ART. VIII – *The Mottes of North Lancashire, Lonsdale and South Cumbria*

By MARY C. HIGHAM

THE most easily recognised additions to the landscape of the north-west which can be attributed to the direct influence of the Normans in the area are the earthwork castles. These have been classified into two main groups, ringworks[1] and mottes.[2] The ringworks are usually annular earthworks with a bank and ditch, and the mottes, although varying from being totally man-made to having been adapted from a suitable natural feature, usually circular artificial mounds, with flat tops, often, but not always, with a bailey or enclosed courtyard surrounding them. As Kenyon[3] points out, however, 'there are times . . . . . when a clear distinction cannot be drawn between mottes and ringworks' and, indeed, excavations at Aldingham in 1969[4] demonstrate that an initial ringwork might be modified later into a motte. Work in Devon has also drawn attention to the existence of mottes with a more concave summit than the usual flat-topped ones 'which have a superficial resemblance to ringworks'.[5] This might be thought to cause problems, but, as King[6] has suggested that the 'ring[work] is contemporary with the motte, and is a straightforward alternative to it', it would appear to be quite in order to discuss the earthwork castles of the North-West *in toto* using the general term 'motte' to describe them.

The motte, certainly in the north of England, would appear to lie firmly in the post-Conquest period, although there are references to 'castles' in Domesday Book which suggest that there are a few which apparently predate the Conquest. As Brown[7] notes, however, these exceptions are "of the best sort which prove the rule, namely that the castle in this country is a Norman and French importation, for the only known castles to which we have reference before Hastings are in every case the foundations of French lords already here, the 'Norman favourites of Edward the Confessor'." In 11th century Normandy this type of construction was very fashionable. Jean de Colmier,[8] describing the motte at Mershem in France, states:

> It was the custom to heap up a mound of earth as high as they were able, and to surround the whole upper edge of the mound with a barrier of wooden planks, stoutly fixed together with numerous turrets set round. Within was a house or rather a citadel. The gate of entry could only be reached by a bridge.

That the French and Norman colony planted in Herefordshire by King Edward should have built *castella* in the latest continental style is not therefore surprising.

The earthwork castles seems to have been a particular response to a specific problem – the need to react quickly and efficiently to provide shelter and safety in a hostile environment. The method of construction, consisting of a series of horizontal layers of soils, has been deduced from the depiction of the building of the motte at Hastings in the Bayeux Tapestry.[9] Although excavation of the motte at Hastings has not revealed any evidence for this type of construction, work at York on Baile Hill (one of the two mottes built by William I in York) has shown that mottes might be built in this manner.[10] This being the case, they would have been able to be constructed quickly using relatively

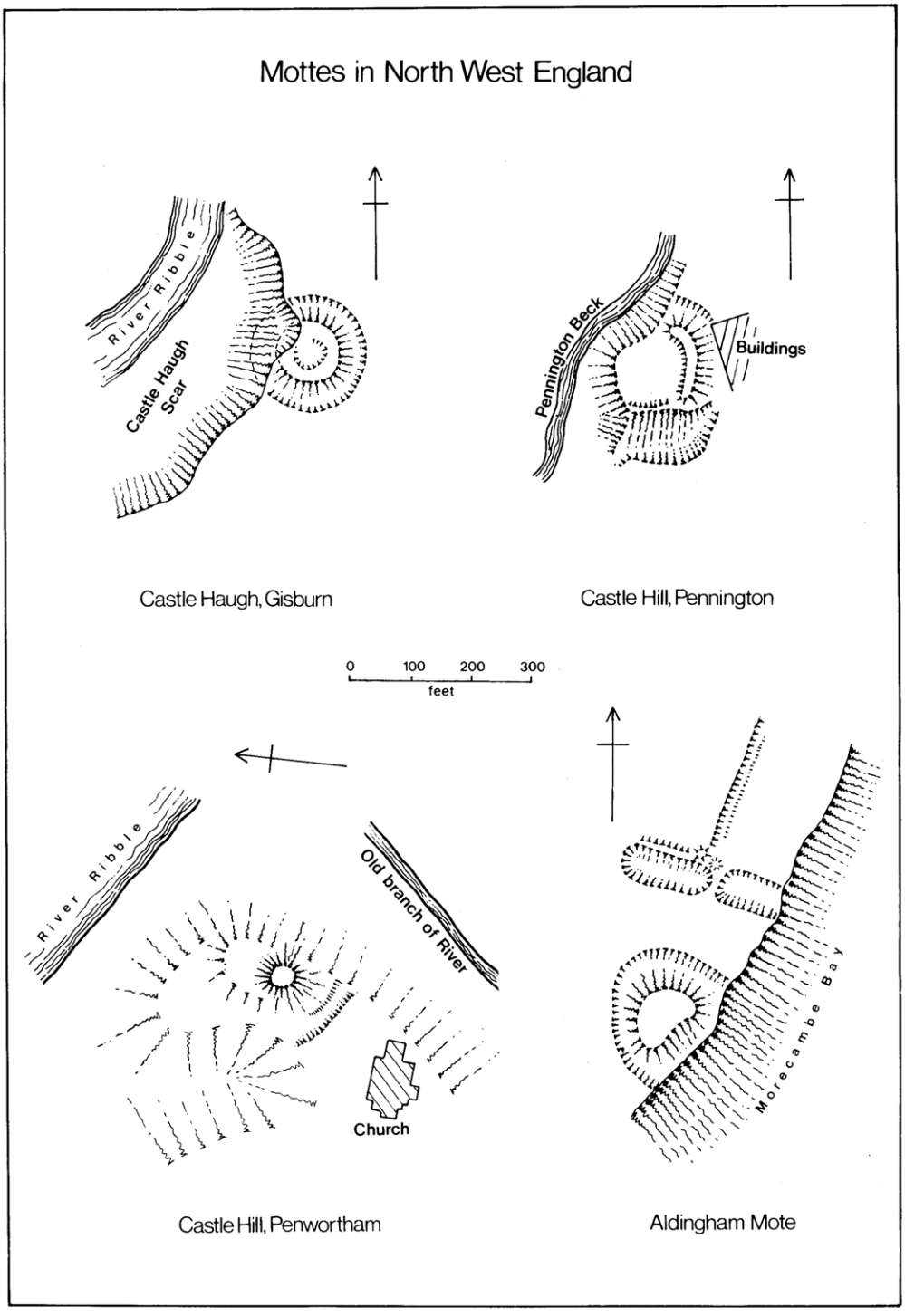

Mottes in North West England
River Ribble
Castle Haugh Scar
Castle Haugh, Gisburn
Pennington Beck
Buildings
Castle Hill, Pennington
0 100 200 300
feet
River Ribble
Old branch of River
Church
Castle Hill, Penwortham
Morecambe Bay
Aldingham Mote

FIG. 1.

unskilled labour under careful direction. They would provide simple refuges in the initial stages of the subjugation of an area, were easily recognisable as Norman, and could act as temporary headquarters until more permanent structures might be constructed. They may have been intended as temporary, but, as Beeler indicates[11] 'the geographical location of the majority of motte and bailey castles is the real clue to their military significance'.

Analysis of the location of earthwork castles, both ringwork and motte, in the North-west would suggest that the sites chosen were far from random, and could be seen as an integral part of an overall strategy for controlling the area. Sites seem to have characteristics in common (Figs.1 and 2) – often situated on a river bluff, with good views both up and down-stream, defending a ford or line of communication, or, as at Aldingham, on a cliff top with good views both across Morecambe Bay, and of an important routeway over the sands.

Personal research has indicated that the distribution of mottes in the north-west, as evidenced by the *Victoria County Histories* in the early years of this century, and checked later by King,[12] was apparently incomplete. Using place-name evidence as a starting point,[13] together with an examination of the geographical occurrence of ME *castel* in field names, but using only those which appear to have the correct appearance and meet the location criteria stated above, together with three sites which, although not designated *castel*, meet both the geographical and physical criteria, it has been possible to add five probable mottes, and a possible pre-Conquest 'burh'-type site at Hall Garth, Kendal, to the Sites and Monuments Record for the area (Appendix). The mottes have been checked out on the ground,[14] and have only been included where there seems little doubt of their positive identification. The group falls into the category of 'mottes which never seem to have had an attached courtyard', possibly built as 'fortified observation posts rather than for permanent occupation'.[15] Even those mottes in the north-west which had a bailey are generally too small to have held garrisons of a size capable of subduing a potentially hostile local population. (Figs.1 and 2). For example, the garrison recorded for Burton in Lonsdale (one of the larger motte and bailey earthwork castles) in 1129–30 was 1 knight (*miles*), 10 sergeants (*servientes*), a gatekeeper (*janitor*), and a watchman (*vigilator*).[16]

This being so, the use of the mottes as information gathering points and checkpoints seems inescapable. There would have been a pressing need for knowledge of movement of men and goods, and the traditional routeways, including the Roman roads which were still recognised and used at this period,[17] together with the crossing points of rivers, would be the obvious places to check. It might be thought that to locate mottes in such places would be a pointless exercise, as anyone not wanting to be observed could deviate from the route and cross elsewhere. Records show, however, that this option was not one to be undertaken lightly. It is often forgotten that today's rivers are emasculated versions of the ones which would have flowed in the 11th century. Rivers are now much better controlled, both by regulation of run-off and by extraction of water and subsequent storage for greatly increased human consumption. Documentary evidence, albeit for a period almost two centuries later, illustrates the potential problems of crossing even at recognised places. The Assize Rolls for Lancashire 1246/7[18] give several examples:

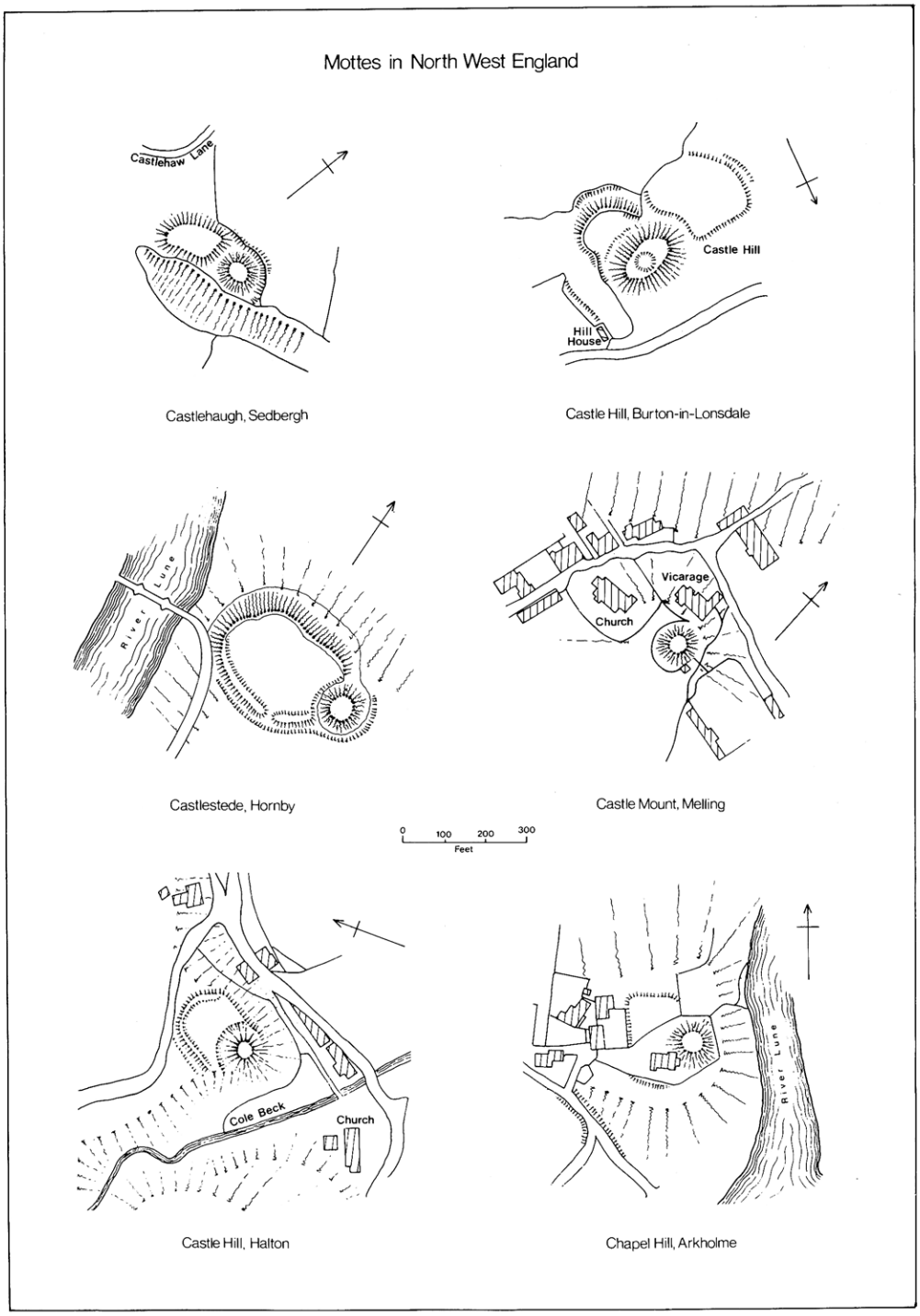

Mottes in North West England
Castlehaw Lane
Castlehaugh, Sedbergh
Castle Hill
Hill House
Castle Hill, Burton-in-Lonsdale
River Lune
Castlestede, Hornby
Vicarage
Church
Castle Mount, Melling
0 100 200 300
Feet
Cole Beck
Church
Castle Hill, Halton
River Lune
Chapel Hill, Arkholme

FIG. 2.

Leyland Hundred
Thomas son of Siward le Oterhunte fell from a horse
in Yarewe water and was
drowned. . .. .Verdict, misadventure

Wappentak of Salfordschyre
Richard son of Eugenia de Ratcliue drowned from a
horse in Irwel water. . ..
Verdict, misadventure.

Blackburneschyre
Robert de Grimsharke was drowned in Rybel water. . .. .
Verdict, misadventure

Wapentake of Lonnesdal
Henry son of Alice of Melling was drowned in Lone
water. . . .. . Verdict, misadventure.

Gilbert Grosman was drowned in Candovere water
[Conder? no judgement as Adam de Kellet, who should
have attached Mabel de Caldecotes, first finder, to
attend the assize had not done so.

Liberty of the Abbey of Furness
Gilbert de Ulueston was drowned from a horse on the sea beach and the
horse was drowned with him. Verdict, misadventure.

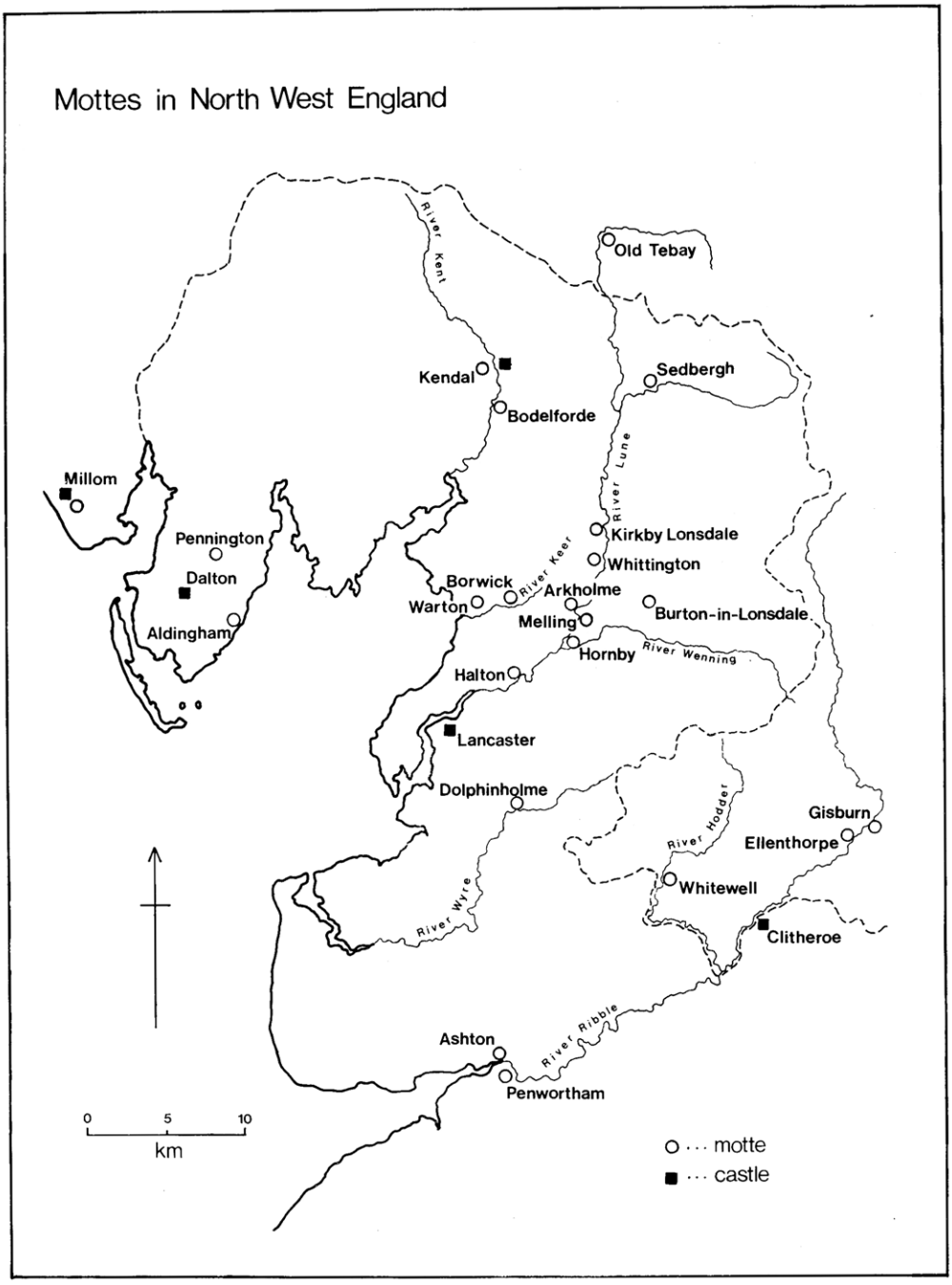
One Ivo, a lay brother (*conversus*) of Foprnell [Furness], was drowned
from a horse in Levene water. . . .. .Verdict, misadventure.

Almost a century later, in 1325, the Abbot of Furness was commenting on the difficulties which still existed in using the Morecambe Bay crossing, noting that there was 'great mortality of the people of Furness . . .. .passing and returning across the sands at the ebb of tide, who are often caught and drowned to the number of sixteen people at one time'.[19]

If evidence such as this is taken into account, the likelihood of the motte garrison knowing who and what was on the move was much more certain than nowadays when so many alternative routes are available.

However, when the distribution of mottes, including the 'new' additions to the record, is plotted (Map 1) it becomes apparent that even those mottes which had no bailey were not just information gathering centres but were also part of a deliberate strategy leading to a tighter control of the area. The mottes are often placed in pairs, positioned either side of a river crossing (Arkholme and Melling), at each side of a strategic throughway, as in the case of Borwick and Mourhull, (each side of the 'throughway' now used by the A6, the M6 motorway and Lancaster Canal, which Burton-in-Kendal probably controlled in the Anglo-Saxon period), or each side of an estuary crossing (Penwortham and Ashton).

This 'dual placement' of mottes at an important crossing was used by William I at York in 1069[20] where he had two mottes constructed, one at each side of the Ouse. Beeler[21] comments that 'the years from 1068 to 1070 unquestionably marked the transition from a sort of partnership between the Normans and their English collaborators


Mottes in North West England
River Kent
Old Tebay
Kendal
Sedbergh
Bodelforde
River Lune
Millom
Kirkby Lonsdale
Pennington
Whittington
Dalton
Borwick
River Keer
Arkholme
Warton
Burton-in-Lonsdale
Aldingham
Melling
Hornby
River Wenning
Halton
Lancaster
Dolphinholme
Gisburn
River Hodder
Ellenthorpe
Whitewell
River Wyre
Clitheroe
Ashton
River Ribble
Penwortham
0 5 10
km
○ ··· motte
■ ··· castle

MAP. 1.

to outright military rule of all territory under Norman occupation', and it is tempting to speculate that the location of the 'dual mottes' of the north-west might have been at the express direction of William I during this period. Certainly, Brown[22] notes that Ordericus Vitalis describes how the king, in 1069, 'rode to all the remote parts of the kingdom and fortified suitable places against enemy attack'. Analysis of the *VCH* plans shows a certain 'uniformity' in the size of the mottes.[23] This could indicate a similar date of construction and might even be thought to hint at a 'standard motte' capable of rapid construction under the control of a peripatetic group of motte builders working to a standard layout. (This has obvious parallels with the Roman practice of constructing 'standard forts', and the military advantages would have been similar.)

The placing of the 'dense group of castles . . . . . on the lower Lune', the purpose of which King[24] finds 'not easy to explain', together with the mottes at Penwortham and Preston, and, indeed Aldingham, seems most sensible both in the local context, and in the context of possible attacks from both Scotland and Ireland. Although places named in Domesday Book were, nominally at least, under Norman control by 1086, it is unlikely that even this area was completely under Norman domination. Indeed, the revolt of Roger de Poitou, one of the lynch-pins of William's strategy for the control of the North, may well have encouraged opposition from those who still hoped for a return to the old order. The line of mottes on the Lune might well indicate the 'real' frontier zone at the time of Domesday, with mottes further north owing more to the activities of William II, who pushed the frontier as far north as Carlisle by 1092, lessening, although only temporarily, the threat of invasion by the Scots, who had actively supported unrest in the north for much of the period between 1066 and 1092.

The Irish dimension in 11th century politics should not be underestimated either. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles tell us that the sons of Harold Godwineson had fled to Ireland following the Conquest, and using that country as a base, had made at least two abortive attempts in 1068 to rally support to their cause by 'coming unexpectedly from Ireland into the mouth of the Avon with a pirate host' and later landing in Somerset, and in mid-summer 1069, the sons of Harold 'came from Ireland into the mouth of the Taw, and there incautiously landed'.[25] The hostile reception on these occasions might well have encouraged the sons of Harold to look elsewhere on the English coast for places to land and there was certainly a long tradition of links between Dublin and York via the Lancashire seaboard. There were also strong links with Cumbria in the Viking period.

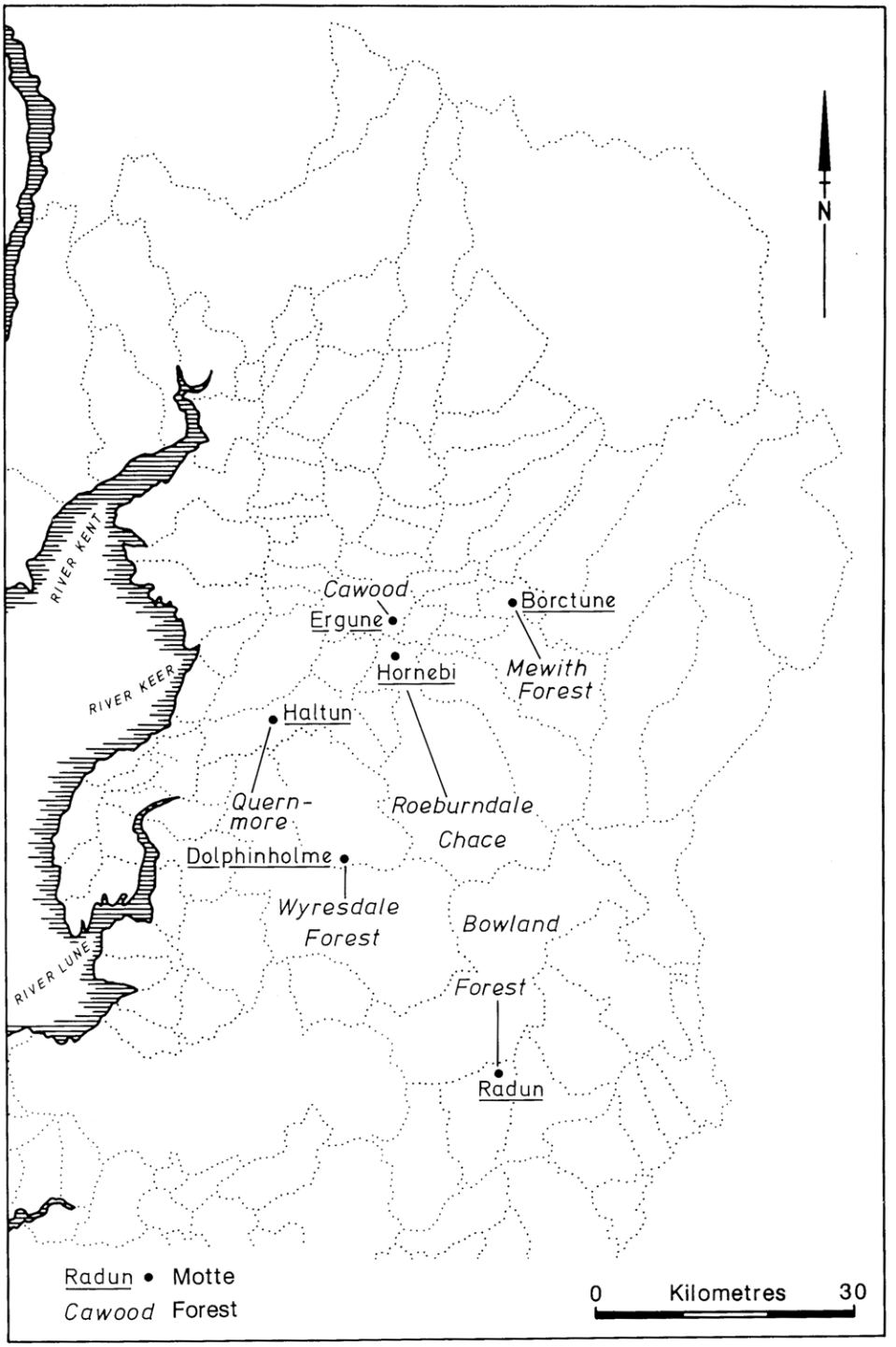
Higham's view[26] was that 'the Ribble estuary had probably played a key role as an anchorage for the Dublin fleet in exile' following Ingimund's invasion in the early 10th century.[27] The largest hoard of Viking Age metalwork found in Europe so far was found at Cuerdale in the lower Ribble valley, this hoard having close associations with the Dublin Norse in exile. The strategic importance of the Ribble estuary in relation to Ireland seems to have been more formally recognised by Edward the Elder in 922–923, when he annexed South Lancashire, and probably founded a *burh* at Penwortham.[28] This was still royal demesne in 1066, and Penwortham had a borough as well as the motte and bailey castle constructed on the *burh* site by 1086. The Lune estuary and Morecambe Bay must have been equally attractive to Irish incursions, even though this is not documented.

The role of the Norman fleet should not be underestimated in this context. A great deal of emphasis is placed on William's marches around the country, and yet the

Anglo-Saxon Chronicles give several examples of his using the Norman fleet to support his armies. Like the Roman conquest some thousand years earlier, when the Roman fleet was used to support the Roman army, both tactically and logistically, on its advance northwards, William's naval levies played an important part in his military strategies. Indeed the location of major Norman sites in the north-west, Penwortham (close to the Roman supply base at Walton-le-Dale), Halton, Hornby and the other lower Lune valley mottes (paralleling Roman forts at Lancaster and Overburrow), the fort of Low Burrow Bridge in the Lune Gorge, located just south of the motte at Old Tebay, would suggest that both Roman and Norman campaigns in this part of the country had to deal with similar obstacles and problems, including that posed by the Irish. The Chronicles emphasize William's campaigns against the Scots and Danes,[29] but it should not be though that Danish raids would only involve the eastern seaboard, although this was most often involved, for the Chronicles for 1070 comment that of the Danish treasure ships which left Ely and ran into 'a great storm', some [of the ships] sailed to Norway, *others to Ireland*, others to Denmark.[30]

This Danish/Irish connection might well help to elucidate the 'waste' entries for the area in Domesday. They are usually explained as resulting from the 'harrying of the North' in 1069, almost twenty years earlier. There is, however, little evidence to suggest that this particular devastation even touched the north-west. Even William's winter march from York to Cheshire in late January or early February 1070 seems to have been largely outside the area, Beeler[31] suggesting that the probable route was along the track of the Roman road from York (Margary 28C[32]) via Tadcaster through the Manchester gap (Margary 712[33]) to Chester, well outside the area of Amounderness, north of Ribble, which was said to be largely waste in 1086. However, the events of 1085, when Cnut, King of Denmark, with the help of Robert of Flanders, was threatening to conquer England, do suggest a possible explanation. The Chronicle for that year says that the king quartered his armies over the whole country and also 'gave orders for the coastal districts to be laid waste, so that if his enemies landed they would find nothing that could be quickly seized'.[34] The possibility of support for Cnut from Ireland, or even opportunist raids by the Irish on their own account, might well have led to the inclusion of the north-west vills in the list of those coastal districts ordered by William to be laid waste in 1085. Certainly Domesday states that the Amounderness vills 'are waste', hinting at a recent occurrence, whereas those further south 'were waste'.[35]

All the evidence suggests that the conquest of the North-west was far from easy, and took over twenty years to accomplish, the mottes being physical reminders of Norman military and political strategy in the area in the late 11th century. The obvious linkage between mottes and areas designated 'Forest' (Map 2) would seem to indicate that control of routeways at fords and crossings was extended into the uplands, by the creation of these areas of special jurisdiction. Indeed, the mottes can be shown to have links with specific forest areas in the medieval period (Map 2). That the mottes were never developed into castles points to the success of this strategy. The building of stone castles at Clitheroe, Hornby, Lancaster and Gleaston, on sites which had not had earlier earthwork castles, meant that very localised control had been superseded by centralised administration based on a small number of prestige sites.



MAP.2. Showing linkages between Mottes and Forests

Appendix

A – Additions to the SMR – Mottes

1. Castle Hill, Dolphinholme, Wyresdale. GR.SD55/522536
This name occurs on OS maps, close to an area known as Bondgate. There is some evidence for a mound, artificially steepened, but partly obliterated by quarrying, situated on a steep bluff above the Wyre. The 'motte' is a short distance up-stream of a crossing-point of the river, and commands excellent views both upstream to the headwaters of the Wyre, and downstream towards the coast.

2. Castle Banks, Ellenthorpe, nr. Gisburn. GR.SD84/824498
The place-name is recorded on the mid–19th century Tithe Apportionment Schedules, and refers to a somewhat abraded motte on a bluff above the north bank of the Ribble, a short distance upstream of a crossing point of the river. It would seem to be the other half of a 'dual system', linked with Castle Haugh, which would have controlled both the Ribble above the gorge, and the major routeway through the drumlin field between Gisburn and Hellifield, which the modern road and the railway still use.

3. Hall Hill, Whitewell. Forest of Bowland. GR.SD64/663468
This is a natural limestone knoll which has obviously been adapted for use as a motte. There are parallels for this in the siting of Clitheroe Castle (Cathcart King, 1983, 243 and 245). Hall Hill is located at the edge of Radun Park, (a medieval creation) and close to the centre of Forest administration. It is on a bluff above the Hodder, commanding the valley above the gorge, and giving good views towards the Trough of Bowland – an ancient routeway from Bowland via Wyresdale to Lancaster.

4. Hawes Bridge, Natland. Possibly Domesday 'Bothelford'? GR.SD58/513892
An obviously man-adapted motte-type mound is located above the river at the bridging point from Prizet on the eastern bank of the Kent, downstream of the Roman fort at Watercrook.

5. Kendal. GR.SD59/532928
This motte is situated east of the Borough, on the perimeter of Castle Park, controlling the old road to Sedbergh. The area was apparently called 'High Gravestone Field' in KCR, with the field immediately adjacent named 'Round Hill', possibly a transferred name (see below). On OS maps compiled before recent housing development in the area (e.g. 1:25,000 First Series), the motte is mapped clearly as a circular feature, shown with two trees on top. The area is now administered by the Woodland Trust.

B – Addition to the SMR – a possible 'burh-type' site

1. Round Hill, Hallgarth, Kendal. GR.SD59/508943
Research in other parts of the North-West has shown that where the place-name 'Round Hill' is recorded, it has usually been applied to locations which are archaeologically significant. Despite the numbers of natural drumlinoid features in the landscape, to which the term 'Round Hill' might apparently be applied, this term seems to have been

exclusively used for hills or mounds which have been either man-made or man-adapted. For example, Round Hill, Halton West, is a tumulus, as is Round Hill (or 'Queen of the Fairies Chair') on the boundary between Bentham and Tatham. When Round Hill (C.R.O.Kendal: KCR.WQR C20, 1834) at Hallgarth was visited, it was obviously man-adapted, with steep sides, and a level summit. However, it would appear to be far too large to be the 'normal' tumulus, having features much more reminiscent of the bailey at Castle Stede, Hornby, which is thought to be pre-Conquest in origin. Located as it is at the heart of Gillemichael's important pre-Conquest territorial unit of Stirkland, it is tempting to speculate that this earthwork feature was its administrative centre, and even the precursor of the Borough at Kendal.

Acknowledgements

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Notes and References

[1] D.J. Cathcart King and L. Alcock, 'Ringworks of England and Wales', *Chateau-Galliard*, Vol.3, (1969), 90–127.

[2] D.J. Cathcart King, 'The Field Archaeology of Mottes in England and Wales', *Chateau-Galliard*, Vol.5, (1972), 101–112.

[3] J.R. Kenyon, *Medieval Fortifications* (1990), 5.

[4] B.K. Davison, 'Aldingham', *Current Archaeology*', Vol.2.1, 39–48.

[5] J.R. Kenyon, *op.cit.*, 5, refers to work by R. Higham.

[6] D.J. Cathcart King (1988), 42.

[7] R. Allen Brown, *English Castles* (3rd.revised edn.1976), 43.

[8] Quoted by Paul Shuter and John Child, *Skills in History Bk.*1 (1987), 87.

[9] D.J. Bernstein, *The Mystery of the Bayeaux Tapestry* (1986), PL.XLIX.

[10] J.R. Kenyon, *op.cit.*,11.

[11] J. Beeler, *Warfare in England 1066–1189* (New York, 1966), 53.

[12] D.J. Cathcart King, *Castellarium Anglicanum* (1983). Part 1 includes a gazetteer of sites in Cumberland and Lancashire; Westmorland and Yorkshire are included in Part 11.

[13] Figures 1 and 2, based on plans in *VCH* Lancashire and Yorkshire, show that most of the mottes have the place-name 'castle' (O.N Fr.*castel*, the usual source of ME *castel*, the use of which term, from about 1050, denoting 'a defensive building, a stronghold, a castle . . .. .In most cases there are physical remains or historical facts relating to the structure' (A.H. Smith, 'English Place-name Elements, Part 1' *English Place-Name Society* Vol.XXV, (Cambridge, 1956), 82.

[14] The Lancashire sites have been visited by the County Archaeologist, Mr B.J.N. Edwards, who first pointed me in the direction of the site at Whitewell. The Westmorland sites have also been checked out.

[15] J.R. Kenyon, *op.cit.*, 4.

[16] In the Pipe Roll for 31 Hen.I (1129–30), *Magnum Rotulum Pipae*, ed. Joseph Hunter (Record Commission 1833), 138.

[17] G.S. Barrow, 'Land Routes: The Medieval Evidence', in A. Fenton and G Stell, *Loads and Roads in Scotland and Beyond* (Edinburgh, 1984), 56.

[18] 'Lancashire Assize Rolls 30–31 Hen.III', transcribed by Col.J. Parker, *Record Society of Lancs & Ches.* Vol.XLVII, (1904), 65, 69, 87, 104, 105, 102.

[19] This 1325 extract is taken from the display at Furness Abbey, (English Heritage) which quotes the Society of Antiquaries, London, as its source.

[20] P. Addyman, 'Baile Hill, York', *Current Archaeology*, Vol.2.1., 25–6.

[21] J. Beeler, *op.cit.*, 37.

[22] R. Allen Brown, *op.cit.*, 50–51.

[23] W. Farrer and J. Brownbill (eds.) *VCH Lancashire* (1920), Part 7 (Ancient Earthworks), 507–560, and *VCH Yorkshire* (1912), (Ancient Earthworks).

[24] D.J. Cathcart King, (1983), Vol.I, 243.

[25] G.N. Garmonsway, (ed.) *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (1972), 203.

[26] N.J. Higham, 'The Cheshire Burhs and the Mercian Frontier to 924', *Trans. Lancs & Chesh. Antiq. Soc.* Vol.85, (1988), 213.

[27] F.T. Wainwright, 'Ingimund's Invasion', in H.Finberg (ed.), *Scandinavian England* (Chichester, 1975), 131–161.

[28] N.J. Higham, *op.cit.*, 213.

[29] G.N. Garmonsway, *op.cit.*, 208.

[30] G.N. Garmonsway, *op.cit.*, 207.

[31] J. Beeler, *op.cit.*, 48–9.

[32] I.D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain* (1973), 416–7.

[33] I.D. Margary, *op.cit.*, 365–7.

[34] G.N. Garmonsway, *op.cit.*, 216.

[35] M.L. Faull & M. Stinson (eds), *Domesday Book 30 – Yorkshire, Part 1* (Chichester 1986), IW–IL 301d states (after the listing of vills in Amounderness) – 'All these vills and 3 churches belong to Preston. Out of these 16 are inhabited by a few people, but how many may be living there is not known. THE REST ARE WASTE [My emphasis]. *Domesday Book 26 – Cheshire*, ed.P.Morgan (Chichester 1978), RI 269c,d states for Altcar that 'IT WAS WASTE', and for Leyland Hundred (which included Penwortham) R6–7 270a,b states 'IT IS PARTLY WASTE'.