ART. IX. – *Medieval Cockermouth.*
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THE study of the smaller towns of medieval Cumbria is in its infancy. The broad outline of the chronology of town foundations in the 12th to 14th centuries is known, but little detailed work on individual towns has yet appeared.[1] This paper is intended as a contribution to a deeper understanding of the history of the smaller urban communities of northern England during the Middle Ages. It is based on a report prepared for Cumbria County Council's Planning Department in 1978-9 as part of a survey funded by the Department of the Environment to establish priorities for achaeological work in four Cumbrian market towns.[2] Since it was prepared, Dr R. H. Leech's 1980 excavations behind 75-87 Main Street, Cockermouth, have taken place. The extensive nature of those excavations and the survival of a comparatively large quantity of documentary material concerning the medieval town give Cockermouth an important place among the smaller towns of the north.

This paper is an attempt to summarise the information available from documentary sources concerning three aspects of the town's history: first, the origins and growth of the borough from the 12th to the 16th centuries; second, the topography of the town and its surrounding farmland in the medieval period; and third, the pre-urban settlement pattern in the vicinity of the later town.

The Growth of the Urban Community

Cockermouth appears to be one of the large class of small urban communities which came into being in the 12th and 13th centuries as a result of deliberate town creation by the larger landholders.[3] The surviving documentary evidence suggests that Cockermouth was founded during the 12th century at the *caput* of the extensive estate of Alan son of Waldeve and his descendants, who were lords of the lordship of Allerdale (north of the river Derwent) and the honour of Cockermouth, comprising the "Five Towns" and Derwentfells, south of the Derwent. The exact date of foundation is not known but the borough charter of *c.* 1210[4] shows that the town was in existence some years before the earliest reference to its castle in 1221[5] or the grant of a market in 1227.[6] Moreover, the charter of *c.* 1210 is a confirmation by the then lady of Cockermouth of privileges conferred on the free men of the town by her ancestors, implying that the original foundation took place at an earlier date. Evidence that an urban community was in existence at Cockermouth by *c.* 1200 comes from contemporary grants of land in the town to monastic houses and further points to a foundation in the 12th century.[7] The only earlier evidence which can help to assign a more precise date to the foundation is a charter of Alan son of Waldeve, given "at Cokyrmoth", *c.* 1150 which implies that Alan's seat of power (presumably precursor of the later castle) was at Cockermouth by the mid 12th century.[8]

The borough charter confirms that the town was a seigniorial foundation and there are other respects in which Cockermouth bears the hallmarks of a new town of the early
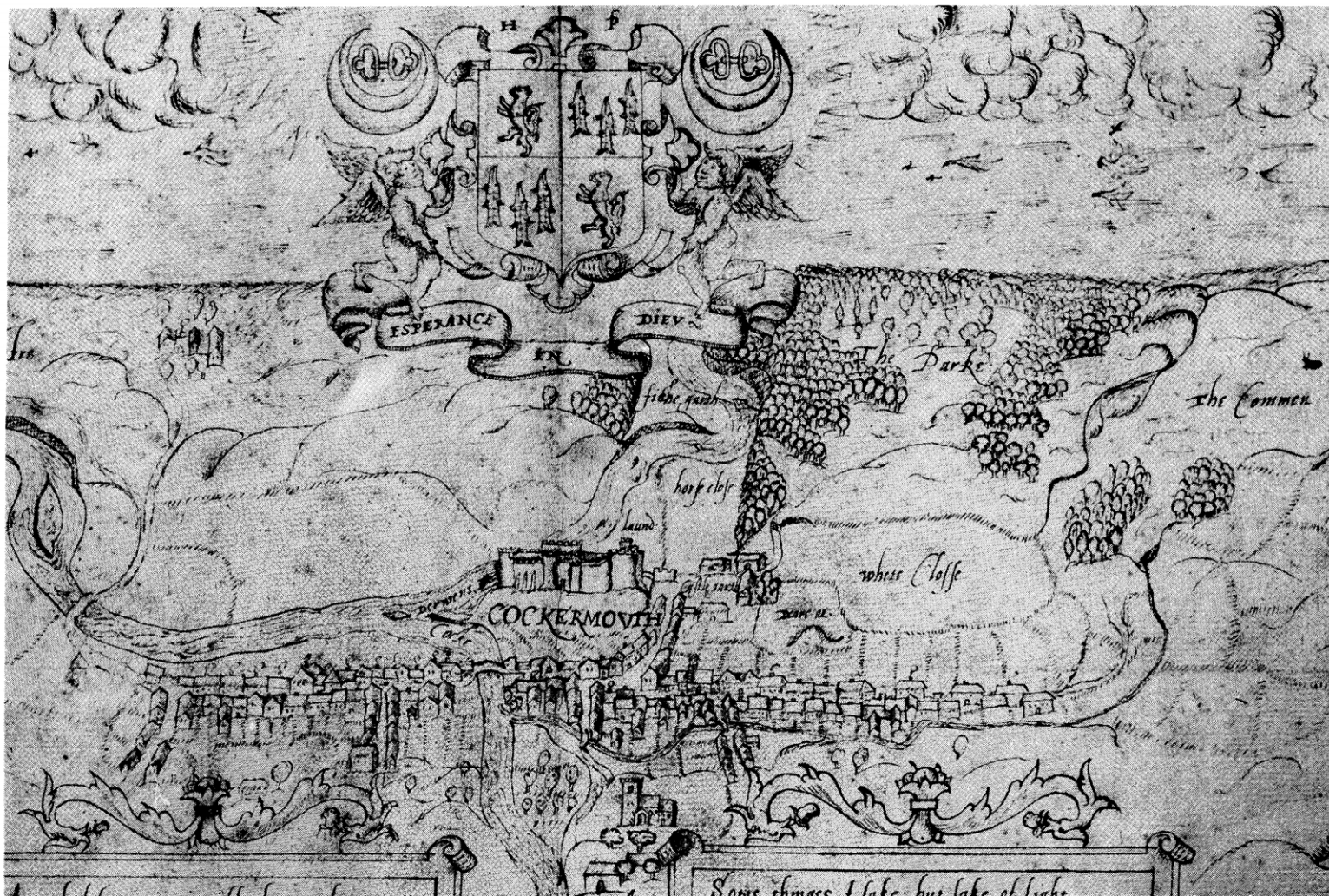
PLATE I – Cockermouth *c.* 1600. Detail from the pictorial map at Cockermouth Castle, reproduced by kind permission of Lord Egremont.

Middle Ages. First, certain elements of the town plan, notably the wide Main Street with its bowed building lines and regular burgage plots are more easily explained as the result of deliberate planning than piecemeal growth. Second, the status of the church of Cockermouth as a chapel dependent on the mother church of Brigham is an example of a pattern which is repeated in many other planted towns.[9]

It is not until possibly a century after the town's foundation that documentary evidence allows any sort of detailed picture of the urban community to be drawn. The survival of extents of the borough in 1259[10] and *c.* 1270[11] and of a series of manorial accounts for years between 1267 and 1294[12] enable an impression of the late 13th-century borough to be obtained. They list three main sources of lordly income: the castle and its demesne land; the rents of the burgesses; and the income from a variety of trading and industrial activites. The lord's demesne consisted *c.* 1270 of the castle with its attached deer park and 25 acres of land in "the close below the castle". A further 83 acres of demesne land in "Ourebyfeld" and the field (*cultura*) near St. Helen's chapel were let to tenants. The demesne at Cockermouth formed the core of a large demesne farming enterprise which included a further 100 acres of arable land near the coast at Birkby as well as mountain pastures and meadow in the vaccary at Gatesgarth, Buttermere, and elsewhere in Derwent fells.

The second major element was the rents paid by the holders of burgages in the town. By the terms of the borough charter the free men of the borough were to pay 4d. for each complete burgage toft. In 1259 the annual rental from the burgages was given as 59s. 3d. which suggests a total of $177\frac{3}{4}$ burgage tofts. The detailed rental of *c.* 1270 lists 161 burgesses holding a total of $175\frac{1}{8}$ tofts. The tenurial pattern is not, however, as simple as this similarity between numbers of burgesses and number of burgage tofts suggest. Only 17 of the 161 burgesses held a complete toft, the majority holding subdivisions of burgages, and a substantial number holding more than one burgage, as Table 1 shows.

TABLE 1. – *Analysis of Burgage Holdings c. 1270*

Size of Holding	No. of burgesses
$\frac{1}{4}$ toft	44
$\frac{1}{2}$ toft	40
$\frac{3}{4}$ toft	19
1 toft	17
1-2 tofts	23
>2 tofts	18

There are grave difficulties in using the rental to estimate the population of the town at that date, but it is the only documentary source sufficiently detailed to allow any idea of the town's size to be gained. The main problem concerns the degree to which the list of burgage holders is tantamount to a list of householders: in the case of the smaller holdings of one burgage toft or less the correspondence may have been close, but it is almost certain that there were numerous undertenants on the property of the larger burgesses. In an attempt to overcome this problem it is suggested that a crude estimate of the number of households in the town may be obtained by counting the number of *holdings* consisting of one burgage toft or less plus the number of *burgage tofts* accounted for in holdings of more than one toft. Such an exercise gives a total of *c.* 230 households,

which, taking an average household size of 4·5 persons, would suggest that the town's total population *c.* 1270 might have been in the order of 1,035 inhabitants.

The degree of burgage plot subdivision which had taken place by *c.* 1270 suggests that demand for burgage property had been high and implies that the town was flourishing. Similarly, the accumulation of substantial burgage holdings by a number of burgesses may also be an indication of fortunes made during the town's first century. The names of several of the larger burgage holders recur in the manorial accounts as "borough reeve" (*prepositus burgi*),[13] perhaps hinting at the existence of a ruling oligarchy composed of the wealthier burgesses.

The evidence of lordly income from various trading and industrial activities in the town gives some idea of its economic base. As might be expected of a town situated at the junction between the pastoral uplands and the corn-growing coastal plain, both sides of the rural economy are represented. The survey of *c.* 1270 lists in the borough two water corn mills, a fulling mill, the dyeworks (*tinctorie*), eight corn measures (*mensurie ad mensurandum bladam*), the market tolls, and three smithies (*fabricae*). The fulling mill (the rent of which, £11 6s. 8d., was almost as great as the combined rent of both corn mills, £13 6s. 8d.) and the dye works suggest an important woollen industry based on the surrounding sheep pastures, and the surnames of some of the burgesses – skinner (*pelliparius*); tanner (*tannator*); dyer (*tinctor*); weaver (*textor*); tailor (*cissor*) and fuller (*fullo*) confirm the impression of the town's importance as a centre for processing animal products from its pastoral hinterland.

The conditions of economic growth which contributed to the town's flourishing state in the later 13th century did not last and it is clear that Cockermouth suffered the effects of the economic depression, plague and political unrest which affected northern England as a whole during the 14th and 15th centuries. During the late 13th and early 14th century the town's livelihood appears to have been severely affected by two factors, the devastating epidemic of sheep "murrain" which spread through Northern England in 1276-8, and the opening of hostilities between England and Scotland during the reigns of Edward I and II. Sheep murrain had reached Cockermouth by 1280/1, as the account of the borough reeve for that year explains the reduction in income from the town's fulling mill (£11 6s. 8d. in 1270/1; £9 6s. 8d. in 1280/1) as being due to the disease.[14] The effect must have been devastating to a local economy strongly geared towards the woollen industry, and its specific mention as a major cause of economic depression in west Cumberland in the inquisition of Ninths of 1340 confirms both its endemic nature and the severity of its effects.[15]

The Castle became a royal stronghold after the estate escheated to the Crown in 1293 and appears to have drawn attacks to its vicinity. Clear evidence of destruction due to the Border troubles is found in the accounts of Robert de Leyburn, the keeper of the castle from 1316-18. The account is confused "because of the Scottish war"; the rents of the burgesses were lower than previously; the fulling mill lay derelict and untenanted, and the market tolls were also reduced because of destruction by the Scots.[16]

It is not clear how long-lasting were the effects of the unsettled political situation and it is impossible to know what further decay occurred as a result of the Black Death and subsequent outbreaks of plague. However, the description of the manor of Cockermouth on the death of Anthony de Lucy in 1368 provides an object for comparison with the rental of *c.* 1270 and suggests that the town was considerably reduced in size (and,

presumably, prosperity) by the troubles of the intervening century.[17] In 1368 the total rent from burgages in the town was 44s. 4d. (i.e. 133 full burgage tofts), a reduction from 58s. 6½d. (i.e. 175⅛ full tofts) in the rental of c. 1270. However, the 1368 extent also mentions separately "certain burgages and lands adjacent to them, newly purchased (adquesit) in the hands of the tenants at will". This is the first mention of plots in the town let out as tenancies at will (the c. 1270 rental listing only freehold burgages) and it seems probable that these "newly purchased" lands represent burgages which, through destruction or reduction in population, had reverted to the lord during the troubled early 14th century and had been re-let on an unfree tenure.

The surviving 15th-century manorial accounts for the borough chart the change from economic decline to fresh economic growth during this century. The earliest account, for 1437/8, hints at continuing decline: the total rent of burgages is 44s. 4d. (as it had been in 1368), but a long list of decayed rents includes 2s. 7d. from "divers burgages, wasted and in the lord's hand".[18] By the later part of the 15th century, however, the town's fortunes appear to have improved considerably. The accounts for 1478; 1500; 1519 and 1542 each contain a list of "new rents", some from new encroachments along the margins of the waste, but those listed in 1478 including burgages and tenements let out for building (ad edificandum).[19] Presumably these entries record a spate of building activity in the wake of economic recovery in the later 15th century. This renewed pressure on building land in the town probably lies behind the presentments in the borough court from 1522 to 1525 against burgages, largely "in the west part" of the town, which lay in decay and were claimed to be "a nuisance to the neighbourhood".[20] The situation is most clearly illustrated by an entry in the borough court roll for 26 October 1532 which notes that:

"a waste place in Sanct Elyngate (i.e. St. Helens Street) between the burgage of the Blessed Virgin of Cockermouth on the east, and the burgage of Richard Garnett, has been completely in decay time out of mind and is now built up and occupied by John Dand."[21]

The re-expansion of the town at this period should thus probably be thought of as involving the re-occupation of burgage plots which had fallen into decay during the preceding period of depression, rather than an extension of the urban area.

That the town was again flourishing by the latter half of the 16th century is implied by the two topographers who made mention of Cockermouth at that time. To Leland, writing in the reign of Henry VIII, it was a "goode market towne",[22] while Camden described it as "wealthy" (copiosum) in the 1580s.[23] The survey of the borough made for the earl of Northumberland in 1578 gives the impression of an urban community whose roots were still firmly in the land: many of the burgage holders also held land in the fields around the town, implying that they combined farming with a trading or commercial activity in the town.[24] Such an impression is confirmed by the handful of probate inventories which survive for late 16th-century inhabitants of Cockermouth. For example, John Brumfield (d. 1592) held in 1578 a half-burgage in the town, and a 3½ acre field called "Gallabarghe and Milne Hill".[25] His probate inventory makes it clear that he combined small-scale farming (he had 9 old sheep, 14 hoggs, a mare, and some hay and onions at his death) with the trade of a leather worker. His possessions included 1½ hundreds of raw leather and "calffe lether, sheepe lether, purses and gloves" to the value of 20s. 8d. He also had woollen cloth worth 14s.[26] It is impossible to know how

typical Brumfield was, but it is striking from the small surviving sample that most testators' possessions included a few animals and sometimes some corn, a stock of leather and perhaps some woollen or linen cloth.[27] As in the late 13th century, Cockermouth's main function was as a centre for the exchange and primary processing of farm produce, particularly animal products, from the surrounding countryside.

Topography of the Medieval Borough

The previous section has sketched in broad outline the origin and development of the urban community at Cockermouth from the late 12th to the late 16th century. This section aims to reconstruct, so far as is possible from documentary sources, the layout of the medieval town and the patterns of land use in and around it.

(a)   The Plan of the Medieval Town

The earliest known plan of Cockermouth (Plate I) is a manuscript pictorial map of the town drawn *c.* 1600 and in the possession of Lord Egremont.[28] A comparison of it with 19th-century plans (see Figure 1) confirms that the area of the town, its street pattern, and building lines remained almost unchanged from the early 17th century until the appearance of terraces of industrial housing on virgin sites in the early 19th century. Until these developments, the town consisted of three distinct morphological elements: the wide, bowed Main Street, west of the river Cocker; the Market Place and St. Helen's Street east of the river in the valley of Bitter Beck; and Kirkgate, running up the hill south of Bitter Beck.

The medieval surveys described in the previous section yield very little topographical information and the initial aim of this section must be to attempt to relate the morphological elements of the town plan shown in Figure 1 to the tenurial terms in which the medieval surveys are couched. As a starting point, post-medieval title deeds have been used to map the tenurial pattern described by the survey of 1578. That survey lists a total of 104 complete burgages (many holdings, as in the 13th century, consisting of less than one entire burgage); 9 freehold "messuages", not described as burgages; and 13 "messuages" held by tenants at will. The location of none of these houses is given. The 13 "customary" messuages (as tenancies at will were later known) are of particular interest: the rental of *c.* 1270 makes no mention of any tenancies at will in the borough and it seems probable that the 13 properties represent the former burgages which were described as "newly" let to tenants at will in 1368.

Figure 2 has been drawn using post-medieval sources to classify each block of land in the town according to its tenurial status. As is to be expected, most properties within the core of the town as defined by the plan of *c.* 1600 were described as burgages, but there are several gaps in the pattern where the "customary messuages" lay. From the tenurial analysis in Figure 2, the following properties appear to represent the 13 customary messuages listed in 1578:

  (i) A block of 8 properties (23-45 Main Street) on the south side of Main Street running
     west from Challoner Street;[29]

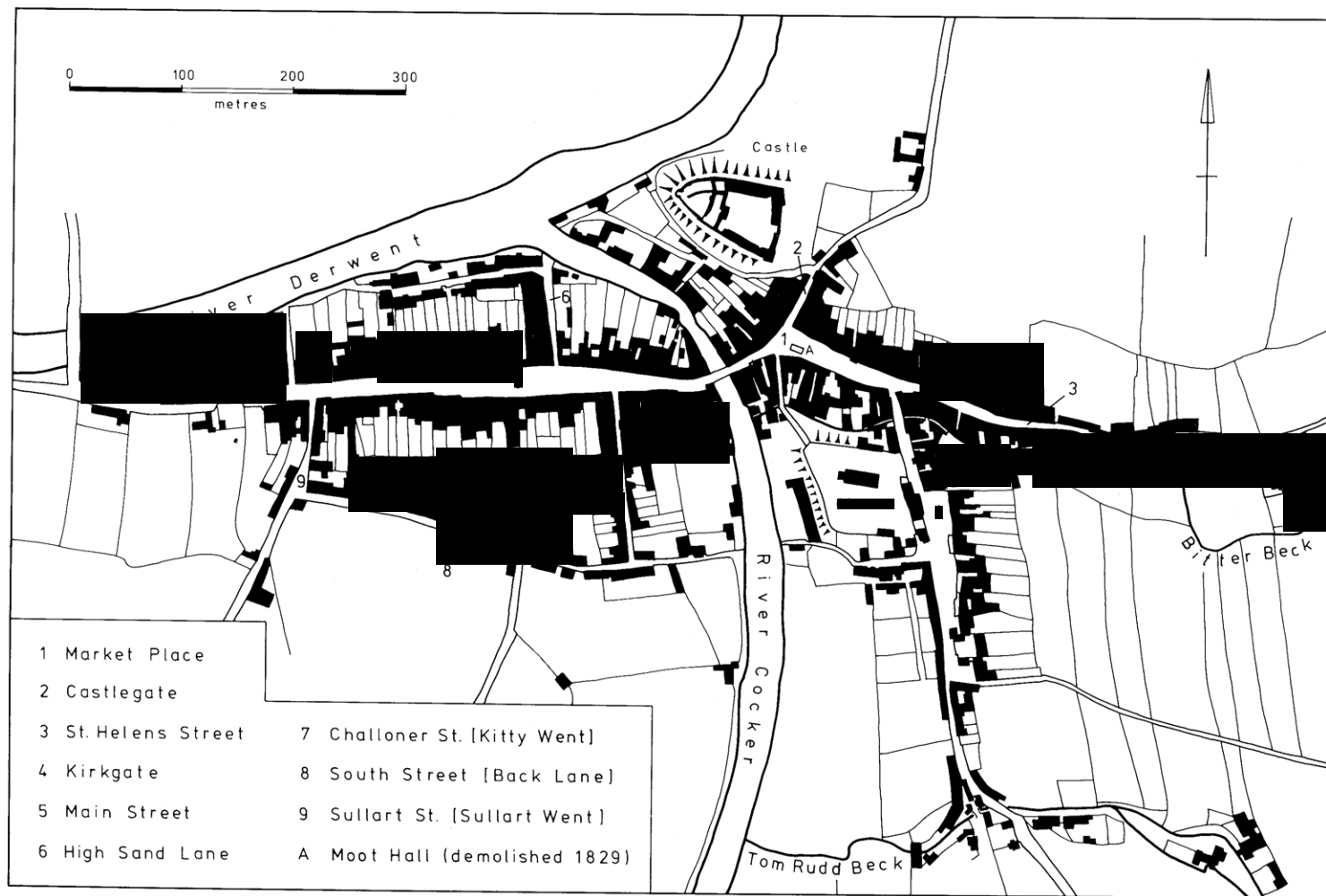 (ii) Properties on the north side of Main Street (36-44 Main Street) east from High Sand
      Lane;[30]

Castle

0   100   200   300
metres

1 □ A

6

2

3

9

8

River Derwent

River Cocker

Bitter Beck

Tom Rudd Beck

1 Market Place
2 Castlegate
3 St. Helens Street   7 Challoner St. [Kitty Went]
4 Kirkgate   8 South Street [Back Lane]
5 Main Street   9 Sullart St. [Sullart Went]
6 High Sand Lane   A Moot Hall (demolished 1829)

FIG I. – Cockermouth in 1832 (Based on John Wood's *Plan of Cockermouth from Actual Survey*).

(iii) 5-13 Castlegate.[31] These properties are described in 1547[32] as a tenement, rent 6s. 0d.' and a house and garden, rent 1s. 2d. parcel of the first tenement, implying that they were originally one holding. They are probably to be identified with a "burgage", rent 7s. 2d., listed among the tenancies at will in 1478;[33]

(iv) 7-11 Kirkgate.[34] This property, described as a "burgage near Skytterbeke", rent 1s. 0d. can be traced to 1478 when it was listed among other tenancies at will.[35]

If the hypothesis proposed to account for the appearance of these customary holdings during the 14th century is accepted and the identifications offered above are correct, these properties presumably represent those parts of the town which suffered most decay in the early 14th century. As such, they may perhaps be expected to yield more evidence of late medieval decay or destruction than the remainder of the medieval core.

With the exception of the customary messuages, almost the entire built-up area shown on the map of c. 1600 was held by burgage tenure. In the absence of documentary evidence to the contrary it may be assumed that this map of properties described as burgages in 17th-century deeds is tantamount to a plan of the medieval borough. This assumption can be checked in part by an examination of those burgages which paid "school rent" to the Free Grammar School of Cockermouth and are thus to be classed among the 10 burgages stated by the 1578 survey to belong to the school. Although little is known of the origins of the school, it was a pre-Reformation foundation[36] and it is highly probable that its endowment of 10 burgages dates from the medieval period. By implication, burgages which paid "school rent" were in existence during the medieval period and, as they were scattered throughout the town,[37] we may be confident that all three morphological elements in the town plan predate the Reformation.
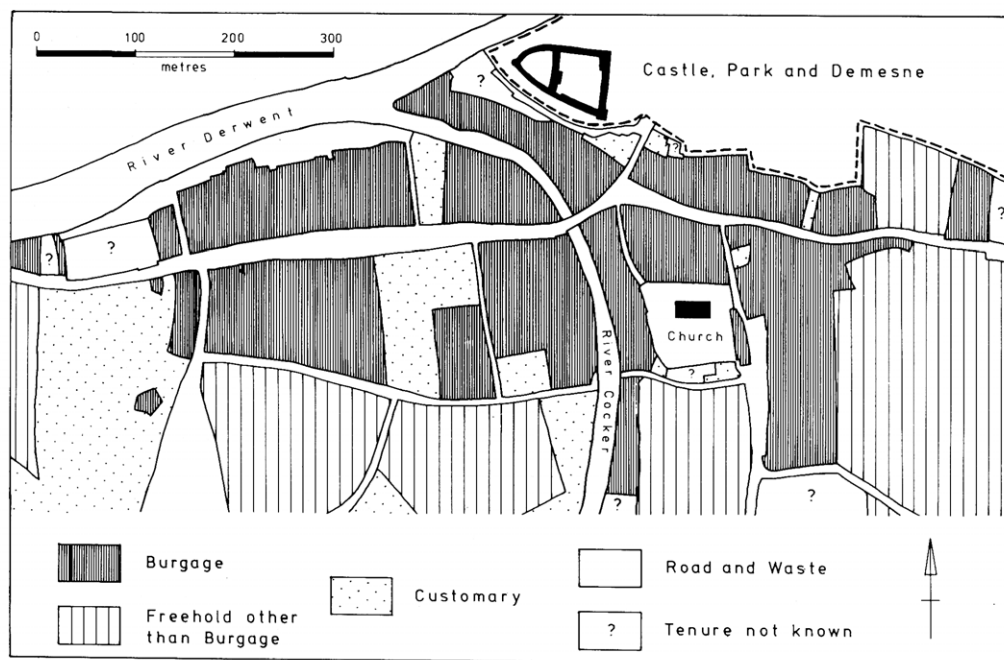

FIG 2. – Tenurial analysis of Cockermouth's Medieval core.

In addition to this general tenurial evidence there is other specific evidence which confirms the stability of the three main elements of the town plan:

(i) Main Street. On the strength of the description of Cockermouth given in later editions of Camden's *Britannia*, Dr R. Millward has suggested that Main Street was a 17th-century accretion to a medieval urban core on the east bank of the Cocker.[38] The excavations behind 75-87 Main Street in 1980 proved occupation from the 13th century, however,[39] and there can be little doubt that the street was a major part of the medieval town. Its regular plan, with constant burgage lengths and a continuous, bowed building line on either side, suggests that it was laid out as a single unit, and the tenurial evidence discussed above is consistent with the view that the whole street was laid out on the foundation of the borough. Moreover, the few snatches of topographical evidence from documentary sources confirm such a conclusion. Leland's graphic phrase that the Cocker "thwarteth over the town"[40] implies that a substantial portion of the town lay west of the river and there are specific references to burgages "on the west side of Cocker Bridge" in 1521 and "in the west part of the town of Cockermouth" in 1523.[41] Indirect evidence that the town extended towards Derwent Bridge in the late 13th century comes in a grant of land "at the head of the town towards the chapel of St. Leonard" *c*. 1280.[42] The chapel can be identified as lying west of Derwent Bridge (see below) and the phraseology of the grant implies that the built up area extended westwards into its vicinity by that date.

(ii) Market Place/St. Helen's Street. The location of castle, church and market place on the east bank of the Cocker suggests, perhaps, that if an earlier urban core is to be sought, it is likely to be found in this area. The winding course of St. Helen's Street and the much less regular plan of the burgage plots in the area contrast markedly with the regular layout of Main Street, perhaps implying a difference in origin between the two parts of the town. On these grounds it is tempting to suggest that the Market Place area represents an earlier core of settlement in the Bitter Beck valley to which the planned Main Street element was added. With the exception of the customary messuages at the head of Castlegate, all the area was held by burgage tenure, but the earliest topographcial references to this part of the town are in the late 15th and early 16th centuries: Castlegate is recorded from 1473; St. Helen's Street (*via Sancte Elene*) from 1524; and a burgage between Cocker Bridge and "Kyrkwent" (later Market Street) was mentioned in 1518.[43]

(iii) Kirkgate. Only the narrow northern section of Kirkgate is shown on the pictorial map of *c*. 1600 and the regular planned layout of "The Square" (the east side of the street, 33-71 Kirkgate) raises suspicions that it may represent a later accretion to the town, deliberately carved out of the fields to the east, into which it appears to be an intrusion. However, its absence from the *c*. 1600 map may simply be due to lack of space: 17th-century deeds of the properties in this block are consistent in describing each as a burgage.[44] At least 2 properties (47 and 69-71 Kirkgate) are among those burgages paying "school rent" to the Free Grammar School.[45] The tenurial evidence is thus consistent in suggesting that "The Square" was an integral part of the medieval borough. It should be noted that the west side of Kirkgate, south of Cocker Lane, was however, a post-medieval accretion to the town. It resulted from the

subdivision and subsequent development of part of the field named Kirkcroft in the 1690s.[46]

So far the discussion has concentrated on identifying the extent of the medieval urban core by analysing tenurial patterns. Little has been said of the physical layout of dwelling houses, outbuildings, yards and gardens within the town. The earliest reasonably full picture of land use in the town itself is that which can be gleaned from descriptions of properties in 17th-century title deeds[47] and from the remarkable detail of the pictorial map of c. 1600 (Plate 1). These suggest that the urban core consisted of three land use elements at that time: dwelling houses fronting the street, burgage plots running back from these houses and containing both open space (gardens, yards) and buildings (workshops, outhouses); and a ring of barns and other ancillary agricultural buildings along the tails of the burgage plots and on the outskirts of the town.

Burgage property is often described in 17th-century deeds as a dwelling house facing the street with a garden or garth behind. The map of c. 1600 shows continuously built-up street frontages consisting of a mixture of eaves and gable-oriented buildings: the only noticeably empty plot is on the south side of Main Street, immediately west of Cocker Bridge (1 Main Street). At an earlier date, particularly in the depression of the 14th and 15th centuries, the building line was probably punctuated here and there by decayed burgages or "waste places" but, as has been noted, most of these seem to have been rebuilt during the early 16th-century recovery. Behind these "front houses" lay the burgage plots which were in many cases almost completely filled with outbuildings, workshops and cottages by the mid-19th century.[48] It is difficult to assess the extent of burgage infill by the 17th century. On the south side of Market Place, backing onto Bitter Beck, buildings in burgage tails are clearly shown on the map of c. 1600, but their absence from other areas of town may be due to artistic licence or stylization rather than an absence of out-buildings in these areas. By the late 17th century there is evidence of considerable burgage infill from title deeds. For example, the description of a property in High Sand Lane in 1682 gives an impression of the complex mixture of buildings and open space in one burgage plot. The deed describes a:

"dwelling house . . . with a backside or yard and also a slated house or stable on the backside of the said Dwelling house and a piece of ground near the said stable between an old dwelling house . . . on one side and a Barn . . . on the other side".[49]

Round the periphery of the town, at the foot of burgage plots and flanking roads as they left the built-up area, lay numerous barns and other ancillary buildings. Their existence provides a physical reminder of the importance of agriculture to the town's inhabitants in the Tudor and Stuart period. Many had been converted into dwellings by the 19th century. On the Sand, (the waste ground on the shore of the Derwent where, according to a court leet verdict of 1695, "the horse faire and beast marktt is keept"[50]) 16th-century sources mention a customary barn[51] and freehold barns and "barnsteads" are mentioned in the 17th century.[52] In South Street there were numerous barns, mainly on the north side of the road in the 17th century[53] and a number of kilns (probably for drying or malting grain) are described in the same area.[54] There were two barns in the Castlegarth at the head of Castlegate,[55] and more barns lay at Townhead, the upper end of St. Helen's Street, on both sides of the road.[56] Finally, a number of properties at the

upper end of "The Square" in Kirkgate were described as barns in the late 17th century. Two had been rebuilt as dwelling houses by the early 18th century.[57]

In addition to the streets of burgage plots with their houses, yards and outbuildings, the medieval town also contained a variety of buildings and structures which reflect other aspects of urban life. The market place, the focus of the borough's economic and institutional life, contained several structures. The Moot Hall, a stone building demolished in 1829,[58] stood in front of 27-31 Market Place.[59] In the 16th century its ground floor was occupied by shops (opellae),[60] the upper storey, as its name suggests, being used as the town's court house. When first recorded, in 1437-8, it was stated to be decayed and in the lord's hand.[61] The 15th-century Market Place also contained the Tolbooth, apparently a building distinct from the Moot Hall, though similar in that its ground floor also contained shops; and the Shambles, both "les Flesh shamells" and several "Fys shamelles", (probably "fish-stones", a common feature in Lancashire market places) one of which lay at the west end of the Moot Hall.[62]

Medieval Cockermouth contained three recorded ecclesiastical sites, the town's church (technically a chapel of ease to the mother church at Brigham) and two chapels which lay at opposite ends of the town. That All Saints Church stands on the site of the town's medieval church is confirmed by the street names Kirkgate and Kirkwent, and the field name Kirkcroft which are all recorded in the late medieval period.[63] When a church was first established on that site is not known. The chapel of St. Helen lay to the east of the town at the head of St. Helen's Street, though its precise location is not known. Its existence is recorded c. 1270 in the name of a field[64] and it survived into the late 15th century when a field called "Seynt Elynclose" was granted rent-free in exchange for repairing and maintaining the building.[65] St. Leonard's chapel, recorded c. 1270[66] and c. 1280[67] lay at the opposite end of the town in the vicinity of a field known as St. Leonard's close.[68] The fact that that field was described as the "toft" of St. Leonard's chapel in 1547[69] probably implies that the chapel had ceased to exist by then. Little more is known about either of those chapels; it is conceivable that one of them was associated with the anchorite of Cockermouth who is mentioned in 1268.[70]

(b) Rural Land Use in the Township of Cockermouth

Having considered in some detail the topography of the built-up area of medieval Cockermouth, we now turn to examine the pattern of land use in the countryside immediately outside the town. Land use in the medieval period was closely related to the tenurial status of individual plots of land. In the township of Cockermouth (see Figure 3), land can be classified under one of three headings: first, the deer park attached to the castle, a large tract of land held in demesne for the lord's pleasure; second, the cultivated land and meadows largely farmed by the borough's inhabitants; and third, the unenclosed manorial waste beyond the fields, used as common grazing land and as a source of fuel.

The park attached to the castle was enclosed by the lords of Cockermouth before 1259 when it was described as being 2 leagues in circumference and capable of supporting 100 or more deer.[71] Surviving accounts of the park-keeper from 1267 to 1294[72] paint a vivid picture of the park as a tract of woodland and pasture from which the estate gained revenue from sales of pasture and pannage, bark, bracken and rushes, fuel wood, nuts
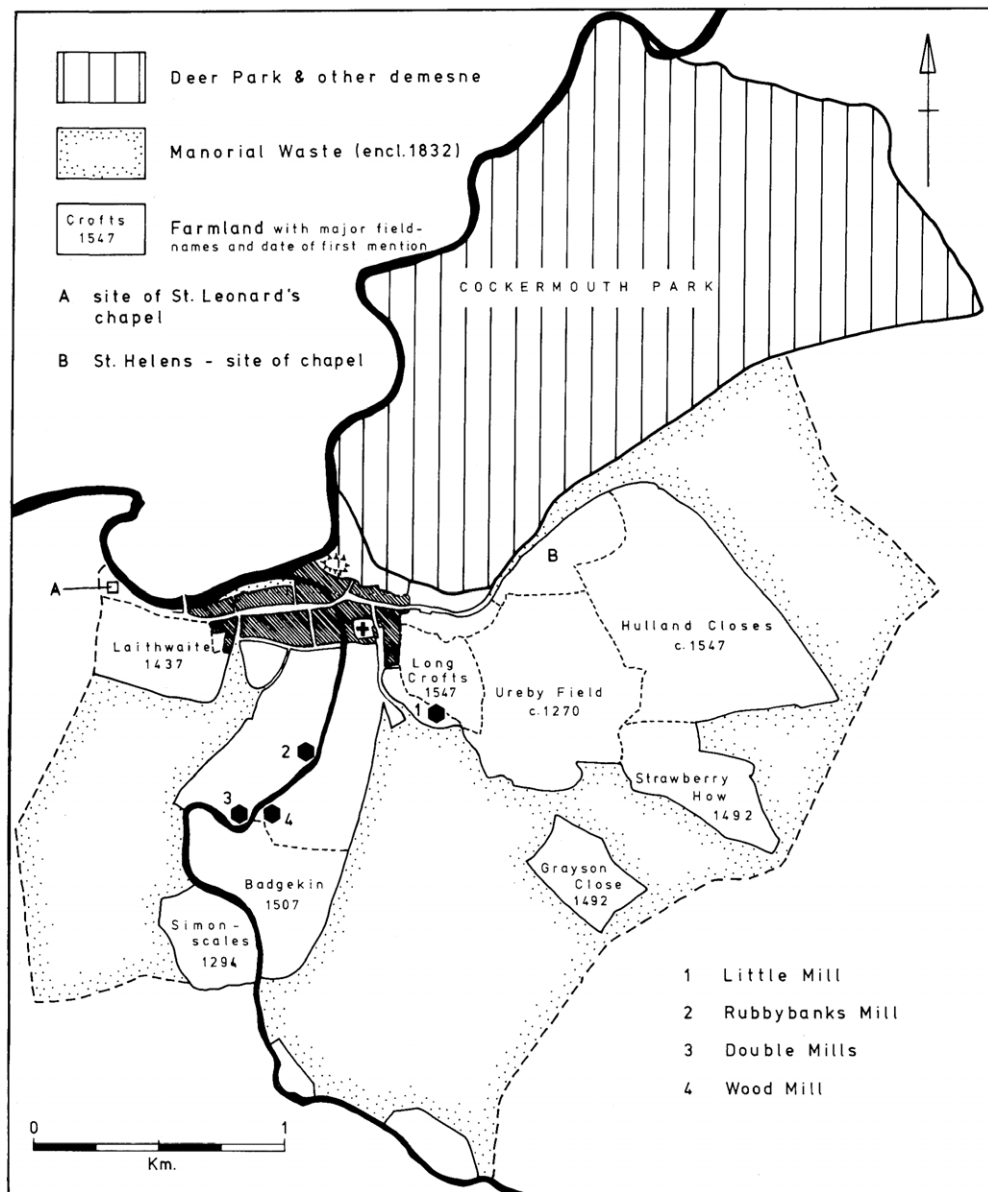
FIG 3. – Township of Cockermouth: medieval and early modern land use.

Legend contents:

Deer Park & other demesne

Manorial Waste (encl. 1832)

Crofts 1547 — Farmland with major field-names and date of first mention

A site of St. Leonard's chapel

B St. Helens - site of chapel

COCKERMOUTH PARK

B

A

Laithwaite 1437

Long Crofts 1547

Ureby Field c. 1270

Hulland Closes c. 1547

Strawberry How 1492

Grayson Close 1492

Badgekin 1507

Simon-scales 1294

1 Little Mill
2 Rubbybanks Mill
3 Double Mills
4 Wood Mill

0   1
Km.

and honey. In 1278/9 it was noted that the park had been newly divided into enclosures (*resicit in claustura*) and subsequent accounts make it clear that the land was being used more intensively as a stud, rearing horses for the estate. In 1578 the park was described as "fenced about in some places with a stone wall, in some places with a hedge and a ditch", and containing 200 acres of "plaine or pasture ground" and 140 acres of woodland, a mixture of land uses shown graphically on the pictorial map of Cockermouth of *c.* 1600.[73] By 1700 the park had been leased as farmland;[74] a plan of 1723 confirms that little woodland remained, except along the river bank.[75]

The remainder of the township's land consisted of a mixture of farmland and moor. Banks of farmland stretched up onto the higher land around the town, while narrow tongues of moorland waste reached down to the entries into the borough. Figure 3 shows the extent of the unenclosed common pasture, known comprehensively as Cockermouth Moor, on the eve of its enclosure in 1832.[76] That the boundary between farmland and moor remained fairly stable between the medieval period and the enclosure of the moor is suggested by the fact that many of the names of fields in the enclosed farmland are recorded in 15th- or 16th-century sources (see Figure 3). From the 1578 Survey it appears that only two isolated farmsteads lay in this belt of land on the periphery of the town at Strawberry How (which survives as a farmstead today), and at Simonscales (which has not been identified, the enclosures of this name containing no buildings on 19th-century plans). The other farmsteads around the town appear to be new farm sites dating from the 18th or 19th centuries.

The open country around the borough also contained the sites of the town's water mills, and of other industrial activities. There was a fulling mill in Cockermouth by *c.* 1200[77] and a corn mill is recorded from 1259,[78] with a second corn mill in existence by *c.* 1270.[79] The location of these 13th-century mills is not stated in contemporary documents. It has proved possible, however, to chart the town's four post-medieval mills back to the 15th century:

(i) Rubbybanks Mill (NY 121 301) was described in 1596 as a water corn mill "late in the tenure of Richard Bacon", which identifies it with the "New Mill, lately erected at Casbay" held by Bacon in 1578.[80] It is likely that the rent of a "new" mill entered in the manorial account for 1541, but absent from the account of 1520,[81] also refers to this mill and gives an approximate date for its foundation.

(ii) Little Mill (NY 126 303) is probably to be identified with the water corn mill, described in 1578[82] as lying on the waste near Long Croft and formerly being a fulling mill. As such it can be traced back to 1437/8.[83] It may thus be the site of the fulling mill recorded in 13th-century documents.

(iii) Wood Mill (NY 1193 2988) is probably to be identified with the fulling mill at "Moor Closes" listed in the 1578 Survey.[84] The fulling mill can be traced back to the mid 15th century; in 1478 it was described as "newly situated opposite the corn mill"; in 1453 as "a new fulling mill on the river Cocker".[85] Its absence from the account of 1437/8[86] suggests that it originated between 1437 and 1453.

(iv) Double Mills (NY 118 298) lies on the Cocker, opposite Wood Mill. As the latter was said to lie "opposite the corn mill" in 1478, Double Mills is thus identified as the town's 15th-century corn mill. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is possible that it may be on the site of one of the 13th-century corn mills.

In addition to the mills there were two areas on the outskirts of the town which appear
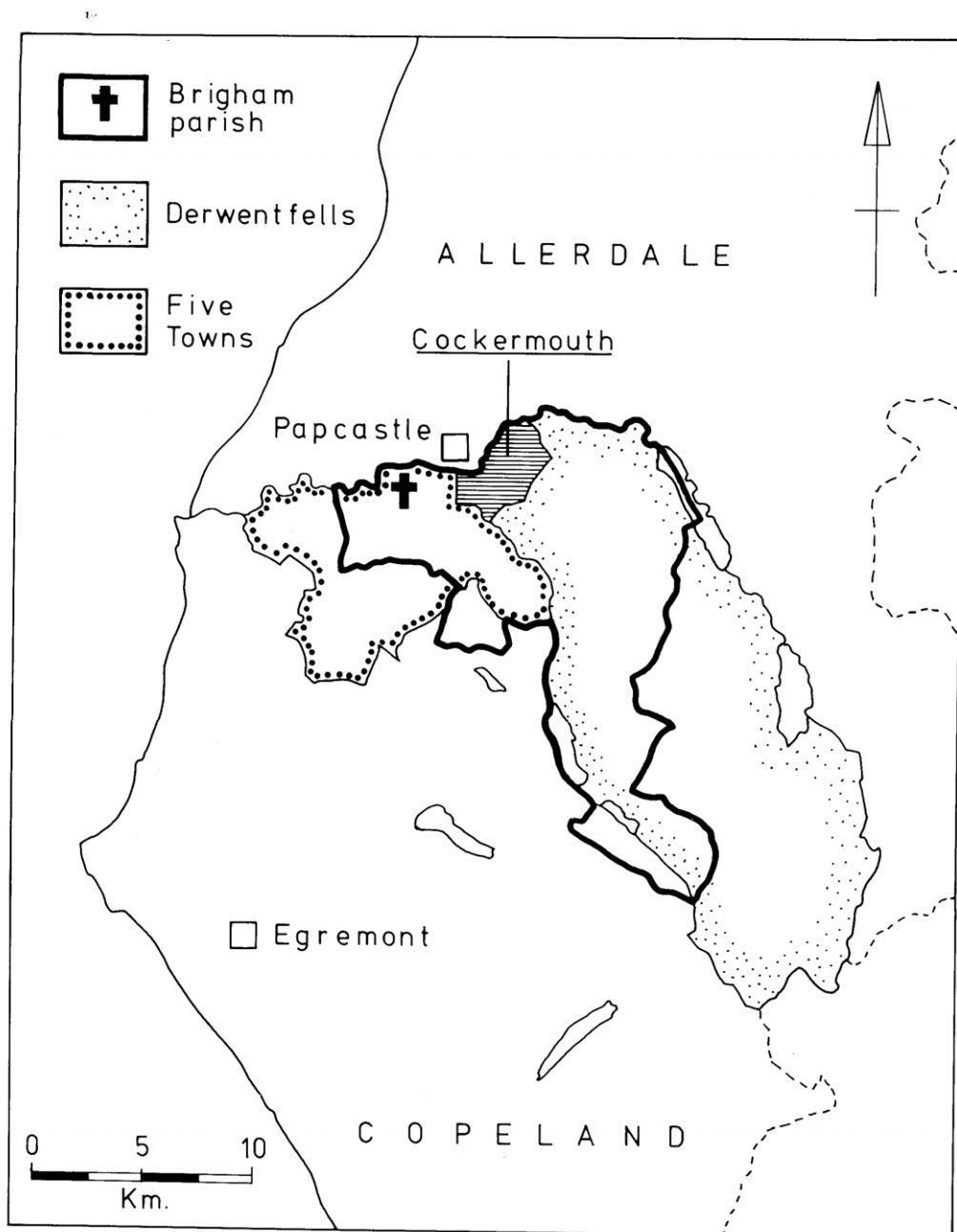
FIG 4. – Honour of Cockermouth: territorial boundaries.

to have had long histories of use as industrial quarters. The valley of Tom Rudd Beck downstream from Little Mill contained a tannery, a skinner's yard, and a former dye house in the mid 18th century.[87] Although earlier evidence of industrial activity there has not been found, it seems likely that similar water-using processes associated with the textile and leather trades may have been carried on in the area at an earlier date. The industrial sites which covered Tenterholme (the angle of land between the rivers where the Cocker meets the Derwent) in the 19th century do not seem to predate the 18th century:[88] in the 15th and 16th centuries it was an open area occupied by gardens[89] and the name "Tenterholme" itself implies that the area had once been a tenterground for stretching woollen cloth during manufacture.

Pre-Urban Settlement in the Vicinity of Cockermouth

The estate for which Cockermouth Castle was the lordly seat and administrative centre in the medieval period consisted of the barony of Allerdale and the honour of Cockermouth (see Figure 4), and it has been suggested above that the town was a new creation of the 12th century, planted literally at the foot of the castle. Allerdale was a pre-Conquest entity[90] and it has been suggested that its pre-Norman *caput* was at Papcastle, the manor to which all settlements in the barony owed their feudal services.[91] According to 13th-century tradition,[92] the Five Towns and the land between Cocker and Derwent (together known as the honour of Cockermouth) became detached from the rest of Copeland *c.* 1100 when William Meschines, the Norman baron of Copeland, granted them to Waldeve, lord of Allerdale. The accepted interpretation[93] is that Waldeve's heirs founded the castle and borough at Cockermouth in the 12th century to act as *caput* of their newly acquired territories (it is striking that the borough straddles the Cocker, thus linking the lowland Five Towns with the upland Derwentfells) and that the *caput* of Allerdale was moved across the Derwent to Cockermouth at that time. Such an hypothesis would reinforce the conclusion that the borough is a planted town, laid out on virgin territory, or, at most, incorporating a small and inconsequential rural settlement.

An alternative hypothesis is that the "land between Cocker and Derwent" and, possibly, the "Five Towns" were pre-Conquest entities, possibly forming an estate or separate estates before their grant to Waldeve *c.* 1100. Estates embracing all the land between two rivers are documented in 9th-century Co. Durham[94] and the same pattern is found elsewhere in Cumbria.[95] It is thus conceivable that the "land between Cocker and Derwent" was an ancient territorial unit. If that were the case, the pre-Conquest administrative focus of that tract of territory might have lain in the vicinity of the later town. The location of the church of Brigham, which contains Anglian sculptural remains,[96] and whose medieval parish embraced most of the honour of Cockermouth (see Figure 4). may be significant. It is possible that the foundation of a church at Brigham at an early date was related to the existence of an estate centre somewhere in the lowlands near the mouth of the Cocker. Its large medieval parish may indicate that it was an early "mother" church possibly serving a pre-Conquest forerunner of the honour of Cockermouth.

The detailed topographical evidence for pre-urban settlement in the vicinity of the later town perhaps enables the alternative hypotheses outlined above to the reconciled.

There is no evidence for a settlement on the west bank of the Cocker before the laying
out of Main Street, presumably on the creation of the borough. It may be postulated,
therefore, that the western part of the town was laid out on virgin land. There are,
however, hints of two pre-urban settlements on the east side of Cockermouth, implying
that the creation of the town added a new element to an existing settlement pattern on
the east bank of the Cocker.

The existence of the medieval chapel of St. Helen, situated somewhere in the Bitter
Beck valley at the head of St. Helen's Street was noted above. The fact that the chapel
should give its name to one of the town's main streets perhaps suggests that it was a site
of some importance. Furthermore, dedication to St. Helena, mother of Constantine, is
sometimes indicative of an early church foundation and it is possible that this was the
site of a pre-Conquest chapel, made redundant after the foundation of the town.[97]
Whether it served a settlement nearby and, if so, where that settlement lay are questions
raised by such an hypothesis. If there was an early settlement in the Bitter Beck valley,
the Market Place/St. Helen's Street area of the town was presumably not laid out on
virgin territory: whether elements of an earlier settlement plan are fossilised in the
burgage plots in this area of the town must, however, remain an open question.

Several pieces of evidence point to the existence of a second pre-urban settlement, a
"lost" settlement called "Ureby" or "Overby" which lay somewhere to the south-east
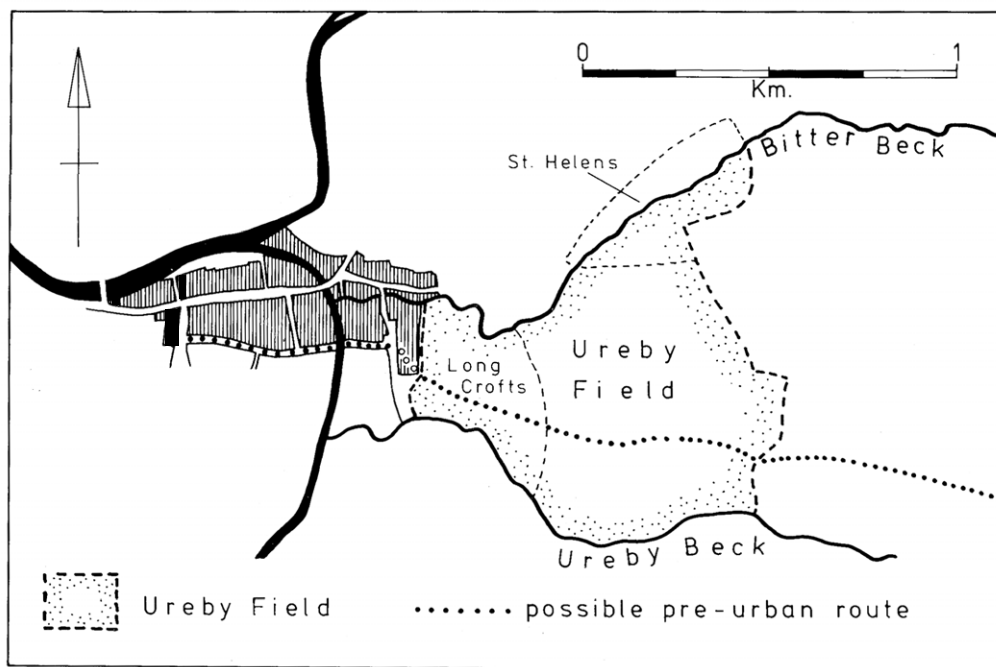

FIG 5 – Evidence for the location of "Ureby".

of the town (see Figure 5). The settlement is known from the field-name "Ureby field",
the implication being that this was originally the farmland of the lost settlement[98] and
that the settlement of Ureby lay somewhere in its vicinity. Only two fields are called
"Ureby field" in 19th-century sources, but earlier documents make it clear that the name

originally applied to a far more extensive block of land. The 1578 survey lists a total of over 20 acres of land in "Ureby feilde", and earlier references to "Seynt Elynclose in Urebyfeld" in 1478,[99] and to land "in urebyfeld in langcroft" in 1547[100] suggest that most of the land to the east of the town on the ridge of fluvio-glacial sands and gravels between Bitter Beck and Tom Rudd Beck originally bore the name Ureby Field.

Ureby Beck is given as an alternative (and probably earlier) name for Tom Rudd Beck in two independent post-medieval sources. A conveyance of land in Long Croft in 1619 gives its northern and southern limits as Skitter Beck (later Bitter Beck) and Ureby Beck respectively,[101] and a deed of 1778 refers to "Ureby Beck otherwise Tom Rudd Beck".[102] On the strength of this evidence it is suggested that the lost settlement of "Ureby" is more likely to have been on the south side of Ureby Field in the vicinity of Tom Rudd Beck than on the north, towards Bitter Beck.

A final piece of evidence is consistent with such a conclusion: a plan of 1810[103] labels an easterly extension of Windmill Lane as "very ancient Way to Westray in Embleton". Mr B. C. Jones has suggested to me that this route, leading via the ford at the foot of Cocker Lane to South Street (the "back lane" at the foot of burgage plots in Main Street) is an early and possibly pre-urban feature of the landscape. If so, "Ureby" is perhaps to be sought somewhere along this route, in the valley of Tom Rudd Beck.

The evidence for the existence of "Ureby" raises the question of when and why the settlement came to be "lost". It is tempting to suggest that it was absorbed into Cockermouth on the borough's foundation. Is it possible that the regular burgage plots in the Square, Kirkgate, (a block of burgage property which cuts into the fields named Long Croft which were part of "Ureby feild") represent the deliberate re-siting of Ureby at that time?

It was suggested at the beginning of this paper that Cockermouth has many of the characteristics of a planted borough of the early Middle Ages. The attempt, made above, to wring evidence of pre-urban settlement from scant documentary evidence perhaps allows a modified hypothesis of the town's origins to be offered. It seems probable that the three distinct morphological elements which make up the town plan reflect differences in urban origins. First, Main Street with its regular burgage plots may perhaps be interpreted as the truly planted element of the new borough, laid out as a whole on a virgin site to the west of the Cocker. In contrast, the huddled burgages in Market Place and St. Helen's Street may represent an earlier core of settlement beside Bitter Beck, possibly associated with an early ecclesiastical site, the chapel of St. Helen. Is it possible that this second element in the town plan was a "proto-urban" settlement (an industrial and trading settlement fulfilling some urban functions) before the creation of the borough in the 12th century? The third element in the town plan, the regular burgages in The Square, Kirkgate, may be interpreted as a second planned unit, possibly involving the deliberate resiting of "Ureby" when the borough was created. Such a picture of the early history of Cockermouth is offered as a working hypothesis in the hope that future archaeological work may answer some of the questions which remain unanswered by a study of documentary evidence alone.

Notes and References

[1] For a summary of the evidence for the foundation of several Cumbrian towns, see R. Millward and A. Robinson, *The Lake District* (London, 1970), 205-219.

[2] A. J. L. Winchester, "Four Historic Cumbrian Towns" (T.S. report, prepared 1978-9, with the County Archaeologist, Cumbria County Council).

[3] The standard work on these urban creations is M. W. Beresford, *The New Towns of the Middle Ages* (London, 1967).

[4] R. Hall, "An Early Cockermouth Charter", CW2, lxxvii, 75-81.

[5] *Rot. Lit. Claus.*, i. 474.

[6] *Cal. Charter Rolls*, i. 58.

[7] Half a burgage toft was granted to Furness Abbey *c.* 1200, and rent from a fulling mill to St. Bees Priory at about the same date: *Coucher Bk. of Furness Abbey*, ii (2), 581 (Chetham Soc. n.s., 76); *Reg. of Priory of St. Bees*, no. 453 (Surtees Soc., 126).

[8] *Reg. St. Bees*, p. 451n.

[9] Compare, for example, Penryn (Cornw.), Bala (Merioneth); Beresford, *op. cit.*, 143, 174. Other examples in the north-west are Egremont (originally a chapelry of St. Bees: *Reg. St. Bees*, no. 2) and Garstang, where the town's church continued to be dependent on the mother church at Churchtown until the 19th century: *V.C.H. Lancs.*, vii, 292, 312.

[10] P.R.O., SC 11/730, m.1.

[11] Ibid., mm. 9d., 10d.; printed in R. Hall, *op. cit.*, 78-80. The surveys of which this extent forms a part are undated. Mr Hall suggests a date of *c.* 1260, but there are suggestions that a date of *c.* 1270 may be more precise. Certain values given in the surveys correspond to receipts recorded in the manorial accounts for 1270-1 (P.R.O., SC 6/824/8). Such a correspondence is not found in other accounts in the series which runs between 1267 and 1294.

[12] P.R.O., SC 6/824/7-15.

[13] E.g. Adam Burel (5½ burgages), reeve, 1267-8; Rob. Redhed (3¾ burgages), 1270-1; Thos. Tirri (1¼ burgages), 1278-9; Adam Pygun (3 burgages), 1280-1. Wm. Goldsmith (*aurifaber*), who held 3¼ burgages, was serjeant of the Five Towns 1277-9: P.R.O., SC 6/824/7,8,10-12.

[14] Ibid., 824/12.

[15] P.R.O., E179/90/9, m.3.

[16] P.R.O., SC 6/824/18.

[17] P.R.O., C 135/201/5.

[18] Cumbria R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/29/1.

[19] Ibid., 29/6,9,12,14.

[20] D/Lec/299/20-22.

[21] Ibid., 299/25.

[22] L. Toulmin Smith (ed.). *The Itinerary of John Leland . . . Parts IX, X, and XI* (London, 1910), 55.

[23] W. Camden, *Britannia* (London, 1586), 452.

[24] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec, box 301, Percy Survey ff. 149-156. (Hereafter "1578 Survey").

[25] Ibid.

[26] Lancs. R.O., WRW(C), John Brumfield, 1592.

[27] Ibid., Isabel Bancke (1581); Brian Braithwait (*c.* 1600); Edw. Fisher (1587); John Hall (1587); Hen. Jackson (1589); Ric. Leigh (1602); John Sibson (1594); Ric. Wood (1603).

[28] The map is undated but, on the strength of the initials 'H.P.' above the arms of the earl of Northumberland, can be assigned to the time of either Henry Percy, the 8th earl, (1572-1585) or his son, Henry, 9th earl (1585-1632).

[29] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/109, enfranchisement deeds nos. 18, 19, 35, 42, 44, probably to be identified with 1578 Survey, tenancies at will nos. 14-18.

[30] D/Lec/106, Valuation dated 1772, nos. 1, 3, 26, 56.

[31] D/Lec/109, Enfranchisement deeds nos. 24, 28; 1578 Survey, tenancies at will nos. 26, 27.

[32] D/Lec/314/38, f.92.

[33] D/Lec/29/6.

[34] D/Lec/109, Enfranchisement deed no. 23; 1578 Survey, tenancy at will no. 3.

[35] D/Lec/29/6.

[36] R. L. Storey, "The chantries of Cumberland and Westmorland, part i", CW2, lx, 94-5.

[37] Five properties in Main Street; five in Market Place/St. Helen's Street; and five in Kirkgate paid "school rent": C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lons, Cockermouth burgage deeds, bundles 32, 82, 96, 102, 121, 147, 177, 192, 206, 278, 230, 231, 240, 247, 261.

[38] R. Millward and A. Robinson, *The Lake District* (London, 1970), 209-10.

[39] Inf. from Dr R. H. Leech.

[40] L. Toulmin Smith, *Itinerary of John Leland* (London, 1910), 51.

[41] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/299/18, 22.

[42] *Reg. St. Bees*, p. 560.

[43] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/299/2, 16, 22.

[44] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lons, Cockermouth burgage deeds, nos. 235-247; D/Lec/5-7, Cockermouth burgage deeds, nos. B.2, B.20. (Hereafter, "Lons. Deeds" and "Lec. Deeds" respectively).

[45] Lons. Deeds, nos. 240, 247.

[46] Ibid., nos. 252-5.

[47] The following descriptions are based on an examination of early 17th-century title deeds (Lons. Deeds and Lec. Deeds).

[48] Cf. O.S. 1/2,500 map. Cumberland sheet LIV-4 (1863 edn.).

[49] Lons. Deeds, no. 89.

[50] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/103, Cockermouth ct. verdict, Apr. 1695.

[51] At "the Sande" (1578 Survey, f.154v.); in "le noute merkett" (D/Lec/314/38, f.91).

[52] Lons. Deeds, nos. 96, 111, 112, 128.

[53] Ibid., nos. 27, 46, 49, 50, 51, 54, 55, 58.

[54] Ibid., nos. 48, 56, 61; Lec. Deeds, no. B.52; C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Van (Acc. 2543), bond 6 May 1598, P. Machell to T. Fletcher.

[55] One was in the "Castleyard" (Lons. Deeds, no. 143); the other in the "Baylyffe garth" which lay to the north (1578 Survey, f.156v.).

[56] Lons. Deed, nos. 181-203; Lec. Deeds, nos. B.14, B.41-2. A barn "at the end of the town" (*fine ville*), referred to in 1547 (D/Lec/314/38, f.90), was probably in this area.

[57] Lec. Deeds, no. B2; Lons. Deeds nos. 245, 247.

[58] Mannix and Whellan, *Dir. Cumb. and West.* (1847), 520.

[59] It is clearly shown on Hodskinson and Donald's *Map of Cumberland* (1774).

[60] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/314/38, f.90.

[61] Ibid./29/1.

[62] Ibid. Both the "Tolbothe" and "le Motehall" are mentioned in the account roll for 1437-8. For topography of Lancs. market places, see G. H. Tupling, "Lancs. markets in the 16th and 17th centuries", *Trans. Lanc. & Ches. Antiq. Soc.*, 58 (1945-6), 1-34.

[63] D/Lec/299/2, 16; 314-16.

[64] As *cultura iuxta capellam sancte Elene*: P.R.O., SC 11/730, m.9v.

[65] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/29/6, 9.

[66] P.R.O., SC 11/730, m. 14v.

[67] *Reg. St. Bees*, p. 560.

[68] It was the triangular field between the road and the river at NY113 307: C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/109, Enfranchisement deed no. 43.

[69] D/Lec/314/38, f.90v.

[70] P.R.O., SC 6/824/7, m.1, where a payment from the castle of 2 skeps of oat flour to the anchorite of Cockermouth is recorded.

[71] P.R.O., SC 11/730, m.1.

[72] P.R.O., SC 6/824/7-15.

[73] 1578 Survey, f.147.

[74] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/106, Lease.

[75] D/Lec/Plans/Cockermouth/2/2.

[76] C.R.O. (Carlisle), QRE/1/27.

[77] *Reg. St. Bees*, no. 453.

[78] P.R.O., SC 11/730, m.1.

[79] Ibid., m.9d.

[80] 1578 Survey, f. 154: C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/leases/50/32.

[81] D/Lec/29/12, 14.

[82] 1578 Survey, f.153v.

[83] D/Lec/29/1.

[84] 1578 Survey, f.153v. "Moor Closes" was an alternative name for "Badgkin", the field in which Wood Mill lies: C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/106, Valuation of Customary Estates, 1772.

[85] D/Lec/29/4,6.

[86] Ibid., 29/1.

[87] D/Lec/106, Valuation of Customary estates, 1772, no. 29; 109, Enfranchisement deed no. 30.

[88] Deed of a garden "now converted into a Tan Yard", 1758: Lons. Deeds, no. 142.

[89] A garden in the Tenterholme rent 1d.: 1578 Survey, f.149. Cf. a parcel of land near the "Tenturholme", rent 1d. under the heading of "new rents" in the manorial account for 1478: C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/29/6.

[90] Gospatric's writ, see *Place-Names of Cumberland*, iii, pp. xxvii-xxx.

[91] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/314/16.

[92] Recorded in "Chronicon Cumbrie", *Reg. St. Bees*, no. 498.

[93] Ibid., p. 451n.

[94] P. A. G. Clack and B. H. Gill, "The land divisions of Co. Durham in the early medieval period", *Medieval Village Research Group 28th Ann. Rep.* (1980), 31.

[95] G. W. S. Barrow, "The pattern of lordship and feudal settlement in Cumbria", *Jnl. of Medieval History*, i (1975), 122.

[96] R. N. Bailey, "An Anglian cross-shaft fragment from Brigham", CW2, lx, 42-5.

[97] e.g. at St. Helen Auckland, Co. Durham (see B. K. Roberts, *Green Villages of Co. Durham* (Durham, 1977), 43); Kirkby Overblow, Yorks. (see G. R. J. Jones in F. Dussart (ed.), *L'Habitat et les Paysages ruraux d'Europe* (Liège, 1971), 256); and, perhaps, at Garstang, Lancs.

[98] That "Ureby" is a settlement name is implied by its second element, the Old Norse habitative term -*by*: *Place-Names of Cumberland*, ii, 363.

[99] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Lec/29/6.

[100] D/Lec/314/38, f.93.

[101] C.R.O. (Carlisle), D/Ben/5/576.

[102] D/Lec/109, Enfranchisement deed no. 11.

[103] D/Lec/Plans/Cockermouth/1/90.