

ART. XII.—*The lost villages and hamlets of Low Furness.*
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THE lost villages and hamlets of England have aroused the interest of archaeologists, historians, and geographers, and much has been written of the abandoned villages of the Midlands, but comparatively little has been recorded of former settlement sites in Cumbria. The Low Furness area of North Lancashire affords the research worker some interesting examples of lost villages of various dates; of the vills listed in the Domesday inventory as being held by Earl Tostig in A.D. 1060, several cannot be definitely identified, the settlements of Hougun,¹ Warte, Suntun, and Borch falling into this category.

If these vills existed in Furness at all, they must have lost their identity before the 12th century for they are not recorded in the Furness Abbey Coucher Book or in early charters relating to the manor of Muchland. However, certain settlements were either abandoned, destroyed, or suffered a change in name during the monastic period and the supposed explanations for their failure may now be re-examined in the light of recent research.

Thomas West² (1774) was one of the first writers to advance theories concerning the destruction of Fordebodele, Rosse, Hert, Cliverton, and Alia Leece, all settlements mentioned in Domesday Book and known to have

¹ William Farrer (1900) in one of the early investigations suggested that Hougun was situated in South Cumberland near to the present town of Millom. F. Barnes in *Barrow and District* (1951) offers an alternative site, that of High Haume (Norse "haugr", a hill), north of Dalton-in-Furness. In the 14th century this site was known as Howehom, a name which bears some etymological similarity to Hougun.

² Thomas West, *The Antiquities of Furness* (1774) 21.

SUGGESTED SITES OF LOST VILLAGES IN LOW FURNESS

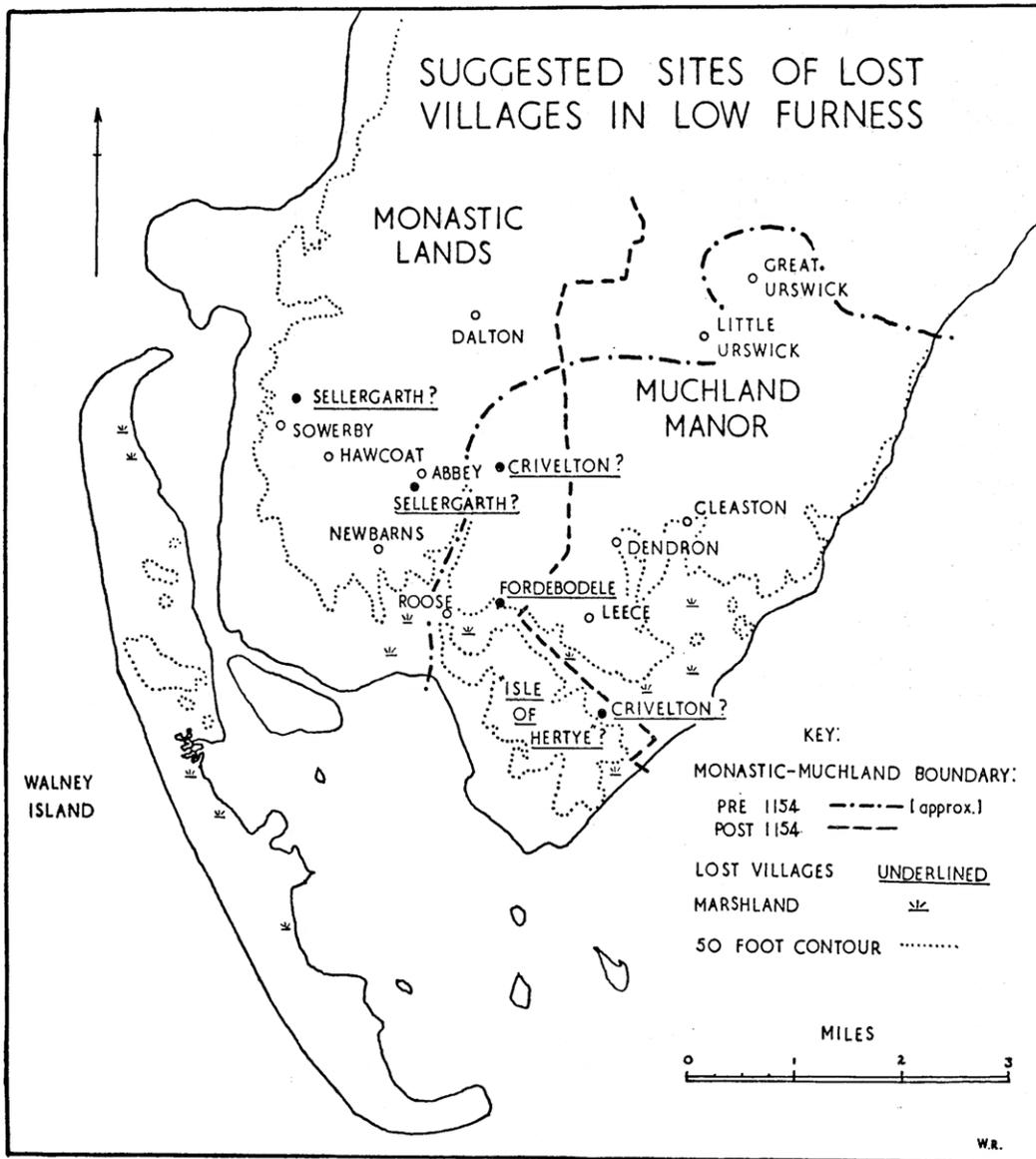


FIG. 1.

existed during the early monastic period; he claimed that all these hamlets were destroyed by tidal inundations. Colonel Fishwick³ (1897), like West, assumed that the settlement of Fordebodele was destroyed by the sea, and he gave the date of the catastrophe as 1553.⁴ Ashton⁵ (1920) similarly claims that Fordebodele was destroyed by marine erosion, but suggests that the early 15th century was the most probable date of destruction.

Fordebodele was mentioned in Domesday Book and was last noted in documents dated 1397. During the 12th century the settlement was involved in territorial exchanges between Furness Abbey and the adjacent manor of Muchland; the Furness Abbey Coucher Book records the transference in 1153 of Fordebodele from Muchland to the monastery, and it may be inferred that as the transaction appears to have been a move to consolidate the territories of both manors, the village was on or near to the boundary. Barnes⁶ (1951) suggests that the place-name is significant, indicating a dwelling ("botl"—Old English) by a ford, and on this evidence he supposes that Fordebodele was situated at the head of Roosebeck Marsh close to the present site of the Old Holbeck cottages (fig. 1) where a ford across the marshland might be expected. This situation, moreover, accords with the hypothesis that Fordebodele was sited near to the Muchland-Monastic boundary. Thus, although the "catastrophic" theories of Fishwick and Ashton, cannot be disproved, it is possible that the settlement at Old Holbeck is the direct successor to the hamlet of Fordebodele, the name having been changed following the drainage of the marsh in the 13th century.

Crivelton (Clivertun — Domesday Book) is also thought to have suffered the fate of Fordebodele; West⁷ claimed

³ Fishwick, H., "Places in Lancashire Destroyed by the Sea", *Trans. Hist. Soc. Lancashire and Cheshire* (1897) 89.

⁴ During this period great storms caused severe damage around the Furness coast. *Duchy of Lancaster Pleadings*, vol. 66 R.3 i Mary 1.

⁵ William Ashton, *The Evolution of a Coastline* (1920) 56.

⁶ F. Barnes, *op. cit.* 24.

⁷ West, *op. cit.* 21.

that the village had been "swallowed up by the sea", and Ashton⁸ suggested that the settlement had been washed away. However, the Furness Coucher Book testifies that Crivelton underwent a change in name:

". . . pur Roos et Crevylton, quore sount
appelle Ruse et Neuton . . ." ⁹

It has been assumed that the Neuton here referred to is the present village of Newton-in-Furness, south of Dalton, but recent study of the Mills v. Muncaster papers in Barrow Public Library¹⁰ indicates that Neuton may refer to Newtowne or Newtown, south of the village of Leece (fig. 1). The statement is not supported by concrete evidence, but it cannot be lightly dismissed especially as it would be unlikely that Neuton (Newton-in-Furness) and Clivertun (Crivelton), both listed in Domesday Book, would refer to the same location.

Unfortunately the evidence concerning the lost village of Hert is even less exact; the settlement is mentioned in the Domesday survey, but information relating to its destruction or change of name is lacking. However, in 1387 Walter Doget, citizen and vintner of London, bequeathed ten pounds to the "more needy poor within the Isle of Hertye in the County of Lancaster".¹¹ If, as Fishwick¹² and Ashton¹³ suppose, the "Isle of Hertye" is synonymous with the vill of Hert, it would appear that the settlement was on or near the coast, indeed, Professor J. A. Steers¹⁴ has put forward the proposal that Hertye Island may have formed one of a group of islands near Piel but a measure of uncertainty must be conceded. W. B. Kendall¹⁵ suggested that the village may have

⁸ William Ashton, *op. cit.* 57.

⁹ *Furness Abbey Coucher Book* (printed by the Chetham Society), vol. I, pt. II (1887) 45r.

¹⁰ Mills v. Lord Muncaster, *The Manor of Pennington and the Manor and Liberty of Low Furness*, Barrow Public Library MSS. Z92.

¹¹ *Register Courtenay*, Lambeth Palace, folio 223.

¹² Fishwick, *op. cit.* 89.

¹³ Ashton, *op. cit.* 56.

¹⁴ J. A. Steers, *The Coastline of England and Wales* (1946) 91.

¹⁵ W. B. Kendall, *Manuscript Diary*, Barrow Public Library, MSS. ZK198.

been situated near to the Roosebeck Marshes but his theory is based solely on the existence of a field-name, Hart Carrs, and must be regarded with some suspicion. Arguing on the same premise, Kendall supposed that the lost village of Leece (Alia Leece of Domesday Book) was situated west of the present village of the same name, there being two vills in the Domesday survey bearing the name Leece. The dangers inherent in arguing on such grounds are illustrated by a consideration of the Tithe Commutation Map (1848) for the parish of Dendron which marks a number of fields with the name Ireleth Closes; now according to Kendall's reasoning, the village of Ireleth should be in the near vicinity whereas in fact it is four and a half miles to the north-west of the village of Dendron. Clearly, then, the existence of a field-name does not necessarily indicate the close proximity of a village site.

The village of Sellergarth presents a more definite problem; the grange of Soler was first mentioned in the Bull of Celestine III¹⁶ (1194) and was therefore one of the earliest monastic settlements. The derivation of the name is uncertain, but Kendall¹⁷ advanced the theory that in the Furness dialect the word "soler" means "large" or "huge", and on this basis he argues that Soler grange was extensive and that from this, Solergarth or Sellergarth was separated. The date of the creation of the tenement from the grange is unknown. The village apparently flourished until 1516 when it was destroyed by Abbot Alexander Bankes; an account of the destruction was given before the Duchy Court at Lancaster when William Case and his wife, inhabitants of Sellergarth, brought an action against the Abbot. (Appendix.) From this document it is clear that the village was a thriving community occupying fifty-two tenements.

¹⁶ *Furness Abbey Coucher Book*, vol. I, pt. III 666.

¹⁷ Kendall, *Manuscript Diary*, *op. cit.*

The 16th century enclosure movement seems to have been the underlying factor behind the destruction of the village and although the Duchy Pleadings indicate the creation of a deer park in connection with the destruction of tenements at Roanhead and Goldmire, it can be argued that the destruction of Sellergarth and enclosure of a third of its arable lands was a further example of "sheep eating men". Certainly the destruction of South-end tenement on Walney Island and the creation of severalty pasture was intended to support sheep as deer could hardly have survived in such an exposed environment.¹⁸ This hypothesis is further supported by the wool prices of the period which confirm an increase in price and a consequent incentive to enclosure, thus in the decade 1511-1520 the average price of wool per tod in the north of England was $4/7\frac{3}{4}$ d. whereas the price in the preceding decade had been $3/10\frac{3}{4}$ d.¹⁹ Thomas More in 1516, the year which Sellergarth was destroyed, wrote:

"Look in what parts of the realm doth grow the finest and therefore dearest wool, there noblemen and gentlemen, yea, and certain Abbots . . . leave no ground for tillage, they enclose all into pasture; they throw down houses; they pluck down towns and leave nothing standing only the church to be made a sheep cote."²⁰

The destruction of the village was illegal in that it ignored the statute of 1488 (4 Henry VII, C.19) "agaynst pullyng doun of Townes", and that of 1515 (6 Henry VIII, C.5) "concernyng the pulling downe of Townes". By this latter statute all

" . . . townes, villages, borowes and hamlettes, tythyng houses, and other enhabitations . . . whereof the more part of the first day of this present Parliament (February 5th, 1515) was or were used and occupied to tillage and husbandrye"

¹⁸ Evidence for the existence of the park may be found in the field-name Old Park which now belongs to the most southerly of the two farms at South End.

¹⁹ E. F. Gay, "Inquisitions of Depopulation in 1517", *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, N S., vol. 14 (1900) 262.

²⁰ Thomas More, *Utopia* (Everyman Edition) 23.

were ordered to be rebuilt within one year, and all lands converted to pasture since that date were to be restored to arable cultivation. Unfortunately the outcome of the action brought against Abbot Bankes has not survived, but it seems probable that the result was not in his favour. Kendall²¹ advanced the theory that after the destruction of Sellergarth in 1516, the Abbot established two new settlements at Hawcote (Hawcoat) and Newbarns, and that twelve Sellergarth tenants were settled at each village and other former inhabitants were given isolated holdings near to the Abbey. The theory is largely based on the fact that neither Hawcoat nor Newbarns is mentioned in the Furness Coucher Book before the destruction of Sellergarth but both are included in the Abbey Rentals (1535, 1537). Furthermore, the villages were assessed as one for the purpose of taxation, and jointly they had the privilege of worthings or dung from the abbey stables, facts which substantiate Kendall's claim.

In spite of the comparatively large size of Sellergarth, the exact site of the village has not been located with certainty. Kendall²² assumed that it was sited in close proximity to the field known as Sellar Butts, immediately outside the western gateway of the abbey; this assumption is based partly on the place-name and partly on the fact that the infield of Hawcoat was far removed from that village, and he seeks to explain this unusual feature by supposing that the infield is in fact the infield of Sellergarth which retained the name after the fields were allotted to Hawcoat. Two arguments may be advanced to oppose this view; first, it is well known that the Cistercians sought solitude:

“In civitatibus, castellis, villis, nulla nostra construenda sunt cenobia sed in locis a conversatione hominum semotis.”

Indeed, in the case of Ravesby Abbey in Yorkshire,

²¹ Kendall, *Hawcoat*, Barrow Public Library MSS. ZK136.

²² Kendall, *Hawcoat*, Barrow Public Library, MSS. ZK136.

solitude was achieved by the removal of two villages, Strichesby and Thoresby, to other sites.²³ According to Kendall's thesis, Sellergarth was close to the western gateway of the abbey; in the light of the above facts it is difficult to appreciate why the monks should have allowed a lay settlement so near to their monastery. Secondly, field-work and aerial photographs have failed to produce any evidence for the former existence of a village of this magnitude in the vicinity of Sellar Butts, although it must be admitted that the urban spread of Barrow-in-Furness has covered certain potential areas.

An alternative site for Sellergarth is suggested by Richardson²⁴ and by Gaythorpe²⁵ who agreed that the village was situated west of Hawcoat near to what is now Sowerby Hall farm. Richardson fails to acknowledge his source but Gaythorpe's opinion is based on field-work. He locates the site of the village about half a mile from Sowerby Hall farm and records that when the site was ploughed in the early decades of this century, stone foundations were unearthed; today the site forms part of the Barrow golf-course. A study of aerial photographs revealed no traces of major settlement, but there are indications of a building in the centre of the golf-course. A tracing of a map dated 1775²⁶ (fig. 2) clearly depicts a house or cottage standing within its own garth, and as there is no indication of such a dwelling on the 1847 6-in. O.S. map for the area, it appears that the building was destroyed between 1775 and 1847. It may be speculated that the "one acre of land with a cottage by Sellergarth" mentioned in the Furness Coucher Book,²⁷ is synonymous with the cottage shown on the 18th century

²³ M. W. Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England* (1954) 152.

²⁴ J. Richardson, *Furness Past and Present*, vol. II (1880) 234.

²⁵ H. Gaythorpe, Manuscript notes and map, Barrow Public Library, MSS. Z227/1.

²⁶ Barrow Public Library, MSS. Z227/2. Attempts to locate the original map from which the tracing was made have failed. The Sowerby fields were owned by the Cavendish family but the map is not to be found in the Cavendish muniments (Lancashire Records Office) or at the Holker Estates Offices.

²⁷ *Furness Abbey Coucher Book*, vol. II, pt. III 587.

map, but there is no evidence to support this theory.

One of the most confusing facets of the Sellergarth problem concerns the occurrence of the name in documents long after 1516; the Abbey Rental (1537) mentions "Sollrgarth" and West²⁸ quotes a military roll dated 1526 which includes "Solergath with Sareby Loge", evidence which suggests a connection between Sellergarth and Sowerby and therefore adding support to the Richardson-Gaythorpe theory. One explanation may be that the rental and the military roll refer to the former Sellergarth lands rather than to the settlement itself. Sellergarth was granted to the Earl of Salisbury by James I in 1604 after which the village and its lands cease to be recorded in documents, and its exact site remains unknown.

Although attempts to establish the exact location of the lost villages and hamlets of Low Furness have so far met with little positive success, the re-examination of the evidence suggests that the marine erosion theories of West, Fishwick, and Ashton can no longer go unchallenged, for the disappearance of a settlement from documents may indicate no more than a change in name, as in the case of Crivelton, formerly thought to have been washed away. If this is not the case, and hamlets have let abandoned perhaps because of unsuitable sites or the development of better sites, then evidence for their existence may yet be forthcoming. Aerial photographs, often regarded as a "*Deus ex machina*" in work of this kind, have, with the exception of the building on the Barrow golf-course, failed to reveal any positive traces of former settlement sites. This is perhaps not surprising for the sites may have been ploughed for centuries, unlike many of the abandoned villages of the Midlands which have been grassed over. Furthermore, the quality of the available aerial photograph coverage for Furness is such that identification of lost villages is extremely unsatis-

²⁸ West. *op. cit.* 133.

factory. In spite of the difficulties, however, the problem of the lost villages, and particularly the site of Sellergarth, is one which invites further research.

Appendix.

Lancashire and Cheshire Record Soc. Vol. 32, 1896.

Pleadings and Depositions in the Duchy Court of Lancaster,
Vol. ii (Calendar 5) C.3 8 H.VIII (1516-1517).

“William Caase and Isobel his wife versus Alex. Banks Abbot of Furness and others his monks re. Incroachment on messuage and land held of the Abbot at Rouse, Selergarth and elsewhere:

William Caase, of Selergarth, in the County of Lancashire, and Isobel, his wife, complain that where they in right of the said Isobel were possessed of a mease or tenement built in the said town with a ploughland there, and held the same of the Abbot of Furness for their lives, paying for a fine there £6 and yielding yearly for the farm thereof 5 marks. They being so seised, the said Abbot with more than 22 of his monks and people, on the 16th Dec. 8 H.VIII (1516) in riotous manner assembled in the said town of Sellergarth, broke into the said tenement and turned out of the same plaintiffs, their children and all their goods and chattels which they still detain to the plaintiffs' utter undoing. Since that time the said Abbot has pulled down the said mease, together with 20 others in the said town and has also enclosed the third part of the arable lands which used to be occupied with the same, so that plaintiffs and the other inhabitants there have been obliged to 'avoysde the said towne for lack of mansions in the same'.

Prays that a Privy Seal may be directed to the said Abbot commanding him personally to appear to answer the said premisses.

First, Alex. Bankes Abbot of Furness, has, without the King's licence, pulled down the whole town called Sellergarth, in Furness, wherein there were 52 tenements and tenants, with all their households 'fonden with tellage and plowage' and has laid the third part of the said town to several pasture to his own use. For these wrongful doings the said Abbot and his monks were indicted at Lancaster by 2 several quests before Sir — Conyngsby, Knight, and at that time Master Brian Palmes, the King's serjeant, whereof they are not yet acquitted. There are now 13 ploughs in the said town clearly 'de Cayet' and 'layd downe frome their occupacion'.

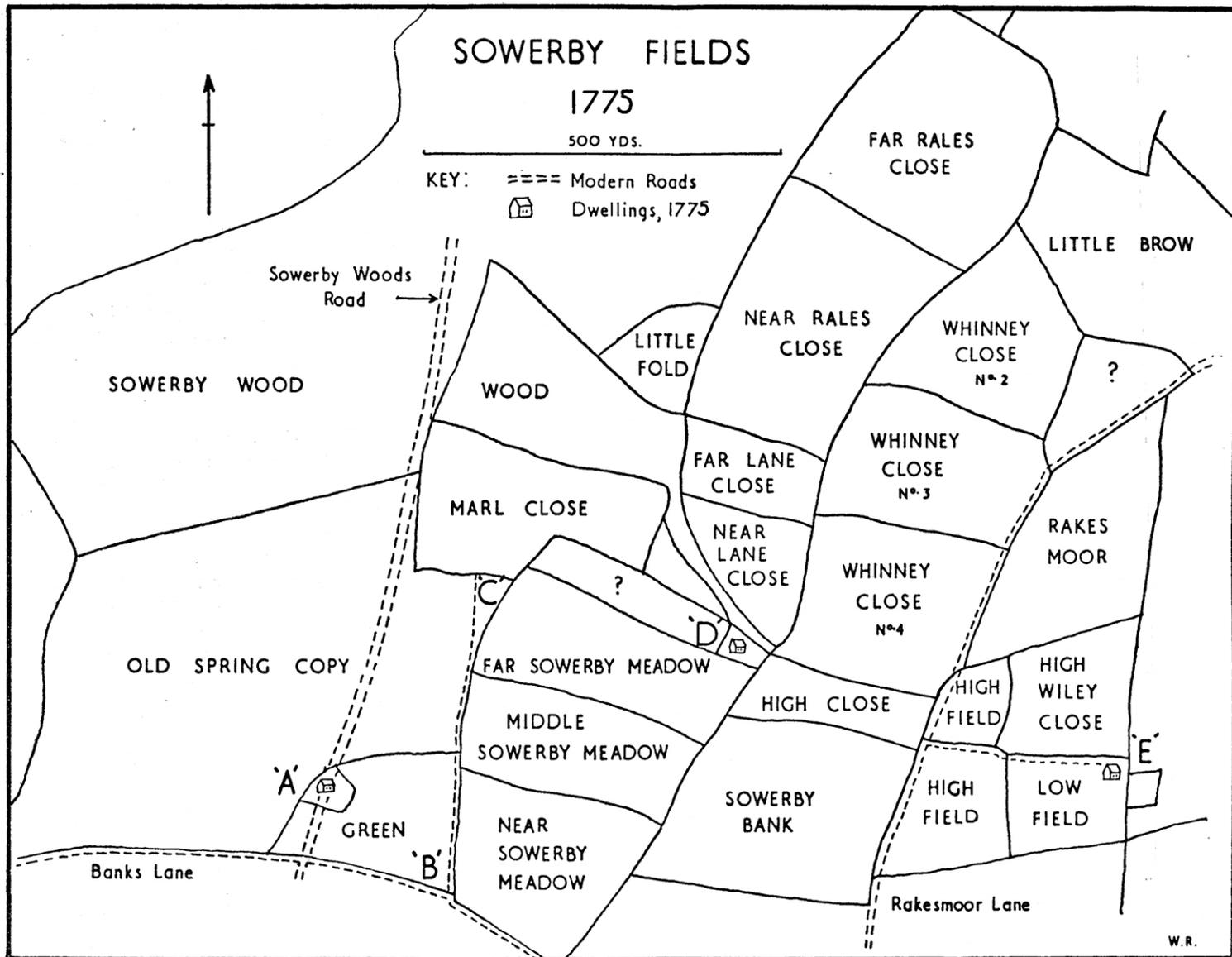


FIG. 2.—Sowerby Fields, 1775. (Based on MSS. Z227/2, Barrow Public Library.)

- A Sowerby Hall, 1775.
- B Sowerby Hall, 1962.
- C Site of Sellergarth according to H. Gaythorpe.
- D Site of house or cottage.
- E Rakesmoor Farm.

The said Abbot has likewise pulled down another tenement in Furness called the Sandstalle, and laid it to several pasture to his own profit, upon which tenement there were always 2 ploughs tilling, also 2 other tenements at a place called Rouse in Furness and laid them into 'severalle clossynge' whereupon there were always 2 ploughs 'tellynge'. The said Abbot has also laid to several pasture a place called the Sowthend in Wanaxe in Furness, whereupon there were two ploughs; and has also made and imparked a parke 'where nevr noen was affor' and put into it 300 deer, and has also enclosed in the said park the greater part of the tenement called Ronhede, and divers other farmeynges of other poor tenants in a place called Goldmyer, with other great parts of their demesnes. Beside this he keeps in his common woods a great number of deer, not yet driven into the said park, 'wher nevr deer was or that he was made abbot'. The said park is by estimation seven miles 'compasse abowet'. Moreover the said abbot of the tenements of Richard Myellner and others at a place called Gryesdalle in Furness Fells made another park ready to put deer into, which park is about 5 miles compass.'