

From Peoples to Regional Societies. The Problem of Early Medieval Cumbrian Identities

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Uniformity should never be assumed of regional identities. Early Cumbrian ethnicities may be differentiated in the contrasted contexts either of an established regional core and its power centres or of culturally more permeable regional peripheries. Nor could ethnic identities remain unchanged in the face of migration, though in the case of Cumbrian history predominantly Celtic strains run through it. As the leading identifier of a regional people, however, ethnicity gave way as local sovereignty was displaced, territory was divided and redefined, and population was redistributed. Traditional ties of kindred seem to have yielded to a new inter-dependency that reflected the establishment of regionally discrete urban hierarchies and networks. The local sense of Celtic difference (as opposed to dialect), nevertheless, appears to have been augmented by revivalist responses to the centralising tendencies of the eleventh and twelfth century state that were shared along, and beyond, the further edges of Anglo-Norman England.

DURING the earlier centuries to be surveyed here, there were no ‘regions’; there were only peoples. Political territories then had ethnic – not spatial – identities; the land of the East Saxons was known simply by their own name: hence Essex. Homeland labels – like ‘England’ or ‘East Anglia’ – took centuries to displace purely ethnic descriptors but still affirmed ethnic possession. How, then, may we pin down here the later-than-usual transition from a formally organised world of ethnically identifiable peoples to one of informal, and so rather differently structured, ‘customary’ regional societies?

It may be helpful to begin by narrowing in from modern Cumbria to the place where this paper was first delivered.¹ Ambleside lies behind a natural redoubt along the rugged northern edge of the soft underbelly of the Lake District. It is hardly surprising that this mighty watershed reaching as far as the Pennine ridge was also a major political boundary. Prior to the Norman re-appropriation of the ‘lands’ of Carlisle in 1092, and the Scottish resumption of them between 1136 and 1157, it represented the then northern frontier of England, beyond which even Domesday Book failed to reach, and the southern boundary of Cumbrian lands within the former Glasgow diocese of a greater British Strathclyde.

The late eleventh century pattern, therefore, reflected a continuing separation of the people to the north from those of the south of this physical and political barrier. By then the north comprised at least Cumberland – ‘the land of the Cumbrians’ or ‘fellow Britons’ – and the dependent ‘land’ of an earlier Anglian ‘people west of the moors’ at the head of the Eden basin called the *Westmoringas*. Only when shiring was completed a century later, was the latter territory artificially combined with that of the barony of Kendal south of the earlier international boundary line. These counties of Cumberland and Westmorland, however, belonged to a tiny group of very late English shires, including Northumberland, that were still constructed to retain, at least in

name, the erstwhile territories of self-identifying peoples. They did not replicate the arbitrary territories being newly described elsewhere around ‘county’ towns in the early eleventh century. The counties south of here, by contrast, were cast in this new Midlands mould by which – in the remorseless interests of state centralisation – former peoples were deliberately partitioned and/or no longer named. ‘Chester-shire’ was formally centred on Chester before 980, and ‘Lancashire’ was named after Lancaster, the centre of a post-Conquest Honour long before the area achieved free-standing county status in 1182.

What was different in the far north-west were the interminable struggles for sovereignty over it from the days of Rome to the later twelfth century. A self-contained, if – increasingly – an ethnically complex, people was bundled backwards and forwards between one or other of the successive royal hegemonies over middle Britain: those of Northumbrian Bernicia or Deira; and Strathclyde or Scotland; let alone the Hiberno-Norse of York and Dublin or the Anglo-Scandinavian or Norman kingdom of England itself. Such circumstances clearly entrenched the inclusiveness of a regional collective identity even as its composition shifted, rather than extinguished it. The separate shirings of Cumberland and Westmorland in their final territorial – as opposed to their already partially instituted administrative – forms were thus delayed into the late twelfth century.² Only by then too – and well over a hundred years later than elsewhere – was it also possible for towns now to supplant previously significant – usually royal – jurisdictional centres within an increasingly monetary economy.

In locating the roots of ethnic identities and their subsequent modification, regional uniformity is not to be expected. A distinction needs to be sustained between the repetitive functions of a genuinely Cumbrian core and those of its inland and coastal peripheries. It is in this latter context that a key problem will also lie. In particular, did the southward-widening coastlands of southern Westmorland, Lancashire and northern Cheshire represent no more than increasingly peripheral extensions of Cumbria, *or* did they already reflect separately related peripheries looking to Northumbria or Mercia, which only subsequently coalesced into a newly defined regional core in its own right?

I

Speaking generally, the northern, Cumbrian core area of lowland was contained between the Solway, the length of the River Eden, and the eastern flank of the Lakeland dome. This area represented the continuing strategic key to both ethnic identity and sovereignty and was consequently the ultimate target for anyone wishing to control the wider region.

In essence the core was controlled from the central Roman axis of what now seems almost definitively to have been the *civitas* of the *Carvetii*, or Stag people, which possibly reached, via Brougham, as far as Middleton-in-Lonsdale, but looked to Carlisle as its chief place. This nodal communication point controlling the crossing of the Eden and the new regional road network would now represent the future key to the domination and defence of the whole region. It was no accident then that *Luguvallium* subsequently became known in Celtic terms as the *cair* or fortress of a named Briton,

or that later it was still reputed retrospectively to have been a major centre for a British people or confederation of peoples associated with a post-Roman kingdom or over-kingdom known as Rheged. On the usually accepted view, this ‘successor state’ would have broadly focused on our core area: the long floor of the Eden basin where, further south, the valley of the River Lyvennet was specifically associated in Celtic tradition as a district with none other than the late sixth century Urien of Rheged as its ‘chief’.³

From the late sixth or early seventh centuries onwards, Carlisle seems to have maintained its *civitas* status but now as a royal centre for a Bernician province with Celtic traditions; one to be visited periodically by its Northumbrian over-king but with its own permanent official, a *prepositus*, perhaps like the *praefectus* associated with such other leading regional places as Lincoln or Winchester. Under Bishop (later Saint) Cuthbert, Carlisle’s province then seems to have been an extension of his Anglian see of Lindisfarne between 685 and 687. It is not clear, however, whether the donation to him of Cartmel ‘and its Britons’ should be taken to mean that his diocese stretched so far south as that, or whether this could have represented the gift of a convenient staging post from the Anglian monastery at Dacre *en route* for York.

There are reasons to suggest that despite linguistic arguments both for the early Anglian suppression of Britons and for a tenth century reoccupation of the area from Strathclyde, many inhabitants of the area in fact persisted in speaking ‘Cumbric’ throughout this Bernician occupation.⁴ Under the Northumbrians Carlisle continued to be known by a Cumbric name, while the only district to be named in what seem to have been ethnic Anglian terms within the heartland area – and so probably prior to the Scandinavian influx – was the original *Westmoringa land* at the upper end of the Eden basin which was perhaps colonised from Deira.

What is increasingly disputed, however, is the degree – or even actuality – of a collapse in 870/1 of the British kingdom of Strathclyde centred on the valley of the Clyde at the hands of the Dublin Norse. Individuals described spasmodically as kings of the Cumbrians or of Strathclyde are known thereafter until 1018 since the Britons or Anglo-Britons concerned, from the Clyde to the Duddon, had come to be regarded as ‘Cumbrians’. But whether such kings acted independently, or were infiltrated or simply dominated by Scots, is more difficult to decide. The increasingly powerful Gaelic kings of Alba north of the line between the Clyde and the Forth, and soon a wider Scotia, were already expanding their power base. These may well have brought under Scottish overlordship the former British kingdom of Strathclyde and its southern neighbours north of Solway plus the Cumberland area which was now threatened by heavy Scottic-Norse immigration. Here, Anglian over-lordship being clearly superseded, protection would have had to be sought elsewhere. The linguistic evidence, at least, increasingly suggests the addition of Goidelic to the Brittonic substratum in the Celtic place-names of Cumberland.⁵

Because of these shifts in power and the opportunistic responses of Wessex, the period between 920 and *c.*1040 was marked by a sequence of West-Saxon/English assertions of suzerainty – through collective public rituals at meetings or open warfare – over both ‘Cumbrian’ and Scottish sub-kings. The only such occasion concerning us here was

when, in 927, the West Saxon Athelstan took the ‘submission’ or ‘cooperation’ of the Celtic leaders of northern Britain at the heart of the core area: specifically near the River Eamont, the first clear indication that this later boundary line between Westmorland and Cumberland was already established. Of these ‘lands’, only Westmorland now lay within what was becoming the realm of Anglo-Scandinavian England; the Cumbrian element being perhaps under the hegemony of the Scots. It may be suggestive that the peak defining the south-western boundary of *Westmoringa land*, Yarlside, took its name from the word ‘jarl’ the Scandinavian equivalent to an earl.

It is not without interest, therefore, that the same locality at the heart of *Westmoringa land* seems to recur consistently as the site for its probable chief place. On the western flank of Urien of Rheged’s favoured Lyvennet river-territory, with its reputed ‘hall of the men of Rheged’,⁶ is the parish of Morland that looks as though it once contained the mother church of a wider continuous *parochia*, dedicated overall to St Lawrence, which straddled the whole course of the Lyvennet and its feeders – some ten miles by eight. Within the probable compass of this entity, post-Rheged, are the successive signs of (1) a Northumbrian high-status residence or *boðl* – as in ‘Bolton’ – (while exhumed from the churchyard of the township immediately to the south-east of the St Lawrence locality, incidentally, comes the ornate, late eighth century, silver-gilt Ormside bowl which – although later repaired – could even have been crafted in the wider Solway region);⁷ (2) the rare presence of a Scandinavian place-name in *hof* which in Iceland implies the location of a superior hall with or without a pagan temple; (3) a regionally unique significance for the once detached, Saxo-Norman tower of the former – probably linear – Morland church-complex as a symbol both of exceptional ecclesiastical standing and of contemporary patronage: this was where Michael – Bishop of Glasgow before Carlisle had its own see in 1133 – held ordinations and was buried after 1114; and (4) the subsequent establishment of Appleby castle and then, if not earlier, a small new town – with its own church of St Lawrence – on the west bank of the Eden and so distinct from the original parish of old Appleby dedicated to St Michael on the other bank.

What then distinguished the area due north of the original Westmorland? It is significant that the diocese of Carlisle was specifically formed out of districts described respectively as ‘Cumbria’, Westmorland and Allerdale, so excluding Coupland.⁸ The whole area of this ‘Cumbria’ thus equates suggestively with the coverage of all the later wards or deaneries variously known as ‘Cumberland’ or ‘Carlisle’, including areas north of the Eden/Irthing line. From Penrith northwards, including the reserved hunting area of Inglewood, as far as the Solway and its north-eastern tributaries, it also seems to have included what was left of an earlier royal demesne, after the subtraction of other royal areas in neighbouring Westmorland. It is thus notable that it was specifically ‘Cumberland’, not ‘Strathclyde’, which was ravaged in both 945 and 1000 by kings of England when it was under Scottish control. In 1237, moreover, the English ceded a number of royal townships in this very vicinity to the crown of Scotland in satisfaction of its continuing claims south of the then international frontier-line. Most conspicuously, it is this ‘Cumberland’ – together with Allerdale and *Westmoringa land* – that includes almost the entire county distribution of surviving place-names which contain Brittonic elements.⁹

The crucial point here is that before 1092 Cumberland, Allerdale, and *Westmoringa land*, which had all belonged to the diocese of Glasgow also seem to have been ruled as one. Following the substitution of Scottish overlordship, Siward – Earl of Northumbria (c.1033-55) – and Gospatric, his local successor, were lords not only of Allerdale but also rulers of ‘all the lands that were Cumbrian’. Nor can there be any doubt that the restored Scottish lands of which Dolfin was then dispossessed by the Normans in 1092 comprised all these areas north of the English national frontier excluded by Domesday Book only six years earlier. Certainly in c.1098, the Norman Ranulf Meschin – or whoever may have preceded him in control of the *potestas* or ‘power’ of Carlisle – governed the same region from either Carlisle or Appleby.¹⁰ He was followed eventually in the same places and function by Hugh de Morville a faithful liegeman of David of Scotland, who, when occasionally present himself in the region after 1135, governed directly but jointly with his son Henry from Carlisle.¹¹ By the 1120s Westmorland royal business was evidently subsumed under Cumberland’s and the axis of the core was now entrenched.

III

In contrast to its core, the region’s narrow peripheries all butted immediately onto external worlds and so provided access for conquerors, migrants and cultural influences, not to speak of outlets for trade, while boasting strong elements of jurisdictional independence from the core itself. The northernmost inland limits were defined somewhere beyond the Wall – which nevertheless had Roman outposts of its own at Netherby and Bewcastle – by what evolved only eventually into the fixed international boundary with Scotland. To the east in this broad area is the later county boundary which – given the high watershed terrain of the Bewcastle Fells – seems, as elsewhere, to mirror an earlier secular frontier reflecting some ethnic significance: in this case the edge of Bernicia and, probably, the Hexham diocese. The exceptional qualities of, and underlying resemblances between, the earlier eighth-century Bewcastle and Ruthwell crosses, indeed, may suggest that these extraordinary monuments marked religious communities at the eastern and western limits in this region of the diocese of Lindisfarne. Rosemary Cramp has tentatively proposed that they may even indicate (the Northumbrian adoption of) the boundaries of Rheged.¹²

Straddling the Tyne-Solway Gap was the entity that became known as the Barony of Gilsland only under Henry II. From before 1092 this ‘land’ seems to have remained a lordship of Scotland designed to guard access from the east. Like Coupland in the south-west of the region, Gilsland thus evaded absorption into the nascent shire structure that would be Cumberland until the late twelfth century. Packed with the highest density of *known* place-names containing surviving Brittonic elements in the region, this could reflect a continuing measure of this district’s semi-independence from Anglian colonisation (despite control from the strongholds indicated by the Old English (OE) suffixes in the names of Bewcastle and Naworth).¹³ It still boasts too a marked scatter of later Goidelic place-names. The area’s own name, indeed, indicates that this ‘land’ became the territory of a chieftain called Gille, from a Gaelic word for ‘servant’.

South of the Tyne-Solway Gap and much earlier, the western bound of the Bernician diocese of Hexham (created in 681) had run not along the Pennine ridge, but along the River Eden (from the SE dividing line between Cumberland and Westmorland) downstream to Wetheral and the Eden's junction with the Irthing. It thereby delimited the raised shelf of land, some five miles wide, running along the foot of the Pennine escarpment. This must thus have also long reflected the leading secular edge of Bernicia itself and so may well have represented the original Northumbrian inroad west of the Pennine ridge. The attenuated Cumberland settlement area involved was distinguished by such early Anglian indicators as the name of the large parish of lost 'Addingham' (with its equally early grave slab)¹⁴ and not far off, the only regional reference to the Northumbrian version of an early small 'shire' in the Scandinavianised name Skirwith which denotes 'shire wood'. It also boasts a candidate for a significant pre-Viking church (with holy well) that is inferable from the name, Kirkoswald. At a frontier site just above the narrow Eden flood plain, this is dedicated to the martyred Bernician Oswald, king of all the Northumbrians, who was killed in battle and ritually dismembered by the pagan Mercians in 642. His symbolic royal importance to Bernicia may be gauged from the fact that his head was buried at Lindisfarne, which he founded, and was later preserved in S. Cuthbert's own coffin during its wanderings.¹⁵

It is evident that beyond the see of Hexham's edge to the south, the later boundaries of both Westmorland and the later diocese of Carlisle – and so of its Glasgow predecessor – all reached as far as Stainmore and the edge of the diocese of York, and thus comprise a further indication of administrative coincidence with pre-shiring territorial divisions. The fact that previously accepted references to the Rere Cross on that boundary as itself marking the south-western reach of Cumbria – and so also of Scottish claims as opposed to those of Strathclyde itself – are now being treated dismissively because of their lateness, cannot therefore be taken to outweigh the probability that this boundary of *Westmoringa land* was indeed formerly that of the north Britons.¹⁶

The confined coastal periphery around the Lakeland dome, southwards from Moricambe Bay and the swamps inland of it, comprised a similar intermediate zone between the core and outside neighbours. From Roman times onwards what mattered was control of the seaboard – in their case though a string of forts and lookout towers, as far even as Lancaster – but in later times control was effected from the sea itself. Bernician and then Deiran – really 'Northumbrian' – thrusts to the west of the Pennine barrier led to the temporary mastering of Chester in 616, the conquest of Anglesey and the Isle of Man, and, in the third quarter of the seventh century, even an invasion of Ireland. By then the Bernicians had also penetrated overland to Galloway, where a diocese was established at coastal Whithorn in 681, while an Anglian presence had already been established along the littoral of modern Cumbria. In contrast to most of the core area, early settlement of the latter seems to have been partially centred on former fortified – or *ceaster* – sites, such as Muncaster, and further characterised by territorial enclaves containing significant Anglian places named in *hām* or *-ingahām*, and *boðl*, and often in fairly close relationship to one another between boundary-rivers dividing such lordships.¹⁷ Religious houses too were located all around the coastal rim of the Solway basin suggesting that, for a time at least, the northern Irish Sea was an Anglian cultural province.

Our problem, however, is to distinguish territorial patterns and their ethnic allegiances around, and to the south of, *Morecambe Bay*. Here Brittonic place-names endure in some number as far south as Cheshire.¹⁸ East of Bowland Forest there is even reason to believe that a little British kingdom of Craven survived, though it is also fairly clear that a small Anglian folk – the *Dunutingas* – had intruded into the Dent valley. We do know that around 670 Deira was expanding west of the Pennines and driving clergy of the British church from their ‘holy places’ for their lands seem to have been granted as endowments for the new grand monastery of Ripon under the militant Romanist, Wilfrid (bishop of Ripon 669-78).¹⁹ In the area north of the Ribble, indeed, there now survives only one British church site denoted by the presence of a name in *eccles*: at Great and Little Eccleston. Whether such zealotry penetrated as far south as the Mersey, notwithstanding arguments that this river already marked the Northumbrian boundary, is doubtful. The survival, despite Wilfrid, of names containing *eccles* at Eccleston, Cheshire, and (broadly) one per later hundred across southern Lancashire – at two Ecclestons, an Eccleshill, and an Eccles – thereby emphasise the preservation of Romano-British churches in a uniquely continuous bloc. The Northumbrian disruption of a previously wider distribution of such churches north of the Ribble being thus reasonably inferable, that district as a whole looks more probably as though it had been already partitioned between Northumbria and Mercia, most probably along the Ribble valley. By the 670s, indeed, temporary Northumbrian influence further south in the Cheshire area seems to have been already superseded by Mercia’s. Five of these British churches were left unscathed within what later emerges significantly as the diocese of Lichfield (the Mercian origins of which predated the fixing of their see in 669), and so to the south of the likely sphere of Wilfrid’s Yorkshire influence north of the Ribble.

The later medieval Archdeaconry of Chester within Lichfield diocese, moreover, specifically incorporated both ‘Cheshire’ and ‘the land between Ribble and Mersey’ as a unit.²⁰ This very area, in combination with some of the adjacent Welsh littoral, could thus have previously reflected the extent of a newly acquired Mercian province included in the appropriate position in the clockwise circuit of the Tribal Hidage list of seventh century peoples.²¹ To judge from a uniquely neutral name that suggests a dependent relation to the heartland of the Mercian Angles to their east, these *Westerners* presumably comprised a collectivity of small peoples like those just mentioned, who lacked a uniform Germanic ethnic identity of their own. Already reorganised with a new non-Celtic tribute burden amounting to 7,000 hides this would have been equivalent elsewhere to the later extent of two Midland counties plus.

Northumbria, by contrast, was granting Cartmel away in the late seventh century, so there is the real possibility that Deira and its diocese – as opposed to Bernicia – was actually now expanding northwards into southern Lakeland, if not beyond. That would fit with the impression that the Anglian colonisation of the western Cumberland coastline may have been at least enabled from the sea. Was it then that all or part of the future ‘Coupland’ area south of Derwent was absorbed into the diocese of York? The somewhat extraneous Millom end of Coupland was surveyed under Yorkshire in the pre-1066 geld roll apparently used for Domesday, but it is not clear whether this was simply the mark of recent re-conquest by or before Tostig (Earl of Northumbria,

1055-65), whose land it had been. All we know is that, when the see of Carlisle was created in 1133, Coupland already belonged to the York Archdeaconry of Richmond.²²

Whatever the case, it was probably from the early tenth century that this entire periphery was infiltrated by Scandinavian and other settlers from the Scottish Isles and coastlands.²³ By then the Irish Sea as a whole was dominated from the Hiberno-Norse kingdom of Dublin and York, while the Cumbrians south of Solway were being increasingly subordinated by either Scots or northern Britons. Following in the wake of those Scandinavians who had already established themselves separately along the seaboard of Ireland after sojourning further north, the successive colonists of the western littorals of Britain seem to have spoken either Norse or Scottic Gaelic or a mixture of both. Recent revisionist thinking now suggests that possibly the characteristic inversion compounds found in Dumfriesshire and the area of modern Cumbria, but – suggestively – far less frequently in south Lancashire and not apparently in Cheshire, were coined by a select number of ‘Gaelic speakers who had learned Old Norse’ because of its dominant political status, rather than by Scandinavians.²⁴ That too would explain both the long line of Gaelic-derived shieling names in *-érgi* which stretches from the River Derwent in Cumberland, through Lancashire, to the Wirral, as well as the presence of numerous Gaelic personal names.²⁵

Importantly, the Goidelic intrusion helps further to differentiate ethnic elements within the region. Allerdale, the northernmost great lordship of the Cumberland coastal strip with its predominantly British and Anglian place-names, was thus least touched by both Norse and Gaelic naming habits, the Scandinavian elements in *-by* seemingly mostly later.²⁶ Conspicuously contrasting is the character of the sector south of the River Derwent: what would emerge under the name of a probably expanded Coupland or Old Norse ‘bought’ land. In addition to its contemporary crosses this shows the highest densities on this periphery of firstly, Goidelic place-names, not least those in *-érgi*; secondly, inversion compounds embodying Gaelic personal names; and thirdly, Scandinavian place-names. Actual degrees of Scandinavianisation, however, are hard to pin chronologically because of the overwhelming numbers of topographically inspired names, like those in *thwaite/-þveit* or clearing, which are so common in later dialect usage that their helpfulness in tracing early distributions is doubtful.

Localised contrasts at least serve to underpin the view of Gillian Fellows-Jensen that apparently later, small administrative districts – fitting for the most part into self-contained valleys (or ‘dales’) or otherwise water-defined contexts – had in fact long contained distinct societies that may simply have been renamed in Scandinavianised terms, like Coupland (above) or Amounderness (the Old Norse ‘ness’ or headland of *Agmundr*). In names like Lonsdale, the ON *dalr-* may have even replaced British names in *Strath-* ‘valley’.²⁷ By 919, indeed, even Manchester, north of the Mersey, needed to be described exceptionally as ‘in’ (Scandinavian) ‘Northumbria’ – rather than ‘in’ (English) ‘Mercia’ perhaps – and possibly as a frontier town controlling the Roman road westwards from Scandinavian York, before that connection was severed by the Mercians. In my view, it was probably only now – in the face of increasing Scandinavian infiltration from the north into the area south of the Ribble corridor

towards Yorkshire – that the Mersey, rather than the Ribble, was established as the ‘boundary river’ determining the southern end of ‘Danish’ Northumbria as a no man’s land. Only then perhaps was a line of Mercian *burhs* constructed from Runcorn to Manchester (915-19), so leaving the probably erstwhile Mercian ‘land between Ribble and Mersey’²⁸ as the territorial anomaly it would remain – albeit later carved up into Norman baronies – until the shiring of Lancashire.

IV

The cumulative ethnic complexities of the north-west now all too lightly differentiated on the ground, it is possible to summarize what might be seen as an eleventh/twelfth century transition from multi-cultural people to indigenous customary society as the new definer of a human region. Even in the mid-eleventh century, however, we need to recall that Gospatric, lord of Allerdale, who also then ruled Cumberland, still saw himself as the head of a traditional local kindred. The yet later common use of patronymics – eg Johnson: ‘son of John’ (of French origin) – may itself suggest a long self-perpetuating, albeit newly named, tradition of ramifying regional family lineages across the North as a whole.²⁹

Custom increasingly displaced the traditional collective norms of a more extensive kin-based society, being concentrated within increasingly localised lordships that tended to restrict personal mobility. An evolving mix of custom – whether shire or ecclesiastical, baronial or manorial, parochial or borough – was invariably internalised through the local courts of specific jurisdictions, however tiny. Carlisle alone had three such: for the castle, the cathedral’s Augustinian canons, and the town itself.

As elsewhere in England, therefore, the engine of change was a fundamental redistribution of population on the ground involving the reorganisation of settlement patterns within jurisdictions that had been newly enabled through private land grants at the expense of collective land claims. Relevant to our region were population pressures that reflected the knock-on effects of international migration. An extraordinary recent estimate by Jesse Byock for the Icelandic population between *c.* 870 and 930 puts it at 10 or even 20,000 people originally arriving in sailing ships each able to carry 30 tons of cargo and livestock from Scandinavia, as well as from transit stations in the same Gaelic-speaking areas of Britain that seem to have furnished settlers in North-West England.³⁰ If similar localised movements most affected the Cumbrian peripheries along the coastlands – and even at Cumwhitton³¹ in colonising the Pennine edge – there also seems to have been a significant Scandinavian incursion much later, especially from Yorkshire through *Westmoringa-land* into the Solway basin (including Dumfriesshire) and, probably via the Aire Gap, into southern Lancashire. In these areas especially, the very early Danelaw use of habitative place-names employing the suffix – *by* seems to have been imported from Scandinavian Northumbria as late as the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Many of these names look as though they were now given to new dispersed settlements, such as Thursby south of Solway which may be named after the Thore mentioned in Gospatric’s writ of the mid-eleventh century, and even, on the Pennine edge, for example, to new, planned nucleated villages with communal field-systems, perhaps like Glassonby or Gamblesby in the twelfth. It is

particularly relevant too that it is mainly outside the Cumbrian core – to its north, east and especially west – that we see patterns of smaller townships that often betoken the subdivision of larger units of ‘extensive lordship’ once containing the lands of whole kindreds. Such fission is most evident when small parishes of the south-western strip are found side by side, with each of them boasting one or more Scandinavianised crosses in its own churchyard.

The other face of population redistribution was seen in the development of key towns and their urban networks. The geographically isolated survival at Carlisle and Stanwix of single late tenth and early eleventh century coins from York and Stamford mints (let alone the recently discovered earlier ninth century coin of Northumbria’s King Eanred) suggests long-distance trading under the protection of its continuing function as a regional *caput* at that period.³² Perhaps some time after Henry I’s visit in 1122, Carlisle may have been effectively split within its new defences between a ‘French’ end containing the new castle, the new priory – soon to be a cathedral – with a ‘*vicus francorum*’ leading to the market place, and what was now left over, intramurally, of the probably pre-existing parish of St Cuthbert’s, which came to contain ‘English’ Street. By then too Carlisle was profiting from its association with both a new mint and the Alston silver mines, whether these were in English or Scottish hands.³³ Probably Penrith – the early geographical pivot of the emergent marketing system because it linked the core area through the Lake District to the Scandinavianised seaboard – was followed by Appleby and other new castle-towns soon after.

The significance of Chester was renewed in the late Anglo-Saxon period because of its Irish Sea location in relation to Norse Dublin, the leading port of the Irish Sea; its proximity to a strongly emergent salt industry; and its own English status as major minting centre. Not only was it perceived as the key to the recognition in 973 of English over-kingship in northern Britain at a gathering of northern leaders, but by 1086 it temporarily superseded Lichfield as the seat of that diocese under a ‘bishop of Chester’. Cheshire also had some oversight over the, as yet unshired, Mercian territory ‘between Ribble and Mersey’ because that was included in the Cheshire Domesday folios rather than Yorkshire’s.

Local urban hierarchies based on Carlisle and Chester then developed informally and in relation to the old Roman road links as the economic regional reflections of the re-defined societies concerned. For the commercially more advanced central Irish Sea region, indeed, the spread of ‘urbanisation’ *via* sub-regional centres such as Manchester, Preston, Lancaster, and Kendal – with its pigmy out-port at Milnthorpe – effectively transformed a politically divided and peripheral coastal strip into a tapering extension of a Cheshire regional core in its own right. Coherence into a recognisable society would be realised, however, only when Chester’s coasting vessels eventually integrated the trade and culture of its littorals by supplying its nascent network of towns, and thereby superseding the former cultural division of the area between Northumbria and Mercia. A Chester coin from Drigg on the Cumbrian coast suggests maritime links had reached even further north by the early eleventh century.³⁴ Each of our two ‘English’ networks – based on Chester and Carlisle respectively – was fringed eventually at its ambiguous outer edges by identifiable ‘frontier markets’ – such as

Ambleside or Brough – but both these urban regions also came to overlap national boundaries into north Wales and south-west Scotland respectively.

This international conjunction, finally, allows us to elaborate on the identities of these customary societies as simultaneously constituents of one of three emerging broader cultural divisions of England as a whole: what might be described as a European England of the wider south-east, an Inner England, and, in this case, ‘Archipelago England’. Situated as far from London as it was possible to get, this last division comprised all those northern and western edges of England that neighboured surviving Celtic polities by both land and sea, including Brittany. From Shropshire to Cumberland and Northumberland with Durham, indeed, there survived archaic customs of local governance and tenurial obligation that were still tied to what remained of a superannuated Celtic system of itinerant kingship and its official provisioning.³⁵ These traditions thus continued to differentiate all such regions from the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ institutions of their immediate neighbours in Inner England to their east during the centuries of transition.

More than that, in two important further respects the northernmost of these newly defined societies in the north-west – like most others in Archipelago England – also consciously perpetuated its earlier sense of Brittonic ethnic identity. The first means of sustaining such memories in the rest of Archipelago England – beyond those fossilised in county names or the widespread local legends surrounding ‘King Arthur’ – was in the popular perpetuation of ethnic saints’ cults through noticeable clusters of church dedications in specific localities. Relics of saintly patrons – usually former bishops of the un-partitioned kingdoms concerned, and so their sees – were mortared into the tops of numerous altars commemorating the Cornish St Petroc in English Devon, the Welsh St Dubricius in English Archenfield (broadly between the rivers Wye and Monnow south of Hereford), and the Strathclyde St Kentigern in the core of ‘English’ Cumberland. In the last case it has also been demonstrated by R. K. Rose that many such churches with this and other Celtic dedications were the possibly late creations of the new local elite, and may have reflected the revival of a sense of British identity in the face of Norman domination. Twelfth century, north-western churchmen were writing the lives of, and so rehabilitating, Celtic saints like Kentigern, Ninian, Patrick, and the allegedly British Helen, the mother of the Emperor Constantine.³⁶

What we are looking at secondly in Archipelago England, in fact, are long-remembered Celtic frontiers that were stamped across the mental landscape well *within* the national edges of what were by then deemed to be the territories of the twelfth century English. The Cornish regarded Devon as still Dumnonian; the Welsh saw the River Severn (pre-English *Hafren*) and its estuary as yet dividing Wales respectively from England and from ‘Cornwall’. The Scots signposted claims to the disputed earldom of Northumberland reaching as far south as the Rere Cross or the River Duddon and even the Ribble. More belligerently, they actually occupied not only the North West, but also Northumbria as far as the River Tees valley south of which their expansion was decisively stopped by the English at the Battle of the Standard near Northallerton in 1138.

In asserting their own Celtic pretensions throughout the long provincial transition

to non-ethnic forms of society while urban networks were integrating down to the earlier thirteenth century, England's neighbours successfully emphasised Archipelago England as a wide zone of continuing ethnic ambiguity between separate nations. Provincial sovereignties may have been finally quashed and whole peoples divided, but questions could still be raised over the completeness of Anglo-Saxon state formation and its Englishness, with all that that implied for the dream of provincial uniformity. Apart from the Cornish, nowhere was this more so than in the case of the Cumbrians, the only people of Archipelago England fully to declaim their separate 'racial' identity. The OE *wealas* element in the names of both Cornwall and Wales signified the racialist Anglo-Saxon view of these peoples as representing inferior Celtic 'foreigners', whereas 'Cumberland' still retained the British name for themselves, the *Cymry*, albeit in an anglicised form.

Yet this continuing structural emphasis on Celtic origins, lost independence, and territorial identity is only half the story and clearly reflects the struggles for regional sovereignty with the English that preoccupied all Celtic political and religious elites. That theme lingered by implication even in the fourteenth century 'polite' culture of the newly articulate central Irish Sea region of Cheshire and Lancashire, with its literary emphasis on a courtly setting for Arthur's world, and separately as well in Cumberland where that same world was located specifically in relation to Carlisle and Inglewood.³⁷ In the longer term what left the more lasting imprint of our period, however, was surely the informal influence of Old Norse on the development of the Cumbrian dialect: to an extent indeed that it is hard to resist the inference that this was the product of considerable migration under individual leaders. Expert agreement seems to be emerging that even into the late eleventh century, Norse or a mixed dialect of Middle English and Norse may still have been spoken, at least in pockets, through a belt running 'from Cumberland and Westmorland across to the North and East Riding of Yorkshire and the north of Lincolnshire' but not, it would seem, in Lancashire and Cheshire.³⁸ This was therefore in time to influence the speech patterns of those who would soon populate the new towns concerned.

In seeking to distinguish 'whose region?', then, the telling regional contrast here is with the other Scandinavian societies of the Danelaw. There the legendary cultures of the transition period either celebrated the Viking appropriation of Anglian kingdoms or perpetuated a widespread myth legitimising the Viking occupation itself. The latter even claimed that the original 'Anglian' kings of Lindsey and 'Norfolk' who superseded the Celtic rulers of post-Roman Britain had in fact been Danes!³⁹ In all these eastern cases, however, incoming Scandinavian elites had taken political control of existing regional cores. In the English far north-west, by contrast, it was Gaelic-Norse peasants – initially under their own chieftains – who colonised regional peripheries, and may have done so by purchase or with British agreement in return for defence services. East and West thus each variously differentiated itself from the English, yet in seeking such earlier ethnic distinctions, perhaps historians should always look to discriminate between the old protective umbrella of lost sovereignty above and, beneath, in its shadow, the more numerous lesser people with their informal, but long-persisting customary ways.

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Notes and References

- ¹ This article originated in a lecture delivered at Ambleside in 2009 and is presented here with but small modifications. For so generalised a survey, covering nearly a millennium, it has been felt best to keep references to an irreducible minimum
- ² Richard Sharpe, *Norman Rule in Cumbria 1092-1136*, CWAAS Tract Series, xxi (Kendal, 2006), 30-33. This study supersedes all previous work on its subject
- ³ Meirion Pennar, *Taliesin Poems. Introduction and English Translation* (Llanerch, 1988), 92, 94. For an archaeologically based alternative view see Mike McCarthy, 'Rheged: an Early Historic Kingdom near the Solway', *PSAScot.*, 132 (2002), 357-81
- ⁴ Charles Phythian-Adams, *Land of the Cumbrians. A Study in British Provincial Origins A.D. 400-1120* (Aldershot, 1996), 77-87; John M. Todd, 'British (Cumbric) Place-Names in the Barony of Gilsland, Cumbria', *CW3*, v (2005), 89-102
- ⁵ Richard Coates and Andrew Breeze, with a contribution by David Horowitz, *Celtic Voices: English Places. Studies of the Celtic Impact on Place-Names in England* (Stamford, 2000), 373, map
- ⁶ Pennar, *Taliesin Poems*, 63-4
- ⁷ Leslie Webster and Janet Backhouse, (eds.), *The Making of England. Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture AD 600-900* (British Museum, 1991), 172-75
- ⁸ Quoted in full in J. C. Dickinson, 'Walter the Priest and St Mary's, Carlisle', *CW2*, lxix (1969), 112, n.37. 'Cumbriam' thus included (a) the area of the much later *ward* known as 'Cumberland', east of Moricambe Bay, which also contained 'the dale of the Cumbrians' or Cummersdale, an out-township of St Mary's Carlisle. (This is therefore also the district immediately referred to south of Solway as 'Cumberland' in one of the earlier charters of David I of Scotland.) 'Cumbria' further comprised: (b) the later rural *deanery* also known as 'Cumberland' which reached from Carlisle as far south as the boundary of Westmorland; and (c) what later was known as Eskdale ward – between the Eden and the Tyne-Solway Gap – including the lordship of Gilsland. Cumberland *ward* plus Eskdale were coterminous with the single *deanery* of 'Carlisle' which therefore contained the regional capital at its southern edge. 'Cumbria' thus seems to have equated with 'Cumberland' at this period, though the territorial status of Gilsland, like Coupland, remained ambiguous until later in the twelfth century
- ⁹ Coates and Breeze, *Celtic Voices*, maps at 370, 390
- ¹⁰ Sharpe, *Norman Rule*, 46
- ¹¹ G. W. S. Barrow, 'King David I, Earl Henry and Cumbria', *CW3*, xcix (1999), 117-27
- ¹² Rosemary Cramp, *Whithorn and the Northumbrian Expansion Westwards, Third Whithorn Lecture, 17 September, 1994* (Whithorn, 1995), unpaginated, n. 3
- ¹³ See Todd, *British (Cumbric) Place-Names*, n.3
- ¹⁴ Richard N. Bailey and Rosemary Cramp, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, II, Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, (Oxford, 1988), 47-8
- ¹⁵ Alan Thacker, 'Membra Disjecta: the Division of the Body and the Diffusion of the Cult', in Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (eds.), *Oswald. Northumbrian King to European Saint* (Stamford, 1995), 100-104
- ¹⁶ Dauvit Brown, 'The Welsh Identity of the Kingdom of Strathclyde c.900-c.1200', *The Innes Review*, 55, no.2 (Autumn 2004), 173-180
- ¹⁷ Phythian-Adams, *Land of the Cumbrians*, 78, map 6
- ¹⁸ Usefully mapped in N. J. Higham, *A Frontier Landscape. The North West in the Middle Ages* (Macclesfield, 2004), 26
- ¹⁹ Bertram Colgrave (ed.), *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus* (Cambridge, 1927), 39-7, 164. Such *loca sancta*, being presumably rehabilitated subsequently in a new Romanist guise under Wilfrid's ecclesiastical patronage, seem improbable candidates for retaining their earlier functional description. Local names in *eccles* west of the Pennines are thus much more likely to describe the earlier British churches which had escaped his reformist zeal rather than otherwise. The difficulties in establishing the geographical distribution of Wilfrid's endowments may be gleaned from I. N. Wood, 'Anglo-Saxon Otley: an Archiepiscopal Estate and its Crosses in a Northumbrian Context', *Northern History*, xxiii (1987), 24; P. Sims Williams, 'St Wilfrid and Two Charters Dated AD 676 and 680', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 39 (1988), 163-83; G. R. J. Jones, 'Some Donations to Bishop Wilfrid in Northern England', *Northern History*, xxxi (1995), 22-38, especially n. 35.
- ²⁰ Ever jealous of its tally of sees it is highly suggestive that contrary to what we might otherwise have suspected, the Province of York never seems subsequently to have claimed *southern* Lancashire from

- the Diocese of Lichfield – as it did the entire see of Worcester – as previously a rightful part *either* of its province *or* of York Diocese. The district of Amounderness (or a part of it), *north* of the Ribble, by contrast, may have had to be *restored* to the Archbishop and Church of York in 934 as the result of a costly royal purchase. If York diocese had ever contained the area south of Ribble, it would surely have been for only a short spell in the earlier seventh century. For probable Mercian activity in this area even during the early Viking period see M. A. Atkin, “‘The Land between Ribble and Mersey’ in the Early Tenth Century”, in Alexander Rumble and A. D. Mills (eds.), *Names, Places and People. An Onomastic Miscellany in Memory of John McNeal Dodgson* (Stamford, 1997), 8-18
- ²¹ Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), 18
- ²² Recent ingenious arguments by F.R.Thorn, ‘Hundreds and Wapentakes’, in Ann Williams (Editor-in-Chief), *The Yorkshire Domesday*, Alecto Historical Editions (London, 1992), 55-60, suggest that the southern Lake District, conceivably plus Amounderness, in fact represented part of an expanded ‘Craven’ in the Yorkshire DB. On this, the jury must be said to be still out. Amongst other problems the deanery of Craven, at least, lay in the Archdeaconry of York, not in that of Richmond; the York archdeaconries being probably created by Wulfstan (Archbishop of York, 1002-23), on which see Frank Barlow, *The English Church 1000-66. A Constitutional History* (London, 1963), 247-8. On the estates of Ivo Taillebois in the same area, see also Sharpe, *Norman Rule*, 37-40
- ²³ David Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea: Conflict and Assimilation AD 790-1050* (Stroud, 2010), 49, fig. 14
- ²⁴ Alison Grant, ‘A New Approach to the Inversion Compounds of North-West England’, *Nomina*, 25 (2002), 65-90; and see Gillian Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the North-West* (Copenhagen, 1985), pp. 303-6
- ²⁵ Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names*, 295-6, figs. 11a, 11b
- ²⁶ Despite the number of presumably elite-originated crosses. Bailey and Cramp, *Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, 4, map 3
- ²⁷ Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names*, 381-4, 99
- ²⁸ See note 20.
- ²⁹ David Postles, *The North Through its Names. A Phenomenology of Medieval and Early-Modern Northern England* (Oxford, 2007), chapter 2, but where the Cumbrian evidence is inevitably somewhat curtailed for want of comparable poll-tax returns
- ³⁰ Jesse Byock, *Viking Age Iceland* (London, 2001), 9-10, 54-5
- ³¹ http://thehumanjourney.net/html_pages/microsites/viking_burial/indepth.htm
- ³² D. M. Metcalfe, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coin Finds, c.973-1086* (London, 1998), 253; Graham Keevil, ‘Excavations at Carlisle Cathedral in 1985’, *CW3*, viii (2008), 53
- ³³ Ian Blanchard, ‘Lothian and Beyond: the Economy of the English Empire of David I’ in Richard Britnell and John Hatcher (eds.), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 1996), 23-45
- ³⁴ Metcalfe, *An Atlas of Anglo-Saxon and Norman Coin Finds*, 255
- ³⁵ W. Rees, ‘Survivals of Ancient Celtic Custom in Medieval England’, in H. Lewis (ed.), *Angles and Britons* (Cardiff, 1963), 153-68, including map
- ³⁶ R. K. Rose, ‘Cumbrian Society and the Anglo-Norman Church’ in Stewart Mews (ed.), *Religion and National Identity*, Studies in Church History, xviii (1982), 119-135
- ³⁷ Michael J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism. Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), 231-4; Robert Gates (ed.) *The Awntyrs off Arthure at the Terne Wathelyne. A Critical Edition* (Philadelphia, 1969)
- ³⁸ David N. Parsons, ‘How Long did the Scandinavian Language Survive in England? Again.’ in James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David Parsons (eds.), *Vikings and the Danelaw* (Oxford, 2001), 307, 310, n.14
- ³⁹ Charles Phythian-Adams, ‘Environments and Identities: Landscape as Cultural Projection in the English Provincial Past’, in Paul Slack (ed.), *Environments and Historical Change*, The Linacre Lectures 1998 (Oxford, 1999), 124-34 For the longer-term distinctions between the NW and the NE, Charles Phythian-Adams, ‘The Northumbrian Island’, in Rob Colls (ed.), *Northumbria: History and Identity 547-2000* (Chichester, 2007), 334-61. (Copies of the excluded introductory section and the consequently omitted original n.1 may be obtained from the author.)