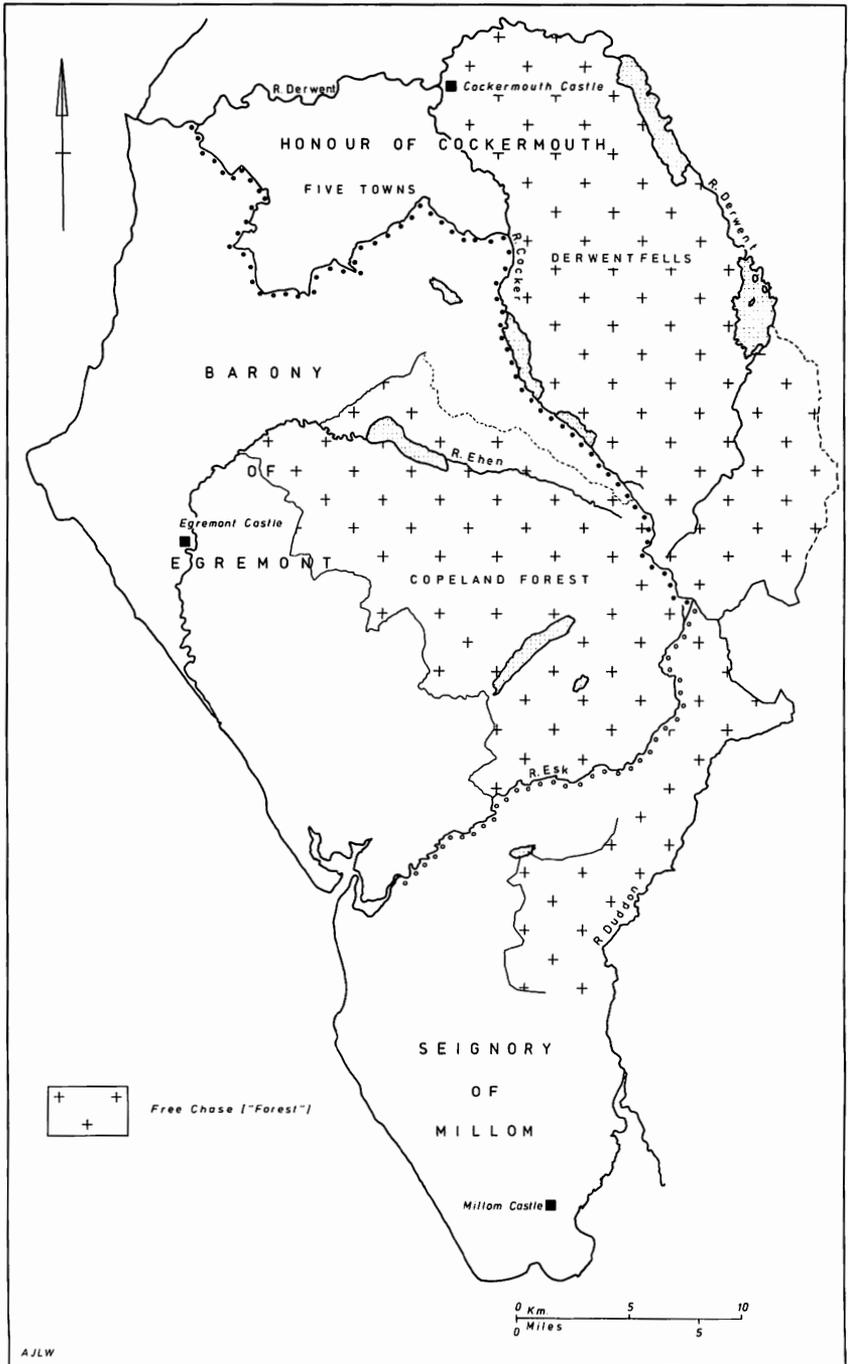


Fig. 7.3 Copeland: multiple estates.

lowland in which most settlements were subinfeudated.<sup>11</sup> The lords of Kendal barony similarly retained control over most of the upland area at the head of Windermere,<sup>12</sup> where there are again references to 'forest' in the late thirteenth century.<sup>13</sup> Further north, in Greystoke barony, the higher land between Ullswater and Mosedale was claimed to be free chase,<sup>14</sup> and in Allerdale much of the northern fells and their foothills was included in the free chases of Skiddaw<sup>15</sup> and Westward<sup>16</sup> forests. The antiquity of the last as a territorial entity is attested by Gospatric's writ of c. 1050, in which Gospatric, apparently lord of Allerdale, granted rights in a bounded area roughly equivalent to what became Westward forest to the men of Cardew and Cumdivock, settlements outside Allerdale.<sup>17</sup>

Except in the case of Westward forest, the existence of the free chases, and their retention by the baronial overlords, cannot be documented before the thirteenth century. Nevertheless, the distinction between the upland and lowland components of the Cumbrian multiple estates appears to be a fundamental feature of the settlement pattern in the area. It has been presented above as a stable feature, and the division does indeed appear to have been rigid by the later thirteenth century. There are hints, however, that the boundary between the free chases and the lowland components hardened only in the twelfth or even early thirteenth century. The west Cumbrian evidence again allows us to see something of this process.

On the basis of the Copeland evidence [Fig. 7.4], it is suggested that three zones of settlement may be discerned. First, on the lowlands along the Irish Sea coast are the settlements held by the ancient dues of cornage and seawake; other freehold townships form a second category, not held by cornage and seawake and located on rising land along the margins of the Lake District; while the scattered farms in the valleys of the free chases, held directly of the baronial overlords, constitute a third class of settlements. As a working hypothesis it is suggested that the three categories represent successive generations of settlement as new farms were carved out of the less fertile land of the Lake District massif.<sup>18</sup>

Such a suggestion is borne out to a certain extent by comparing the names of the estates held by cornage and seawake with those of the freeholds known to have been held by other dues. In general, while places held by cornage and seawake bear a mixture of names containing Celtic, Old English and Old Norse elements, the second type of freeholds shows a predominance of Old Norse names. In terms of particular place-name elements, for example, four of the five townships in Copeland which bear early Old English names in *-ington* were held by cornage and seawake, while four of the six townships bearing Old Norse names in *-thwaite* were held by other free rents.<sup>19</sup> The contrast suggests that the names of many non-cornage-paying villis were coined after the Scandinavian colonists arrived, and it seems likely that this group of settlements represents a phase of colonization in the tenth to twelfth centuries as new farmsteads were established in clearings (as *thwaite*-names such as Thackthwaite and Thronthwaite testify), or on former shieling grounds (as names like

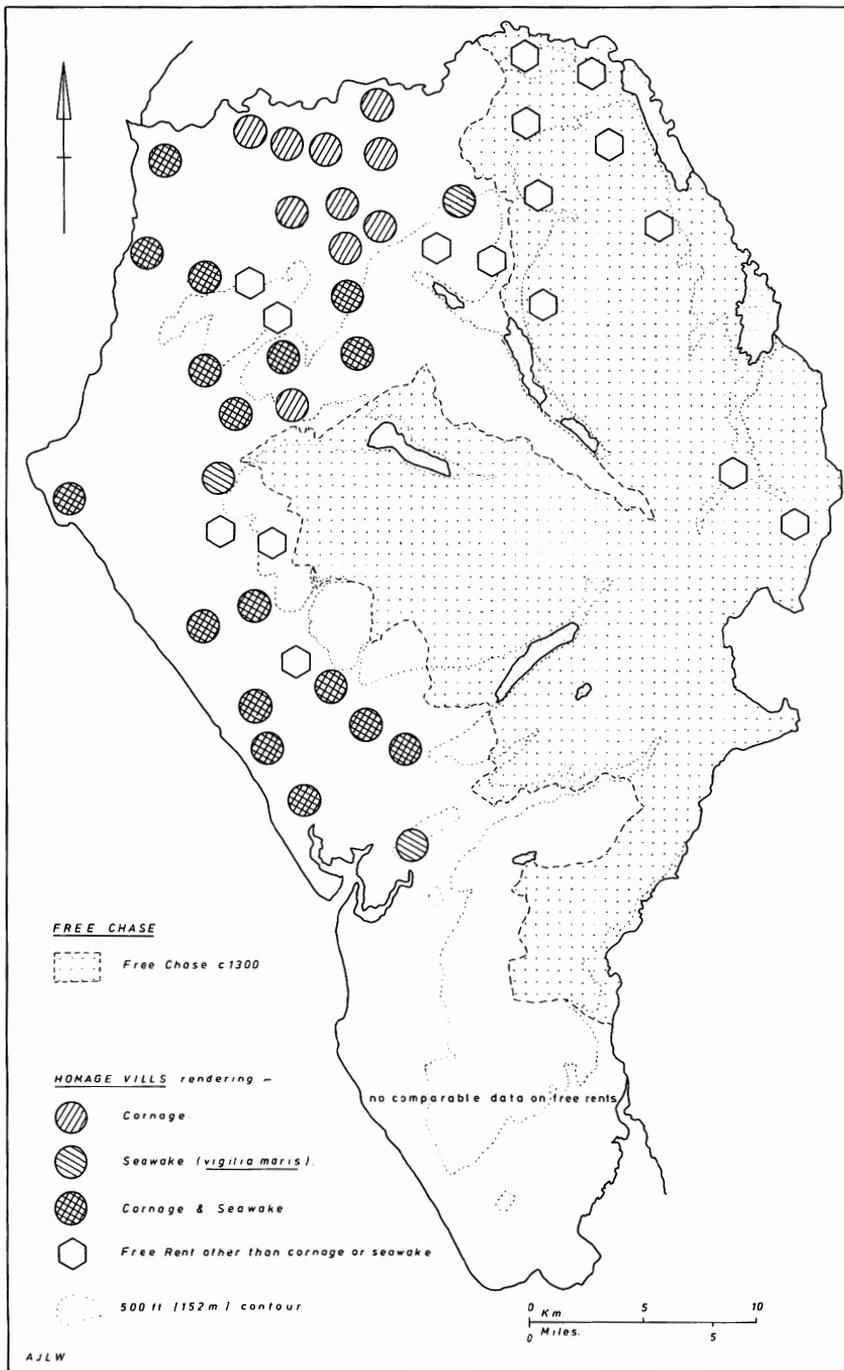


Fig. 7.4 Copeland: analysis of free tenures.

Mosser and Setmurthy imply). The last phase of this process is recorded in the surviving grants of some of these estates in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and it is perhaps to these settlements along the foothills of the Lake District that we should look to account for the phase of woodland clearance recorded in pollen diagrams at *c.* A.D. 1000.<sup>20</sup>

On the basis of this argument we can probably view the Lakeland valleys — the free chases of the Middle Ages — as extensive upland pastures appendant to the anciently-settled peripheral lowland and vital to the economy of its constituent vills at the time of the Scandinavian settlement.

### Estate foci

A second recurrent feature of the Cumbrian multiple estates is the existence of a 'core' area, a concentration of lordly and ecclesiastical power in one part of the estate. Such a core acted as a focus for outlying settlements and may also have been an ancient, stable feature of the settlement pattern. In the thirteenth century the estates often focused on to baronial castles, adjacent to which planned towns had in some cases been laid out in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. A number of features point to the conclusion that these castles and towns, expressions of Norman feudal and economic power, were planted at or near the site of the pre-Conquest estate centres whose functions they probably replaced.

First is the frequent proximity of the Norman overlord's castle to the multiple estate's mother church, an early church with a vast parish covering much of the estate's upland component. For example, the castle and borough at Cocker mouth lie a couple of miles from, and in the parish of, the church at Brigham — a church whose antiquity is suggested by the survival of numerous Anglian and Norse sculptural fragments and whose parish covered a large part of both the upland and lowland areas of the honour of Cocker mouth. The pattern is repeated in the relationship between the castle and town of Egremont and the parish church of St Bees.<sup>21</sup> The position of St Bees church in the township of Preston ('the priest's settlement') perhaps implies that the church lay in its own endowment of land, a feature also found in the case of the mother church of Kendal. In that instance, the parish church, physically adjacent to the borough and castle of Kendal, stood in its own township called Kirkland, which, as its name implies, consisted largely of glebe.<sup>22</sup>

Another hint of continuity in the location of multiple estate foci comes in evidence for the existence of an ancient block of demesne near the Norman estate centre. This is most clearly demonstrated in the case of Egremont. In the early fourteenth century all the lord's demesne was concentrated at Egremont itself and at nearby Couderton. There were also in the vicinity of Egremont three settlements — Carleton, Beckermet, and Blakestanefit (probably Ehenside) — which were held by tenants by custom (*custumarii*), a class of tenant not found elsewhere in the barony.<sup>23</sup> It is suggested that these features may indicate the presence of an early core

of demesne farming in the heart of the multiple estate, the tenants by custom being descended from communities of bondmen who worked the demesne. The evidence that the features described above were of any antiquity is admittedly circumstantial, and comes from two elements in the pattern of land tenure at Egremont in the early fourteenth century. Part of the demesne at Egremont and Coulderton was described as 'bordland', presumably 'table land', that is land providing victuals for the lord's household;<sup>24</sup> it is perhaps comparable to the ancient Welsh *tir bwrdd*, a category of land with an identical meaning.<sup>25</sup> The precise nature of 'bordland' in Cumberland is not known, but each of the four other occurrences of the term in the county — at Wigton,<sup>26</sup> Carlisle,<sup>27</sup> Dalston,<sup>28</sup> and, possibly, Burgh-by-Sands<sup>29</sup> — lies close to a baronial estate centre. Similarly, the community of tenants by custom at Carleton near Egremont may also be a reminder of an ancient pattern. H. P. R. Finberg drew attention to the frequent association at a national level between the place-name Carlton/Charlton and ancient, often royal, estate centres. He argued that, as has been suggested for Egremont, these 'peasants' settlements' provided the labour to work the demesne.<sup>30</sup> In Cumberland, Carletons are found close to the royal estate centres of Carlisle and Penrith, and a further possible instance of the name occurs at Cockermouth, another estate focus.<sup>31</sup>

In summary, certain recurrent features in the internal structure of the multiple estates of early medieval Cumbria enable an outline to be sketched of the tenurial and territorial framework to settlement within which, it is suggested, the colonization and clearance of the centuries either side of the Norman Conquest took place. The pattern was one of large estates, each of which centred on a lordly seat with its adjacent demesne land and bond settlements placed on the lowlands peripheral to the Lake District. That lordly seat controlled a large block of land, often bounded by major physical features and consisting of an anciently-settled lowland component in which most settlements were held as freehold estates, and an upland component, a share of the Lakeland fells and dales retained by the overlord as free chase. Between these two components in western Cumbria it is possible to discern a marginal zone in which active colonization was taking place and new freeholds were being created in the Scandinavian period. The ecclesiastical organization of the countryside was contained within the same framework. An early church, close to the lordly seat but often in a separate township with its own 'kirkland' to support it, ministered to the greater part of the multiple estate, its parish coinciding by the opening of the written record with those parts of the estate retained by the overlord.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF NORSE SETTLEMENT

The patterns described above bear similarities to those found in many other parts of the country in the early medieval period, as the work of

G. W. S. Barrow and G. R. J. Jones has shown. As Celtic origins have been ascribed to those patterns, it is reasonable to consider the hypothesis that the Cumbrian patterns predate the Scandinavian settlement, and to ask how such a stable territorial framework might have affected the Norse infiltration into the north-west.

Two contrasting views of the process of Norse settlement are possible. We can imagine that the Scandinavian penetration was a gradual process, primarily by men of humble means, who accepted the tenurial framework they encountered along the Irish Sea coast and settled where there was room, presumably primarily on poorer land. If that were the case, we should perhaps expect to find a concentration of evidence of early Norse settlement inland along the margins of the Lake District massif. In fact, the occurrence of Viking burials,<sup>32</sup> of place-names in *-by*, and of Scandinavian sculpture shows a markedly peripheral distribution on the coastal lowlands.

An alternative view, and one which is more compatible with the archaeological and place-name evidence, is that put forward by G. R. J. Jones to help explain the Scandinavian settlement of Yorkshire<sup>33</sup> and followed by C. D. Morris in his study of Viking settlement in Northumbria.<sup>34</sup> They see the Norse invader as taking over the seat of power of an established overlord and thus gaining access to the landed resources of the whole territory of his multiple estate. Almost the only light thrown on Cumbria by documentary sources at the time of the Norse settlement is consistent with such a view — Alfred son of Brihtwulf, who was granted a large estate in south-east Co. Durham in the early tenth century, had fled from the ‘pirates’ and came from ‘beyond the mountains towards the west’.<sup>35</sup> Surely we see here a substantial Cumbrian landowner being displaced from his estate by Norse invaders. A landless Englishman, he fled east to English Northumbria. Although his is the sole recorded instance, it is suggested that such dispossession might have been repeated elsewhere as English overlords were replaced by Norse invaders.

Such a view might help to explain why the major territorial divisions down the Irish Sea coast of north-west England — Allerdale, Copeland, Furness, Amounderness — all bear names of Scandinavian origin. Of these, Copeland is perhaps of particular significance. A Norse name meaning ‘bought land’ (*kaupa-land*), it is perhaps to be interpreted as an estate for which a Norse settler struck a financial bargain with an existing landowner. In the case of the west Cumbrian territory bearing that name, do we see a block of land ‘bought’ for settlement by Norse invaders? The evidence from Copeland for a zone of colonization along the Lake District margins in the tenth to twelfth centuries could thus be interpreted as settlement stimulated by the Norse take-over of seats of power.

### *Postscript*

Since this paper was written (1981), the author has examined more fully the meaning and distribution of the term *bordland*. He now believes it is not appropriate to suggest that the

existence of bordland can be used to argue continuity of the pattern of lordship from the pre-Conquest period.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the thirteenth-century evidence for West Cumbria see A. J. L. Winchester, *Territorial structure and agrarian organisation in mediaeval and sixteenth-century Copeland, Cumberland*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham, 1978. 200–10. Throughout this paper, where no other source is cited, see pp. 53–88 of this thesis and sources therein cited.

<sup>2</sup> G. R. J. Jones, The multiple estate as a model framework for tracing early stages in the evolution of rural settlement, in F. Dussart (ed.), *L'habitat et les paysages ruraux d'Europe* (1971) 251–67.

<sup>3</sup> J. E. H. Jolliffe, Northumbrian institutions, in *English Historical Review* (1926) CLXI. 1–42. Cf. F. M. Stenton, Types of manorial structure in the northern Danelaw, in P. Vinogradoff (ed.), *Oxford studies in social and legal history, vol. II* (1910).

<sup>4</sup> G. R. J. Jones (1971) op. cit.; Multiple estates and early settlement, in P. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval settlement: continuity and change* (1976) 15–40.

<sup>5</sup> G. W. S. Barrow, *The kingdom of the Scots* (1973) 7–68; G. R. J. Jones, Early territorial organisation in Gwynedd and Elmet, in *Northern History* (1975) x. 3–27.

<sup>6</sup> G. W. S. Barrow, The pattern of lordship and feudal settlement in Cumbria, in *Journal of Medieval History* (1975) I. 117–38.

<sup>7</sup> *Victoria County History of Lancashire* VIII. 254, 286.

<sup>8</sup> *Domesday Book*. ff. 301d, 302a, 332b.

<sup>9</sup> Fig. 7.4 is redrawn from Fig. 3.4 of my Ph.D. thesis with additional information from Cumbria Record Office D/Lec, box 314/16.

<sup>10</sup> It is tempting to link 'seawake', a coastal guarding duty, to the series of milefortlets which protected the Irish Sea coast of Cumberland in the Roman period.

<sup>11</sup> *Victoria County History of Lancashire* VIII. 298.

<sup>12</sup> P.R.O., C 133/5/10; C 134/81/18, m. 5.

<sup>13</sup> At Langdale and Rydal (ibid.), and at Troutbeck (*Cal. Inq. p.m.*, ii. 269).

<sup>14</sup> *Plac. Quo Warranto*, 119.

<sup>15</sup> A demesne pasture recorded from the 13th cent.: P.R.O., SC 11/730, m. 14v.; *Cumbria Record Office D/Lec/291*, m. 40.

<sup>16</sup> F. H. M. Parker, Inglewood Forest, in *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*. 2nd series (1905) v. 41–42.

<sup>17</sup> A. M. Armstrong et al., *The Place-names of Cumberland* (1952) III. xxvii–xxx.

<sup>18</sup> For a similar approach to settlement chronology, see B. K. Roberts, Village plans in Co. Durham: a preliminary statement, in *Medieval Archeology* (1972) XVI. 39.

<sup>19</sup> Based on derivations suggested in A. M. Armstrong et al. (1952) op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Inf. from Dr. W. Pennington (1980).

<sup>21</sup> Egremont parish was a chapelry of St Bees c. 1130: see J. Wilson (ed.), *Reg. of the priory of St. Bees*, Surtees Society (1915) CXXVI. 29.

<sup>22</sup> W. Farrer, *Records relating to the barony of Kendale*, ed. J. F. Curwen (1923) I. 3; *Westmorland Record Office WDY/50/3*; Levens MSS, box 3/2.

<sup>23</sup> P.R.O., C 135/41/1.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Cf. H. de Bracton, *De legibus et consuetudinibus Angliae*, ed. T. Twiss (1883) IV. 197.

<sup>25</sup> G. R. J. Jones, Post-Roman Wales, in H. P. R. Finberg (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, I. II (1972) 338.

<sup>26</sup> At Dockray in 1385: *Cumbria Record Office D/Lec/314/16*.

<sup>27</sup> At Upperby in 1360: *Originalia Rolls*. II. 253.

<sup>28</sup> At Little Cummersdale in 1318: *Cumbria Record Office DRC/1/1*, p. 526.

<sup>29</sup> Refs. to 'Boureland' in 1485, in A. M. Armstrong et al (1952) op. cit. I. 129; 'Broadelands' in 1638 *Cumbria Record Office D/Lons/L/Burgh* barony survey.

<sup>30</sup> H. P. R. Finberg, *Lucerna: studies of some problems in the early history of England* (1964). 144–60.

<sup>31</sup> Field-name 'Carlton close' recorded from 1453: *Cumbria Record Office D/Lec/29/4*.

<sup>32</sup> J. D. Cowen, Viking burials in Cumbria, in *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society*. 2nd series (1948) XLVIII. 73–75.

<sup>33</sup> G. R. J. Jones, Early territorial organisation in northern England and its bearing on the Scandinavian settlement, in A. Small (ed.), *The Fourth Viking Congress* (1965) 67–84.

<sup>34</sup> C. D. Morris, Northumbria and the Viking settlement: the evidence for land-holding, in *Archaeologia Aeliana*. 5th series (1977) v. 81–103.

<sup>35</sup> D. Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042* (1955) 261–62.



*Plate X* Crosby Ravensworth village, Westmorland. The Old Norse name suggests an earlier church in a marginal and high-lying area on the fringe of the Eden Valley which some have suggested was an area of primary Scandinavian colonisation.

*Plate XI* Sadgill, Longsleddale. A farm with a *sáetr* name which was still functioning as a temporary shieling site in the 13th century. It was probably colonised permanently during the 14th century.

