

ART. V.—*The meaning of acrewall.* By ROBERT S. DILLEY, M.Litt.

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IN a glossary published in CW2 lxx I wrote of the term acrewall:

A curious word occurring in several manors. While sometimes it obviously refers simply to a wall or fence, probably a ring-fence, elsewhere it is clearly used to describe a definite area of pasture or grazing<sup>1</sup> land.

Further investigation has turned up additional references to this word, but its meaning is no clearer than before. In view of this continuing ambiguity I think it is worth presenting the information here in more detail.

TABLE I.

*Occurrences of the term acrewall after 1500.*

Location	No. of occurrences.	Date.	Source. <sup>2</sup>
Arlecdon	1	1743	Glebe Terrier (PNC p. 337)
Birkby, nr. Maryport	1	1534	Manorial Court (CRO D/Lec/299)
Great Broughton	1	1525	Manorial Court (CRO D/Lec/299)
Little Broughton	7	1518-1531	Manorial Court (CRO D/Lec/299)
Calvo	2	1537	Survey (PRO E315/399)
Crosby, nr. Maryport	3	1534	Manorial Court (CRO D/Lec/299)
Dean	2	1735	Manorial Court (CRO D/Lec/127)
		1737	Enclosure Agreement (CRO D/Ben/103)
Dundraw	2	1578	Survey (CRO D/Lec/301)
Hesket-in-the-Forest	1	1597	Survey (PNC p. 207)
Holme Cultram*	1	1663	Manorial Court (PRO LR11/59/850)
Papcastle	8	1505-1525	Manorial Court (CRO D/Lec/299)
Wigton*	1	1517	Manorial Court (CRO D/Lec/299)

\*The Holme Cultram and Wigton occurrences may refer to Calvo and Dundraw respectively; the manorial court entries cannot be located more precisely.

<sup>1</sup> This should have read "pasture or arable".

<sup>2</sup> Abbreviations used in this column: CRO = Record Office, Carlisle; PRO = Public Record Office, London; each followed by the relevant document reference. PNC = *The Place-Names of Cumberland*, by A. M. Armstrong, A. Mawer, F. M. Stenton and B. Dickens, Cambridge, 1950.

In 1959 G. G. Elliott wrote in CW2 lix 94 that at Aspatria in the 16th century the arable land was protected from the stock on the waste by a large boundary wall which was referred to as the "acrewall". It was built of banked earth and was sometimes ploughed for crops and grazed by the stock.

Though I have found no other reference to this term at Aspatria, other contexts in which the word appears support Elliott's definition. In October 1505 an offender was presented at the Papcastle Manorial Court "for her cattle being on the several acrewall" and four other court verdicts specifically used the term "on" the acrewall. Also used were the phrases "over on the acrewall" (Papcastle, November 1508) and "over the Acrewall" (Little Broughton, October 1522). Mention in the 1537 Holme Cultram Survey of 3 acres of land "in Akerwall Nooke" at Calvo could be taken to describe a field bounded on at least two sides by such a banked-earth acrewall.

Other uses of the word, however, show that acrewall must have had a much greater areal extent. The Five Towns Manorial Court of October 1735 referred to "Dean Town feild called Ackrewall" and on 30 November 1737 agreement was reached by the proprietors to divide and enclose

a field or parcell of arrable and waste ground . . . called and known by the generall name of Acrewalls . . . being within the Manor parish and libertyes of Dean. . . .<sup>3</sup>

Presentments at the Little Broughton Manorial Court in October 1522 for encroaching "5 acres of land and meadow of the Acrewall" and at the Papcastle Manorial Court in April 1525 for having "20 cattle 80 sheep and 3 horses . . . surcharging of the lord's acrewall" imply that the acrewall was something larger than a ridge of banked earth. Other manorial court entries referred to "a close lately set up . . . in the Acrewall" (Wigton, May 1517) and eight times

<sup>3</sup> The site of this field is presumably marked by the present farm of Acrewalls, just south of Deanscales.

to animals trespassing "in" (rather than "on") the acrewall. The 1578 Percy Survey of Wigton listed two tenants at Dundraw each with 4 beastgates in and 1/24 of the Acrewall, and the 1537 Survey of Holme Cultram noted large areas of acrewall at Calvo; two separate acres and two butts of arable plus a rood of meadow. Unfortunately, the Dundraw reference does not specify the acrewall area and the Calvo entry confuses the issue by locating the lands *on* the Acrewall (my emphasis).

The distribution of the occurrences of the word is interesting (Table I). Of the 30 references to acrewall, 26 date from the 16th century (earlier sources were not considered) and all but one are located in the north-western part of the county, specifically in the valleys of the Marron, Derwent, Ellen and Waver. With only two exceptions (Arlecdon and Hesket), the locations referred to are settlements for which there is some evidence of the existence of infields and/or outfields at the time.<sup>4</sup> Aspatria, as in Elliott's description, also possessed an infield and an outfield. Since only about forty settlements in the whole of Cumberland have any evidence at all of any sort of infield and/or outfield organisation, the coincidence with the distribution of acrewall is striking. This does not help explain why the term should be restricted to a limited part of the county, as no plausible explanation can be given at this stage for the distribution of infield or outfield.<sup>5</sup>

Thus it is not at all clear just what the acrewall was. Its association with infield and outfield may be significant:<sup>6</sup> Elliott's description could be of a perman-

<sup>4</sup> An infield was a permanently-tilled common arable field close to a village; an outfield was part of a larger area of pasture land taken in and ploughed for a period of years before being allowed to revert to grass while a new area was taken in.

<sup>5</sup> See R. S. Dilley, *Common Land in Cumberland 1500-1850*; Unpublished M.Litt. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1972, pp. 44-49.

<sup>6</sup> As may the generally early disappearance of the word: few infields or outfields survived the 16th century.

ent infield wall, though outfields had only temporary boundaries. Elsewhere, however, the acrewall was clearly a field of normal dimensions. Was the term perhaps used to name fields located near an existing or recently-defunct infield boundary wall? Was the same word employed to describe two quite different phenomena — a wall small enough to be leaped over and a field large enough to contain a 5-acre encroachment — often in the same settlement at much the same time? It is to be hoped that more instances of the use of this word will be found, to help solve this terminological problem.