

EARLY ESTATE STRUCTURES IN CUMBRIA AND LANCASHIRE

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Cumbria and Lancashire can claim to be one of the key regions of England in which estate structures answering the description of ‘multiple estates’ can be discerned. Long before Glanville Jones coined the term ‘multiple estate’, J. E. A. Jolliffe drew attention to the similarities between early estates in the North West and the ‘shires’ of Northumbria and argued that the patterns must have Celtic roots (Jolliffe 1926). Geoffrey Barrow, approaching the subject from a fully British perspective, came to similar conclusions (Barrow 1973, 1975). The theme has been developed in regional studies, including my own early work, which argued for continuity in the framework of estate structures in Cumbria from pre-Viking times (Winchester 1985, 1987) and Chris Lewis’ masterful introduction to the Lancashire folios of Domesday Book (Lewis 1991). More recently, Charles Phythian-Adams has both urged caution over accepting the antiquity of estate patterns in Cumbria recorded only after the Norman Conquest, and mustered a range of evidence in a painstaking attempt to reconstruct early territorial patterns in his meticulously argued study of early-medieval Cumbria (Phythian-Adams 1996).

From the point of view of settlement history, the importance of the multiple estate model lies in its stress on long-term continuities in what might be termed the ‘texturing of space’ – the durability of cores, peripheries and boundaries and the links which bound settlements and communities into larger wholes. If Celtic, or at least early, origins are accepted, the multiple estate model describes a stable territorial framework in the critical centuries for settlement development between c. 700 (or even earlier) and c. 1100. This paper begins by taking a quick survey of the estate patterns recorded in the earliest documentary evidence from Cumbria and Lancashire, and then moves on to consider two of the key features claimed by the multiple estate model: first, long-term continuity of estate structures; second, the economic significance of multiple estates as the units within which access to resources was organised. The aim is to pinpoint the hard questions that need to be posed when discussing spatial arrangements in pre-Norman times in a region with hardly any pre-Conquest documents.

Domesday Book and beyond: the earliest evidence for estate structures in north-west England

In terms of evidence for recapturing early estate structures in the North West, it is necessary to think of three sub-regions, the boundaries of which are mirrored by those of the medieval dioceses. First, is southern Lancashire, the ‘land between Ribble and Mersey’, tacked on to the Domesday survey of the western Midland counties and forming an extension to the Mercian diocese of Coventry and Lichfield; second is

Lancashire north of the Ribble, together with southern Cumbria, the far-flung north-western corner of the kingdom of England in 1066, treated under Yorkshire in Domesday Book and forming part of the medieval diocese of York; finally, to the north lay the bulk of Cumbria, which fell within the sway of Scotland until conquered by William Rufus in 1092, and formed the diocese of Carlisle, created in 1133. The earliest tenurial evidence takes different forms in each of these areas but points to some striking common features.

South of the Ribble, Domesday Book describes six great manors, each coinciding with a hundred. The pattern of tenure on the eve of the Conquest was very similar in each: the king held the manor from which the hundred took its name, but most settlements were in the hands of men variously termed ‘free men’, drenghs or thanes who held them as separate manors and carried out customary dues, including building the king’s buildings, fisheries, woodland enclosures (*haias*) and stag beats (*stabilituras*). In the hundredal manor of Newton, for example, ‘the other land of this manor was held by 15 men who were called ‘drenchs’ as 15 manors, but they were berewicks of this manor;’ and in the manor of Blackburn ‘lay [*adjaceb*] 28 free men holding 5½ hides and 40 carucates as 28 manors’ (Morgan 1978, 269d, 270a). The king’s demesne land in each hundredal manor was restricted to a few settlements and, except in Warrington, to woodland (*silva*) or (in West Derby and Salford) ‘forest’. To what extent the ecological sense of the term *silva* overlapped with the legal sense of *foresta* is unclear, but the impression is that peripheral (in that less densely settled and wooded) parts of each estate were retained in the king’s hand. That these areas probably had the status of hunting grounds is reinforced by the presence of hawk’s eyries in each of the estates containing woodland or forest. The similarities between these hundredal manors and the shires of Northumbria have long been recognised – indeed, the Lancashire hundreds were termed ‘shires’ in medieval sources: Blackburnshire, Leylandshire, Salfordshire, for example (Smith 1961).

In North Lancashire and southern Cumbria, the Domesday survey consists solely of copies of pre-Conquest tax lists, which group settlements as they ‘lay towards’ or ‘pertained to’ a chief manor, noting the assessment of each settlement in carucates. The most southerly such grouping, headed ‘Amounderness’ and consisting of 61 places which *iacent ad Prestune*, seems to be akin to the estates south of the Ribble, coinciding closely with the hundred of Amounderness. Further north the groupings are smaller, more fragmented and correspond less closely to later territorial entities, bearing little relation to county or hundredal boundaries. They do, however, bear some relation to early parish boundaries (Fig. 1). Domesday gives no indication of tenures, services, land in demesne, or woodland, so it is

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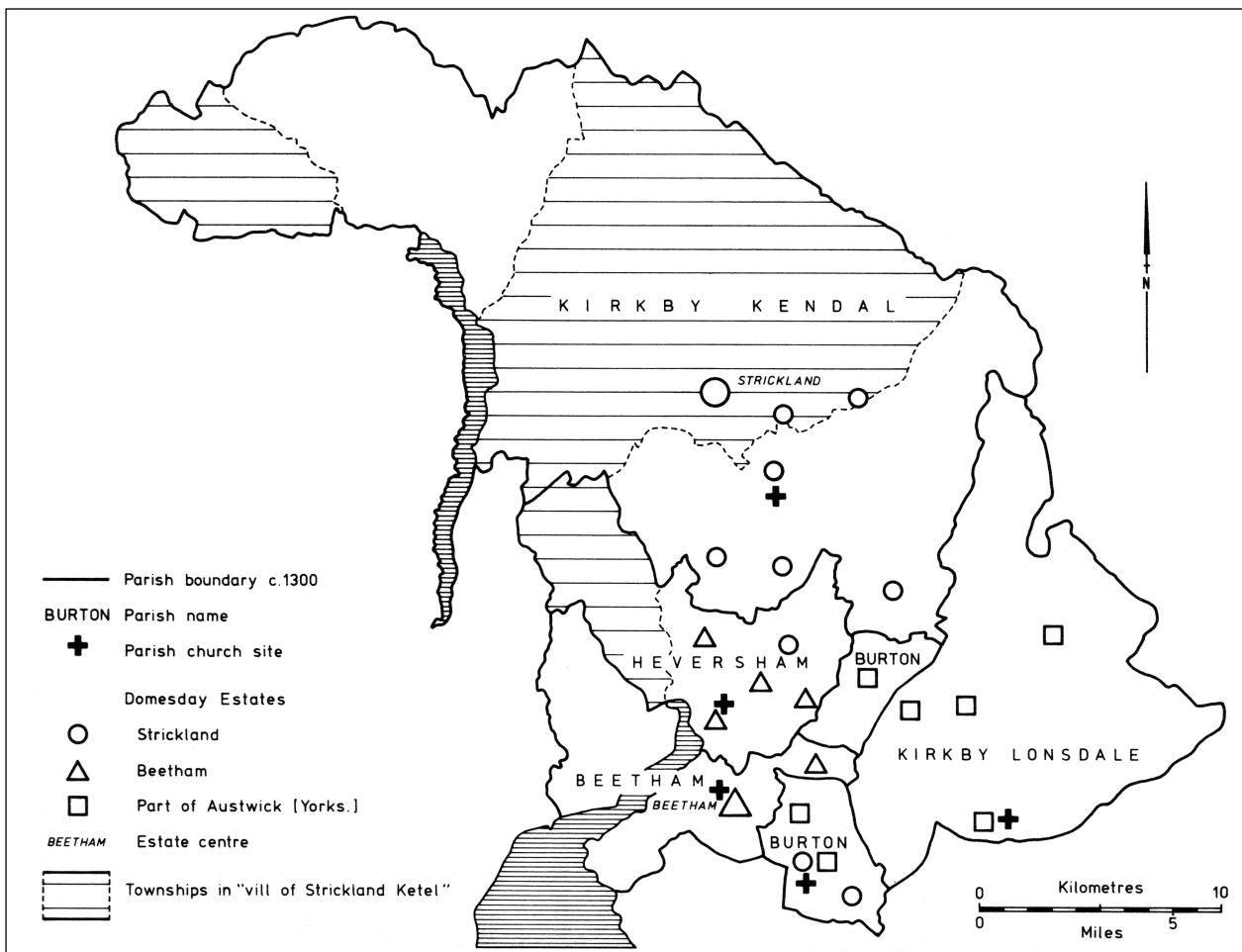


Figure 1 The Barony of Kendale: the relationship between Domesday estates and parish boundaries.

impossible to know how closely the tenurial structures of these groupings resembled the hundredal manors south of the Ribble. However, the evidence is not incompatible with a view that essentially similar estates are being described by Domesday in two different ways.

In northern and western Cumbria, we move beyond the limits of Domesday Book into territory for which we must rely on twelfth-century or later evidence. Only one pre-Conquest document survives (Gospatrix's writ of c. 1060). Beneath the feudal geography and counties of medieval Cumbria lies a structure of large, possibly ancient, territories, which recur as both secular and ecclesiastical divisions ('wards' in Cumberland and Westmorland, which are the equivalent to hundreds, and deaneries), implying that these territories may predate their first record, in the twelfth century in the case of the deaneries, and thirteenth century in the case of the wards. They generally form natural geographical units, bounded by watersheds and major rivers, as indicated in some of their names: Allerdale, Kendale (the valleys of the rivers Ellen and Kent respectively); Furness (the promontory by Piel Island, formerly 'Foudray'). Geoffrey Barrow drew attention to the similarity in scale and geographical character between these Cumbrian territories and the major territorial building blocks of south-west Scotland and Wales and argued that they all represent ancient features (Barrow 1975).

The relationship between these arguably ancient territories and early estates is, however, problematic. The Norman pattern of landholding in much of Cumbria was one of large baronial estates but in general these units of overlordship are smaller than the wards and deaneries (the barony of Westmorland is the notable exception) but still form compact, discrete blocks of land (Fig. 2). In some cases it can be argued with some conviction that the baronial estates were reincarnations of pre-Conquest territories. The barony of Allerdale perpetuates the name of the pre-Conquest entity named in Gospatrix's writ of c. 1060; the barony of Gilsland (which was not created until 1158) preserves the name of the pre-Norman owner, Gille son of Bueth and, presumably, equated to his estate; the barony of Copeland bears a Scandinavian name, meaning 'bought land', perhaps preserving the memory of a pre-Conquest territorial entity.

The internal structure of the Norman baronial estates in Cumbria can be explored by looking at the territory of Copeland (Fig. 3). The deanery and ward covered all the land between Derwent and Duddon, but contained three twelfth-century estates: the honour of Cockermouth, the barony of Egremont and the seigniory of Millom. Each covered a compact, discrete block of territory; in each the broad patterns of lordship were similar: land held in demesne by the overlord was restricted to vills close to the estate *caput* and to an upland area retained as 'forest',

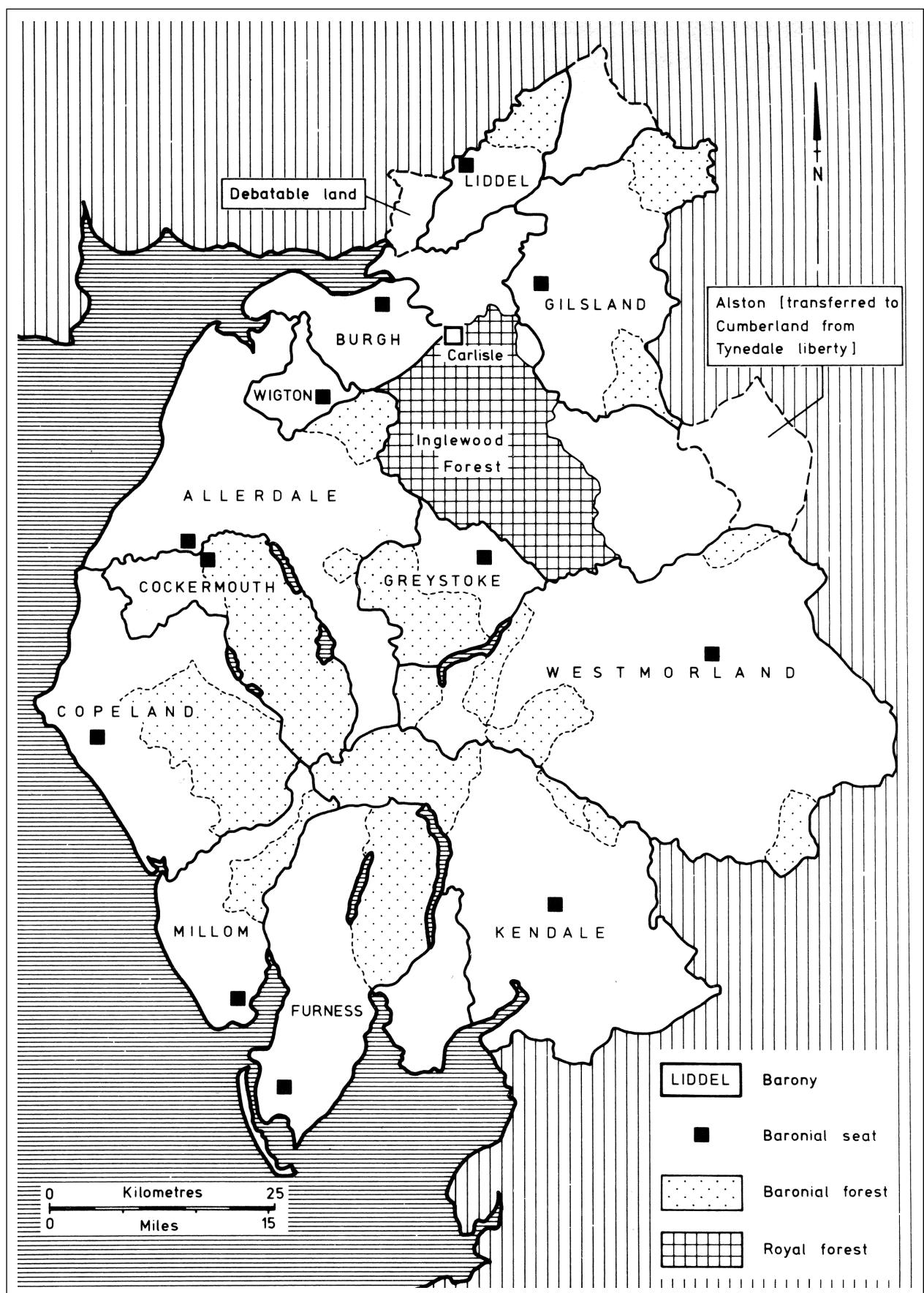


Figure 2 Cumbria: baronial estates and forest areas.

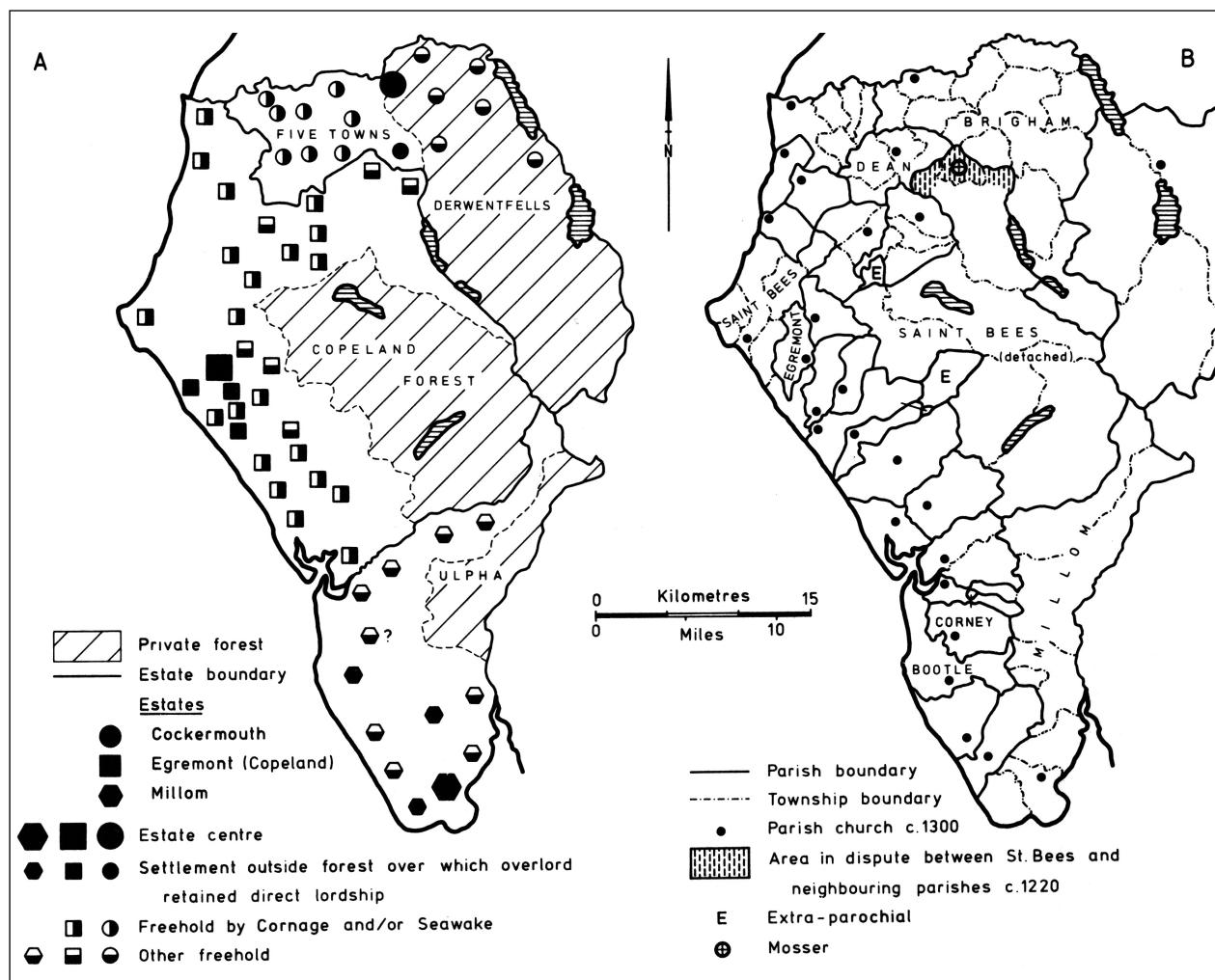


Figure 3 Copeland: (a) feudal tenure, and (b) parish boundaries c. 1300.

while the bulk of the lowland section of the estate was held as subinfeudated manors. The parallels with the hundredal manors of southern Lancashire are striking. The estates in Copeland also exhibit another characteristic associated with ‘multiple estates’, a relationship to what was arguably an early mother church (Brigham; St Bees; Millom), which lay close to, but separate from, the estate *caput*, the boundaries of parish and estate coinciding, particularly in the upland, forest areas (Winchester 1987, 19–22).

Across the North West, estates with apparently similar territorial arrangements are also found to share a range of archaic renders and services which have parallels in Celtic society. The payment of cornage (or ‘noutgeld’), the ancient cattle render, was widespread and the parallels with Celtic areas are striking, even to the extent of its being rendered at the beginning of May – the ‘Beltancu’ (literally, the cow paid at Beltane, the Celtic equivalent of May Day) recorded in Lancashire must surely equate to the *treth calan mai* (‘tribute of the Kalends of May’) of medieval Wales. Likewise, a judicial system based on officers termed ‘land sergeants’ or ‘sergeants of the peace’ was widespread. Services included ‘puture’ of sergeants or of foresters (that is the duty of feeding the lord’s judicial representatives) and,

in Cumbria, ‘bode and witnessman’ (providing messengers and witnesses). Another almost certainly antique service, found only in the ancient territories of Allerdale and Copeland, was *vigilia maris* (‘seawake’), a coastal guarding duty protecting the Irish Sea coast (Barrow 1975, 121; 1992, 135–6; Jolliffe 1926).

Pre-conquest territorial organisation: locating ‘core areas’

The multiple estate model would see these antique services and common tenurial patterns as evidence of antiquity and continuity of estate structures. A key question when attempting to assess the antiquity of the earliest recorded estate patterns is: to what extent does the survival of archaic tenures imply continuity of territorial structures? If we accept that the archaic tenures may have Celtic roots, does this necessarily imply that the territorial patterns observed at or soon after the Norman Conquest (estate boundaries, lordly centres, etc.) were also inherited from a distant, Celtic past? The first step in answering this question involves the challenge of getting beneath the Norman overlay, particularly in northern and western Cumbria, beyond the coverage of Domesday Book.

In approaching this, we must bear in mind that the pre-Conquest estate groupings in north Lancashire and south Cumbria, recorded in the Domesday tax lists, did not survive intact after the Norman takeover. Further north, territorial groupings may also have been redrawn in the Norman pattern of feudal overlordship. Charles Phythian-Adams has suggested, for example, that Copeland represents ‘a deliberate Norman creation by which a number of miscellaneous territorial elements were artificially combined into a unit of lordship’. As he noted, Millom seigniory appears to have broken a pre-Conquest allegiance to Furness (as part of the large estate lying towards ‘Hougun’, which was probably somewhere in Low Furness) to be linked after the Conquest to the barony of Copeland. The antiquity of the northern boundary of Copeland is also in doubt: Waldeve, the native lord of adjacent Allerdale, held the northern sections of Copeland, suggesting that they might previously have been part of Allerdale. In other words, Norman Copeland’s Derwent-Duddon boundaries may not be ancient (Phythian-Adams 1996, 31–3). Furthermore, the territory’s core area also exhibits worryingly Norman features. The name of the estate *caput*, Egremont, is a French import (‘the *mont* (castle motte) beside the River Ehen (‘Egre’)’) and its position may be significant. Copeland contained two land sergeants’ beats, one ‘between Ehen and Derwent’, the other ‘between Ehen and Duddon;’ perhaps Egremont was a deliberate choice to link two separate (pre-existing?) territories either side of the Ehen.

Putting aside the possibility that some of the Cumbrian baronies may have involved re-drawing of boundaries, it is still possible to argue, as Charles Phythian-Adams went on to do, that the ‘miscellaneous territorial elements’ which appear to have been grouped together to form Copeland may have had some identity at a considerably earlier date. Almost the only way to approach this question in north-west England is by seeking to identify clusterings of high status sites in what may be termed ‘core areas.’ One of the features of the multiple estate model is the notion that at the heart of early estates lay not a single central place but a core in which high status functions were exercised in separate settlements which lay close together. Such high status sites were both secular (notably the places at which services were performed, dues rendered and justice carried out) and religious (mother churches).

Here again we face the challenge of seeing behind the Norman facade: were Norman estate centres created anew (as may have been the case at Egremont, for example) or did they replace pre-Conquest seats of power in existing core areas? The evidence is again ambiguous. Features which have in the past been taken to indicate pre-Conquest lordly seats may not do so at all. Demesne land close to some seats of overlordship (at Egremont and Carlisle, for example) is recorded as ‘bordland’ (literally ‘table land’), a term which it is tempting to link to the Welsh *tir bwrdd* but which in Cumbria, as in Scotland, very probably represents the Norman import of a southern English term (Winchester 1986, revising the argument made in Winchester 1985). Settlements named Carleton lie close to three (possibly four) post-Conquest estate centres (Carlisle, Penrith, Egremont and, possibly, Cockermouth, where a ‘Carleton’ field-name is recorded

in 1453). H. P. R. Finberg’s suggestion that these ‘settlements of peasants’ housed the peasant workforce on the pre-Conquest demesne (Finberg 1964) has been questioned (Faith 1997, 150–1) and it has been suggested that some of the Carleton names in Cumbria may be post-Conquest, feudal imports (Phythian-Adams 1996, 26–7).

Elsewhere, suggestions of continuity in the location of core areas are stronger. For example, Kendal was the focus of a large baronial estate covering the whole of southern Westmorland by 1200. Domesday Book shows that this Norman creation replaced a pattern of smaller estates, one of which had its *caput* at Strickland, just to the north of Kendal. The presence of a pre-Viking mother church at Kendal and of a Roman fort at Watercrook, close by, make it possible to think in terms of continuity of an estate core in the Kendal area, of which the Norman barony was the latest expression.

One way of approaching this systematically at regional level is to identify place-names which may indicate pre-Viking high status sites and to examine their distribution in relation to the earliest recorded estate structures. Several place-name elements have been taken to indicate early secular high status sites in the North West. The earliest layer includes the British terms *llys* (‘lord’s court’), which occurs in Leece in Furness and Trealeas (*tref-llys*) in Amounderness, and *caer* (‘fort’), of which there are several examples in Cumberland (see Phythian-Adams 1996, 83–7). Assumed to date from the pre-Viking Northumbrian period is the Old English term *bothl* (‘building’), usually interpreted as ‘hall’ or other high status or special building (Smith 1956, 43–5). Where it occurs in the compound ‘Bolton’, it has been interpreted as ‘settlement with a special building’. Then there are the early church sites, the ‘mother churches’ which often retained vast parishes and whose antiquity is confirmed by sculptural or place-name evidence (e.g. the Scandinavian compound ‘Kirkby’, ‘settlement with a church’).

The *bothl* names may have a particular significance in north-west England, if what may be a garbled memory of the ancient service of ‘seawake’, the coastal guarding duty only found Copeland and Allerdale, is taken seriously. Writing c. 1600, the antiquary John Denton explained the place-name Bothel in Allerdale thus:

The towne stands on the side of a hill, where in old tyme the watch was kept day and night for seawake, which service was performed by the country beneath Derwent at that place, and above Derwent in Copeland att Bothill in Millam and att Bothelton in Egremont barony (Cumbria Record Office, Carlisle Dean & Chapter muniments, Machell MSS, vi. 56; cf. Ferguson 1887, 50).

Denton then confuses ‘seawake’ with the service of ‘*bode*’ (i.e. providing messengers) and uses this to explain the place-name: ‘whereupon the hill was named the Bode or Bothe-hill, and a village at the foote of it Bothillton.’ Now, this is plainly garbled and confused, but could it be that Denton is recalling a distant memory of an association between places containing the element *bothl* and the ‘public’ services and obligations of settlements in Allerdale and Copeland?

In Cumbria the distribution of *bothl* names bears a striking relationship to putatively early estate territories

and to early church sites (Phythian-Adams 1996, 88–9). Allerdale contains both Bothel and Bolton (on either side of the River Ellen, from which the territory takes its name). It is striking that Bothel lies on the slopes of Moota ('meeting hill'), perhaps suggesting that this was a focal area for public services and justice. The honour of Cockermouth contains Blindbothel, close to the mother church at Brigham. Its name begs the question, 'why "blind"?' It may be that it is 'hidden away' (it is in a low-lying position), or could it be that, as 'seawake' was not rendered in Cockermouth honour, it was a 'blind bothel' without any coastal look-out duty? Each of the next four territorial building blocks (Egremont barony, Millom, Furness and Kendale) contains a *bothl* name. That in Furness lies close to Haume (a candidate for identification as the Domesday estate centre of 'Hougun'); to the mother church at Dalton; and, tantalisingly, to Leece (British *llys*, 'lord's court'). The lost 'Bothelford' in Kendale lay in Natland, not far from the core area described above (Farrer 1923, 167).

When a similar exercise is carried out in hundredal manors or 'shires' of south Lancashire (Fig. 4) a striking pattern again emerges. Each of the four *bothl* names lies in a different shire – Bootle in West Derby, Bolton in Salfordshire, Parbold in Leylandshire, and Bold in Warrington hundred (the latter names containing *bold*, the Mercian variant of *bothl*). Some parallels with Cumbria are visible: Bootle overlooks the Mersey estuary and is adjacent to the early mother church at Walton-on-the-Hill; Parbold is again on rising ground, overlooking the low-lying west Lancashire plain. There is an equally striking pattern of arguably earlier religious sites, in the place-names containing the Celtic element *eccles* ('a church'), which, as Geoffrey Barrow pointed out, are similarly distributed in relation to the hundredal estates (Barrow 1973, 26). Although Eccles in Salfordshire and Eccleston in Leylandshire were both ancient parishes, the

remaining *eccles* names seem to refer to religious sites pre-dating the medieval parochial structure: Great and Little Eccleston in Amounderness straddled the boundary between the medieval parishes of Kirkham and St Michaels on Wyre; Eccleston in Warrington hundred lay within Prescot parish; Eccleshill in Blackburnshire lay within the parish of Blackburn.

If we accept that *bothl* names indicate high-status buildings in the pre-Conquest (and probably pre-Viking) period, the distribution of these place-names in relation to early church sites and to eleventh-/twelfth-century estates hints at continuity in a framework of spatial ordering, involving core areas of considerable antiquity, in which high status secular and religious sites lie within a few miles of one another in lowland areas of better agricultural land. If these are stable, ancient high-status cores, does this imply a similar stability of territorial structures and boundaries? Or, just as the survival of archaic tenures and services well after the Norman Conquest does not necessarily imply continuity of estate boundaries, could the territory 'lying towards' a core area be re-formed and re-shaped across time?

Organisation of resources: access to pasture

A second key strand in the multiple estate model is the suggestion that landed resources were managed within the framework of the estate, to allow individual settlements access to distant and specialised resources, particularly to pasture and woodland. Jolliffe wrote that 'the unity of the shire' was 'clearly shown by its common scheme of pasturage', noting that the pasture rights of Northumbrian villas 'were determined by the resources of larger areas than the civil townships of the middle ages' (Jolliffe 1926, 12). Specifically, he drew attention to 'shire moors', in which all townships in the shire intercommoned. This final section reviews some of the evidence for the organisation of pasture resources within the framework of the early estates discussed above.

Whillimoor in Copeland was cited by Jolliffe as an example of a shire moor. In the twelfth century the overlord of Copeland granted grazing rights on Whillimoor to tenants from outside the immediate vicinity and the moor retained its identity in the mid fifteenth century, long after it had, to all intents and purposes, been parcelled out between adjacent settlements. By the thirteenth century the lord of Moresby, one of the adjacent villas, was granting rights on the moor adjoining his manor and by c. 1360 that section of Whillimoor was known as 'Moricebymore' (Winchester 1987, 85–7). Intercommoning, an identity separate from and greater than moorland attached to individual townships, and tension between the rights of a feudal overlord and immediate manorial lords all point towards the conclusion that Whillimoor may have been akin to a Northumbrian shire moor.

A second example comes from Leylandshire in southern Lancashire (Fig. 5). The hundredal estate stretched from the Ribble estuary to the edge of the moorland of Rossendale Forest. Place-name evidence suggests the survival of a belt of woodland along the edge of the higher ground and there are hints that the higher, eastern sections served as a resource for

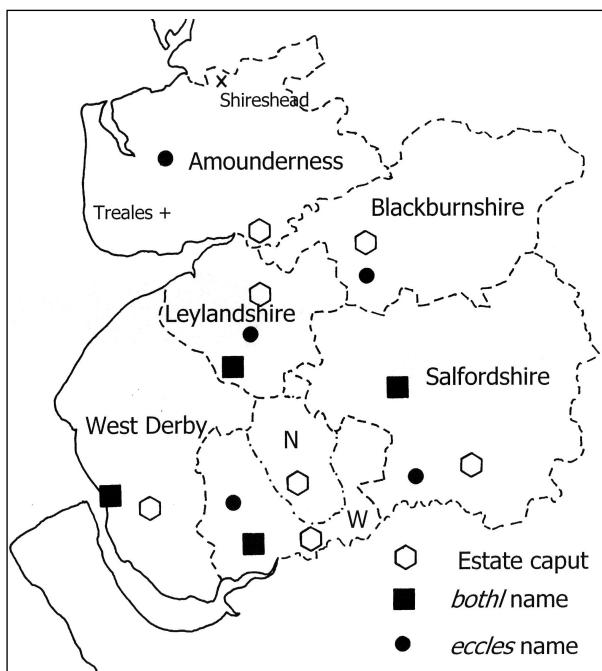


Figure 4 South Lancashire: *bothl/eccles* place-names. (N: Newton hundred; W: Warrington hundred).

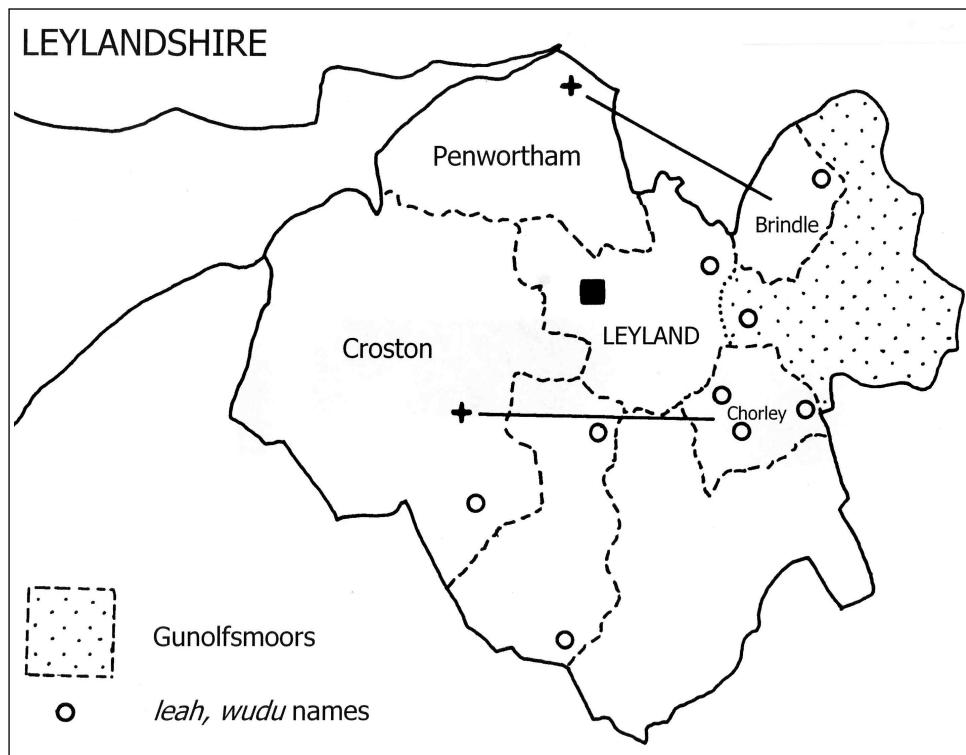


Figure 5 Leylandshire

settlements across the shire. The eastern townships were grouped under the district name 'Gonulfsmoors', recorded from twelfth century. As late as sixteenth century disputes arose, centring on whether the constituent settlements had named and bounded sections of it. As with Whillimoor, the survival of a separate identity and the disputes between overlordship and immediate lordship suggest that 'Gunolfsmoors' was akin to a shire moor (Shannon 2004, 75–80). Leylandshire also exhibits another feature which may reflect early patterns of pasture rights, the existence of detached portions of lowland parishes in the eastern, upland section of the shire. Brindle (recorded as a separate parish but taxed as township in Penwortham parish in the fourteenth century) and Chorley (a chapelry of Croston parish until the eighteenth century) are perhaps to be interpreted as sections of former woodland grazings on edge of higher ground attached to settlements in the lowland west of shire.

Similar settlement linkages elsewhere in the North West, evidenced by suggestive place-names as well as parish boundary patterns, also point to transhumance, whereby communities in the coastal lowlands made use of land on the edges of the upland forests, as in Leylandshire. Examples from the edge of the Bowland Fells include Goosnargh, a detached chapelry on the margins of the uplands belonging to Kirkham parish in the lowland Fylde, and Ortner, in Wyresdale, recorded as 'Overtonargh', linking it to Overton on the Irish Sea coast. The second element of both Goosnargh and Ortner is the Gaelic loan-word *erg* (summer pasture) confirming the nature of land use during the Viking period (Fellows Jensen 1985, 64, 210).

In Cumbria, upland-lowland links are suggested by early tenurial evidence indicating linked ownership of

land of different qualities. In the baronies of Copeland and Allerdale there are several cases in which the owners of vills on the coastal lowland also held settlements on the margins of the baronial forests in the uplands. The fee centred on Workington included not only the neighbouring vills of Winscales and Harrington, but also the upland townships of Lamplugh and Kelton, to which may be added the settlements of Salter and Arlecdon, granted to St Bees priory by the lord of Workington in the mid-twelfth century (Wilson 1915, 60–3, 465n). This substantial estate, held at a level below that of the barony, may originally have comprised a swathe of northern Copeland, from the coast up to the edge of the upland forest.

In neighbouring Allerdale, thirteenth-century tradition ascribes the granting of linked vills in upland and lowland by Waldeve son of Gospatrick, the native lord of Allerdale in the early twelfth century. He was said to have granted to two brothers, the sons of Lyulph, two blocks of land, one on the coastal lowland, the other in the fells: Tallentire and Gilcrux, neighbouring vills in the lowlands; and Uldale and Castlerigg 'with forest between Greta and Caltre', in the fells. To another tenant, Waldeve son of Gilimen, he granted Broughton, Ribton and Little Broughton near the coast, and Bewaldeth on the edge of the fells, *ad unam logeum* ('for a lodge'), a phrase which may refer to a summer shieling, rather than hunting rights (Wilson 1915, 492–3). All these snippets of evidence (possible shire moors; detached portions of ancient parishes; place-names; manorial linkages) point to a common pattern of land use in the centuries either side of the Norman Conquest, in which settlements in the lowlands had access to grazing grounds on the edges of the uplands within the framework of boundaries defining extensive units of lordship.

Conclusion: ‘multiple estates’ in north-west England?

Throughout this survey of evidence for early estate structures in north-west England has run an uncertainty concerning the question of scale: which of the territorial entities discussed above were ‘multiple estates’? We need to distinguish between different levels of early territorial organisation. At the highest level (before the creation of the counties in the twelfth century) were the ‘provinces’ or ‘lands’ in Cumbria, units like Allerdale, Gilsland and Copeland (and probably also the pre-county territories bearing the names Cumberland and Westmorland, which were much smaller than their later namesakes). While these were units of overlordship, they were of much greater extent than multiple estates as normally conceived and they often contained more than one Norman baronial estate, which themselves bore the characteristics of ‘multiple estates’.

Whether these Cumbrian ‘provinces’ were comparable to the hundredal estates of Lancashire south of the River Wyre is far from certain. In terms of estate structures, the shires of Lancashire bore close similarities to the baronial estates of Cumbria: a distinction between a manorialised (or previously ‘ministerial’) lowland section and an upland forest periphery; continuity of high status functions in a core area around the estate *caput*; and archaic tenures (regal or comital renders and obligations). But then, below the level of the shires and baronial estates, there were other groupings of vills, which had distinct identities. These include the shadowy sub-hundredal groupings which have been identified in the Domesday accounts of West Derby and Amounderness (Lewis 1991, 25–6), as well as smaller estates in which upland and lowland settlements were linked under common lordship. Should an estate such as that centred on Workington, apparently covering at least six vills in the twelfth century but itself held of the barony of Egremont, be described as a ‘multiple estate’? Defining the spatial extent of multiple estates remains perhaps as great a challenge as demonstrating continuity and antiquity of tenurial patterns.

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