

ART. XV.—“*Statesmen*” in *Cumbria : The vicissitudes of an expression*. By J. D. MARSHALL, B.Sc. (Econ.), Ph.D., F.R.Hist.S.

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MANY a popular writer on Lakeland topography and history makes reference to the statesmen, the former small landowners of the region. In so doing, he implies that the term *statesmen* has special significance in Cumbrian history and tradition. It is the purpose of this article to explore the real or alleged significance of the word.

It may seem surprising, in view of what follows, that the usage has never been firmly questioned or qualified. But perhaps it is also the case that many lovers of Lakeland lore and antiquities do not like to see tradition questioned, and it may even be true that such an unwillingness to question has affected regional scholarship from time to time. It is a fact that when a contributor to *Notes and Queries*,<sup>1</sup> early in the First World War, asked for information bearing upon the word *statesman*, only one member of our Society wrote to the journal in reply, and even his item of knowledge added little to the subject.<sup>2</sup> Yet the contributor's query did not go unmarked elsewhere, and there survives, in fragmentary form, some interesting evidence of a discussion involving Dr Charles Moor, W. G. Collingwood and Dr J. R. Magrath.<sup>3</sup> There is reason to believe that this discussion bore some interesting fruit, not

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries* xi, 10 April 1915, 278.

<sup>2</sup> *Notes and Queries* xi, 24 April 1915, 325. The respondent was that doyen of northern librarians, our member Archibald Sparke, who built up the fine reference collection at Bolton Public Library.

<sup>3</sup> In the Whitwell Papers at the Westmorland Record Office, WD/K; a small file of letters marked “Statesmen”.

least in a now well-known passage in Collingwood's *Lake District History* (1925):<sup>4</sup>

"Yeomen" always in old writings; "statesmen" perhaps earlier used colloquially but not found in books before the later years of the 18th century; men who owned their estates, however small, or held them with special fixity of tenure.

There is evidence, however, that not even these simple facts — if thus they are — were known a decade or so previously, in 1915. In our own Society, the only scholar who had performed significant work on the history of Lakeland yeomen was Dr Charles Moor, whose "The old Statesmen families of Irton", published in 1910,<sup>5</sup> is an important piece of pioneering scholarship which refused to accept hearsay and instead concentrated on the evidence of wills and inventories analysed in bulk. Following the brief *Notes and Queries* discussion of April 1915, Dr Moor was privately approached by R. J. Whitwell for guidance on early uses of the term statesman, and the former's reply is revealing:<sup>6</sup>

... Prof. Collingwood wrote to me some weeks ago on the subject of the *statesmen* ... when I wrote the paper you mention [*see above, JDM*], I originally headed it "the Old Yeoman Families &c.", but if I remember rightly, Prof. Collingwood himself, or possibly Mr Curwen, suggested the change to "Statesman", I think by way of making it more attractive. I did not at any rate mean to indicate any particular tenure of land. The Irton tenure was chiefly copyhold. . . .

Dr Moor went on, tentatively but perceptively, to relate the word to possible usages or occurrences of "estate" in deeds and documents, pointing out that a manorial tenant's holding was "sometimes 'my grounds', or simply 'the land', but eventually 'my estate'." He had found no use of the word "estate" in Irton documents before 1704. He concluded by remarking that

<sup>4</sup> *Lake District History*, 125.

<sup>5</sup> CW2 x 148-200.

<sup>6</sup> Letter to R. J. Whitwell, 24 May 1915, in the collection cited.

In the parish registers also I have very seldom found the title statesman, though yeoman occurs with great frequency. But I have a clear recollection of having met with statesman in *some* register, I think that of Torpenhow, and fancy that it was about 1750.

A more recent inquiry by the present writer<sup>7</sup> has indicated that Dr Moor was in error about the occurrence of the word in the Torpenhow parish registers, but his general drift is sound enough. Where parish registers and other types of local list give descriptions of land-occupiers, they almost invariably use "yeoman" or "husbandman", and only towards the end of the 18th century does "farmer" appear — and then only infrequently. The writer has not discovered a single instance of the use of "statesman" in a Furness parish register before 1803, when the Ulverston burials give<sup>8</sup>

6 Jan. 1803 Thomas Towers, Statesman 81.

Further examples follow in January 1805 and January 1807. In the parish register volumes published by our Society, and covering Newton Reigny, Lowther, Cliburn, Crosby Ravensworth, Crosthwaite and Lyth, Whicham, Newbiggin, Middleton-in-Lonsdale, Crosthwaite, Barton, Bolton and Great Orton, this descriptive title does not once occur, even though the entries in general continue until 1812. Further surveys of unpublished registers have so far yielded the same negative result. Yet, as we shall see, there is evidence that the word *was* used, even in localities where parish clerks felt disinclined to set it down on paper.

Dr Moor, as we have seen, drew attention to the possible relevance of the word "estate" in legal instruments. Examples of this usage are in fact found before

<sup>7</sup> Greatly assisted by the vicar of Torpenhow, the Rev. W. F. G. Wittey, who kindly searched these registers in 1969.

<sup>8</sup> Ed. Bardsley and Ayre.

1704, his earliest instance in Irton.<sup>9</sup> The will of George Knype of Monk Coniston, dated 9 February 1671/2, refers to "my Tenement and Customary Estate of Tenantright",<sup>10</sup> and that of Myles Halhead of Mountjoy, Underbarrow, dated 21 May 1667, recites that "My Eldest Son Robert Halhead shall have this Estate which I now dwell upon".<sup>11</sup> The word was sometimes used in a different connection, as in the will of Isaac Dixon, of Heaning in Applethwaite (1698), who referred to "the Widdow-Estate of Margaret my now wife".<sup>12</sup> It should not be inferred from these examples, however, that the word is a common one in 17th-century documents; it most emphatically is not, as regards references to customary or other lands at least. The almost invariable form, judging from a survey of several hundred Lakeland wills from the 17th and 18th centuries, is "customary messuage and tenement", and there is no proof whatsoever that the word estate sprang automatically to the mind of yeoman or lawyer alike.

The 18th century yields rather more examples of the usage. Joseph Clark of Thackmerhead in Lambrigg (1719) bequeaths his "Messuage Tennement and Customary Estate" to his son,<sup>13</sup> and Adam Balmer, of Castlethwaite, Mallerstang (3 March 1729/30), gives

<sup>9</sup> It should be made clear that the expression *estate of inheritance* occurs in general statements and petitions in both the 17th and 18th centuries; e.g., in 1654/55 an agreement between Joseph Pennington of Muncaster and his tenants makes reference to "a good customarie or tenant right estate of inheritance" (example by courtesy of Professor G. P. Jones). An award by arbitration after a dispute between the seventh earl of Thanet and his Westmorland tenants (1739) also refers to "customary estates of inheritance"; R. S. Ferguson, *History of Westmorland* (London, 1894), 139. In view of such general usages, it is surprising that "estate" does not occur more often in wills and deeds.

<sup>10</sup> In the collection of Richmond Wills at the Lancashire Record Office (Furness Deanery). Given as Knipe in the published calendar.

<sup>11</sup> The same collection (Kendal Deanery); this was of course the family that produced the famous Quaker preacher; see R. S. Ferguson, *Early Cumberland and Westmorland Friends* (London, 1871), 55.

<sup>12</sup> J. Somervell, *Some Westmorland Wills* (Kendal, 1927), 4. This compilation does not make clear whether the o.s. or n.s. year is meant in the dates of wills.

<sup>13</sup> *Op. cit.*, 63.

his wife "half of my Teñant right Estate in Mallerstang afors<sup>d</sup>",<sup>14</sup> while William Harrington of Holme Bank, Urswick, Furness (20 August 1728) refers to his "paternal Antient Estate Comonly Call<sup>d</sup> Holme Bank".<sup>15</sup> John Slack of Cragg at Hutton-in-the-Hay (14 December 1745) bequeaths his "Tennant right estate cald Cragg in the Hay".<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, one can look in vain through a succession of lengthy, clear, well-drafted wills of this period and region for a whisper of the word estate. Perhaps, then, the word came into increasing use with the more extensive enfranchisement of customaryholding tenants by lords of manors, and with the consequent spread of tenure in fee simple or freehold? As Professor G. P. Jones has pointed out, such enfranchisement was not uncommon before 1777,<sup>17</sup> and we might expect a man to write or speak with some pride of his freehold "estate", and of his position as an "estatesman". All that can be said here is that clerks or lawyers betray little or nothing of any such trend in their drafts of wills, and that the forms of words remain much as before. William Braithwaite of Fold in Far Sawrey (24 March 1766) bequeaths his "freehold messuages and tenements" to his cousin Robert Sinkinson,<sup>18</sup> and James Sawrey of How End in the same township leaves his "freehold message" to his nephew (3 January 1767),<sup>19</sup> while William Braithwaite of High Wray (1798) leaves "parcells of my ancient and patrimonial freehold message". It should be added that freehold tenure, subject to the payment of bloomsmithy rent, had long been common in the Hawkshead area, and that these observations should not inhibit fellow-students of local history from pursuing research into the forms of

<sup>14</sup> Wills for the Diocese of Carlisle, at the Record Office, Carlisle.

<sup>15</sup> Richmond Wills (Furness Deanery).

<sup>16</sup> Richmond Wills (Kendal Deanery).

<sup>17</sup> CW2 lxii 206-207.

<sup>18</sup> Richmond Wills.

<sup>19</sup> R. Wills.

bequest and description of land in varying localities. Furthermore, wills in the Carlisle Diocese, relating to the 17th and 18th centuries, only infrequently mention bequests of land at all, and the institution of customary-hold receives little mention, and "tenant right" even less. The sense of pride and possession implicit in these expressions must nevertheless have been felt just as much among the "lairds" of the border and the Solway as among the holders by tenant right in Westmorland and central Lakeland.

Our point must remain that the word "estate" seems to have had no special legal or generally expressive force, and it is therefore quite impossible to establish that the words "statesman" or "estatesman" evolved *locally* from its use. The one possible example of their employment before 1767 is dubious in the extreme. Dr J. R. Magrath, who was engaged in editing *The Flemings in Oxford* when the 1915 discussion was taking place, remarked in a letter to R. J. Whitwell that: "I saw the appeal about 'statesmen' in *Notes and Queries*, & think there is a possible instance in one of the Fleming letters which I hope will appear in my third volume."<sup>20</sup> This did indeed eventually appear, and we are shown James Fleming writing to Roger Fleming (1695) at Rydal and greeting him as "Quondam Staits Man". Dr Magrath added a note suggesting that "Staits Man may have some connexion with Statesman, the North Country name for a yeoman farmer owning the land he farms. In Queen's the word would be familiar, and might be applied to any North Country man. . . ."<sup>21</sup> But, as we shall see, it has yet to be proved that statesman is a specifically north-country word at all, and there is, moreover, an etymological difficulty to be surmounted. It is known that over a century later the word often took the form

<sup>20</sup> Whitwell Papers, letter of 28 May 1915.

<sup>21</sup> *The Flemings in Oxford*, iii (Oxford, 1924) 217.

"estatesman", and it would be reasonable to expect the longer form to be used before it became customary to drop the stressed vowel at the beginning, "statesman". Similarly, *establish* could sometimes become *stablish* — "stablished it fast by a changeless decree". The hypothesis that the word is derived from *steadsman*, the possessor of a homestead or firestead, can be dismissed as unlikely.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever the force of this criticism, Dr Magrath's now well-known example found its way into the relevant volume of the *Oxford English Dictionary*,<sup>23</sup> published in 1933 (which rightly describes it as "a doubtful instance"), and a small if insubstantial brick was placed in the edifice of etymological history. An isolated brick also; for, astonishingly, the word *statesman* does not appear in print until the end of the 18th century (a point well made by W. G. Collingwood) and does not appear in Cumbrian written records until its later middle years. If we assume that the word *was* widely used, in Lakeland and elsewhere, few significant expressions can have shown such coyness in lurking in the security of mere colloquialism, and such unwillingness to reach the form of permanent record.

Fortunately, the second half of the 18th century does bring indications *à propos* the nature and extent of its use. In this respect — and the point cannot be too strongly stressed — the infrequent occurrence of the word in lists and surveys tells its own story. This was not only because "yeoman" or "tenant" were words habitually accepted by local persons and lawyers as quite sufficient for their purposes; a man who might have called himself a *statesman* had other ways of expressing pride or status. Some, at the upper end of the yeoman social scale, undoubtedly sought

<sup>22</sup> Professor Jones's view, with which one cannot but concur.

<sup>23</sup> *O.E.D.*, x (1933) 858.

to call themselves “Gentleman”, or, if this was not quite feasible in the eyes of the law or of opinion, to use the title “Mr”. In this respect the list of Furness freeholders, compiled for jury purposes in September 1776,<sup>24</sup> contains some suggestive examples. While it is true that most of those listed were content with “Gent.” or “yeoman” after their names, the freeholders of Colton were not, and every potential juror was entitled *Mr* by the constables, John Rawlinson and Richard Croasdell:

Mr John Scotson	Old Hall
Mr John Hartley	Bouth
Mr Thomas Towers	Shoemaker
Mr John Fell	Mercer
Mr John Walker	Mercer
Mr Rich <sup>d</sup> Crewdson	Maltmaker
Mr Edw. Burns	Cringlemire
Mr Wm. Benson	Blackbeck
Mr Rich <sup>d</sup> Crewdson	Riddingside
Mr John Robinson	Oxenpark
Mr Robt. Turner	Oxenpark

And so on, through a list of unquestionably yeoman family names, until a number of cases indicating very clear distinctions of rank occur:

John Machell Esq.	Hollow Oak
Wm. Brathwaite Esq.	Finsthwaite

Likewise, Satterthwaite recorded its leading freeholder as Myles Sands Esq., but accorded the title of Mr to the yeomen, and a number of Osmotherley yeomen took the same mark of status. In most Furness townships this did not happen.

Yet there is evidence that the word statesman was used, even in these years. Our point is that it was probably used not as a common expression in dialect, but in a rather worldly, sophisticated sense by those who chose to insist on its employment in private intercourse, as a status-word of the type of *Mr* in the

<sup>24</sup> Lancashire Record Office, QDF 2/3.

foregoing examples. The earliest Cumbrian example to appear thus far in writing is to be found in the Papist Returns for Westmorland, in a list (17 November 1767) for Kirkby Stephen. The seventh of a list of papist families for that township includes the following person:<sup>25</sup>

J.W. a statesman aged 54 Resident 54 years

This is the only case of its kind in the historical source indicated,<sup>26</sup> and the location of the example, as well as its rarity, may well be significant. It occurs well away from central Lakeland proper, as do a number of other examples which appear in the 1787 Census for Westmorland. The surviving lists for the latter embody a survey of a large part of the Westmorland population of that time, and the frequency with which the word statesman appears is therefore important as a social and a statistical indicator.

Some of the local constables who performed the census enumeration saw the word as significant, and as carrying an indication of status, but it did not occur to the majority to use it. Hence, out of 32 townships enumerated in the West Ward of Westmorland, there are appearances of the word, variously spelt, at Barton and Little Strickland.<sup>27</sup> At Barton, in company with seven other similarly spelt cases, it appears like this:

Samewell (*sic*) Lancaster Estatesman

In this township, or to the mind of the constable-enumerator, "Estates man" meant someone who was not a farmer, and who was, as a yeoman, in some way superior; "farmer" was the other land-occupying category used. That the word had status, and was not simply one of occupation, is shown by some clear

<sup>25</sup> MS. Returns at the Victoria Tower, London, 1767, by courtesy of our member Dr T. G. Fahy.

<sup>26</sup> Dr Fahy tells me he has not found another example in the whole of Westmorland.

<sup>27</sup> Westmorland Record Office, WQSP/C.

distinctions made at Little Strickland in the same census:

Joseph Abbot	A Husband Man	Statesman ( <i>sic</i> )
John Hodgson	A Husband Man	Farmer
John Rigg	Mason	Statesman
George Arsbridge	Husband Man	Statesman

Here, it will be seen, “husbandman” means simply “a land-occupier in agriculture” in the most general of senses, and this connotation is sustained throughout the surviving enumeration lists.<sup>28</sup> But it is interesting to note that the title statesman might be *added* to a man’s industrial or craft occupation, just as Thomas Towers, shoemaker of Colton, might still insist on being addressed as *Mr* because he was a small freeholder. Landownership and status were of course linked throughout the whole of Georgian society, and the connection was not confined to the wealthy. In a further 15 townships of the East Ward of Westmorland, two more instances of the local use of the word occur, one being incidental and the other strikingly illustrative. There is unquestionably a hint of status in

Ann Atkinson      Estatesman widow

at Temple Sowerby. At Longmarton, however, the *Statesmen* were given a separate classificatory heading, and ten such families were listed before those of six *Farmers*, followed by a further list of *Tradesmen*. (Some forty-two years later, Parson’s and White’s *Directory* of 1829 was still adhering to the established convention by describing some of these Longmarton statesman families — notably surviving members of the Bellas stock — as *yeomen*.)

It will be seen from these examples that *estatesman* and *statesman* appear as parallel forms, and it is probable that the first of these forms was used less and less often in succeeding decades, following the mutation we have already mentioned. If this mutation

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

was still proceeding, however, the mere fact makes Dr Magrath's example all the more unlikely. Another and more certain fact is that at the time of the enumeration, 1787, the word *statesman*, or its parallel form, *had still not reached printed expression in Cumbria*. Its comparative slowness in assuming both written and printed forms *regionally* strongly suggests that the word is an importation, one more readily adopted as some members of the yeomanry began to climb the social scale and become increasingly status-conscious, and as others began to feel that that status was threatened. Nor had it merely crept over the border from Durham or Northumberland (although it was used in both of those counties); it was a provincialism known in the south-east of England. Hence, William Marshall, writing on Norfolk agriculture in 1787 commented that "Formerly, in this District, were many small Owners — Yeomen — provincially called 'statesmen', who cultivated their own estates."<sup>29</sup> Thomas Brown, writing on Derbyshire agriculture a few years later, drew attention to the "smaller landholder (provincially *statesman*), who has not a sufficient capital in stock, and is unwilling to part with his hereditary property"<sup>30</sup>.

It is worth noting that the statesman was becoming an object of mild criticism by Board of Agriculture report-compilers, and those for the Lake Counties, Andrew Pringle for Westmorland and John Bailey and George Culley for Cumberland,<sup>31</sup> together with their colleagues, began to set a fashion which persisted on the part of influential agricultural improvers, that of pitying and condemning the small yeoman at one

<sup>29</sup> William Marshall, *The Rural Economy of Norfolk*, vol. I (London, 1787), ch. 2, 6.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Brown, *General View of the Agriculture of Derby* (London, 1794), 14.

<sup>31</sup> A. Pringle, *Gen. View of the Agric. of Westmorland* (London, 1794), 300; J. Bailey and G. Culley, *Gen. View Agric. Cumberland* (London, 1794), 209, also mention the *lairds* or statesmen somewhat later, in an expanded edition of 1797.

and the same time. "They live poorly and labour hard," wrote Pringle in 1794; they "seem to inherit with the estates of their ancestors, their notions of cultivating them," wrote Bailey and Culley. These writers, significantly men from outside the immediately Cumbrian scene,<sup>32</sup> were the first to render *statesmen* in print *vis-à-vis* these counties.

Before proceeding to the question of how this word came to be used in such a specifically Cumbrian connection, we must still examine with care the undoubted evidence that it was used in common local speech during the second half of the 18th century. We can dismiss the hypothesis that it was an originally Lakeland word which was *exported*, even though medieval Cumbrians are known to have migrated to distant Norfolk.<sup>33</sup> Had it been so deeply embedded in folk-speech, it would have become part of common and regularly used Lakeland dialect long before Georgian times; and there is little indication that it was used regularly and spontaneously at the later period, and still less that it was a commonly recurring word in dialect. One of the earliest and most informative pieces of dialect writing to be locally printed, *A Bran New Wark*, by William de Worjat (by the Reverend William Hutton of *Beetham Repository* fame), originally published in Kendal in 1785, refers to "the shaws, the crofts and intacks of the north", but not once to statesmen;<sup>34</sup> moreover, in his earlier *Beetham Repository* (1770), Hutton expressed himself in such a way that mere association *must* have brought the word to the surface had it been in his active vocabulary. Writing of Witherslack, he commented on: ". . . Moss How, two Estates & good old Yeoman

<sup>32</sup> Pringle was of Balencriff, Bailey was of Chillingham, and Culley of Fenton, Northumberland.

<sup>33</sup> Information by courtesy of Mr R. A. McKinley, based on the movement of surnames.

<sup>34</sup> Reprinted in Elworthy and Skeat, *Specimens of English Dialect: Devonshire and Westmorland* (London, 1879), 181-208.

Houses on Them . . . three Lowood Estates, good Antient Houses; but I find everywhere the Yeomandry extinct, not one owner lives on his Estate."<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless, this type of observation is highly significant; the yeomanry, or statesmen, were acquiring antiquarian interest even in 1770, and it was slowly becoming fashionable to bemoan their disappearance. Before many years had passed, Wordsworth and other writers were to invest the supposedly simple, virtuous dales yeoman with a romanticism that became more poignant with his steady extinction, and the word statesman was to be bitter-sweetened with this romantic flavouring.

It is clear that the word had very little fashionable association of a romantic kind before the very end of the 18th century. Our case here is based on a particularly compelling *argumentum e silentio*; just as the well-informed Hutton never used it in print, so the early guidebook writers and topographers seem never to have encountered it or added it to their stock of words. It may have disturbed the chatter of the occasional dales tavern, but it added little to these writers' appraisal of the picturesque. Nevertheless — and this point, too, must be strongly stressed — the simple virtue of the dalesmen, as an attribute which harmonised fittingly with the scenery, was commented upon by a succession of writers, and, as in the case of Hutton's observations, association *should* have brought the word statesman to the surface. Hence, William Gilpin's *Observations Relating to Picturesque Beauty made in the Year 1772*, writes of the "simplicity" of the inhabitants of the Lakes,<sup>36</sup> and Gray's *Journal* of October 1769 dwells briefly on "peace, rusticity and happy poverty".<sup>37</sup> Thomas West's *Guide to the Lakes*, writing of Borrowdale,

<sup>35</sup> W. Hutton (Ed. Rawlinson Ford, 1906), *Beetham Repository*, 135.

<sup>36</sup> Vol. II (London, 1788), *esp.* 65 ff.

<sup>37</sup> In appendix to West, *Guide to the Lakes* (2nd edn., 1780), 211.

informs us that "mountain virtue and pastoral hospitality are found at every farm".<sup>38</sup> Hutchinson's *An Excursion to the Lakes . . . in the Years 1773 and 1774* (London, 1776), makes no relevant reference, but, two decades later, Joseph Budworth's *A Fort-night's Ramble to the Lakes* (1792), showed much more interest in the local peasantry, even to the point of recording conversations with them and parodying their speech. He used the word "farmer" upon several occasions to describe the people he met, and wrote of some householders who "farm their own estate".<sup>39</sup> Even if the other authors were far too detached from common humankind to listen to their conversation, one feels that Budworth might have been a sensitive enough recorder to have reproduced the word statesman. The other writers might have heard their peers repeat it.

There can only be one rejoinder; the word was not in currency in polite or learned circles, in *Cumbria* at least. It would be otiose to recite a detailed list of the standard antiquarian and scholarly writers of 18th-century Lakeland; all that need be said here is that neither Hutchinson, nor Nicolson and Burn, nor West (in his *Antiquities of Furness* (1774)) nor James Clarke, even mentions the word statesman, although Hutchinson, especially, was greatly interested in the evolution of customary tenure.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the expression failed to reach even some of the agricultural authorities of the period, and the Board of Agriculture reporter for Lancashire, John Holt, although concerned with "the northern parts of the county", including Furness, writes only of "the yeomanry" (1795),<sup>41</sup> while his successor William Dickson (1815)<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> *Op. cit.*, 137.

<sup>39</sup> 3rd edn. (London, 1810), esp. 227, 248, 273, 293.

<sup>40</sup> *History of the County of Cumberland* (Carlisle, 1794), 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> J. Holt, *Gen. View of the Agric. of the County of Lancaster* (London, 1795), 13.

<sup>42</sup> R. W. Dickson, *General View . . . Lancaster* (ed. Stevenson, London, 1815), 90.

commented in similar terms. Their colleague Robert Brown, reporting on the agriculture of the West Riding (1799) is silent about statesmen — who were, as we shall see, established in Craven in both name and fact — and so is Tuke, the reporter for the North Riding (1800).

The reason for this array of negatives will shortly become more apparent. It is very clear that the word, from being obscured in a mass of provincialisms and colloquialisms, became fashionable in about 1800. The prime agent in this transformation was undoubtedly John Housman, whose deservedly successful *Topographical Description of Cumberland, Westmoreland, Lancashire and a part of the West Riding* was published by Jollie of Carlisle in that year. Housman did two things which are relevant to this analysis; he gave an intelligent account of Cumbrian society, economy and agriculture which at the same time managed to maintain the romantic conventions; and he linked this romantic fashion with *statesman*. Pringle, on whose work he had of course drawn, was certainly no romantic; his commentary contains such phrases as "little straggling villages . . . very inconvenient for farming purposes. . . . They live poorly and labour hard . . .". He had, however, added that "The consciousness of their independence renders them impatient of oppression or insult, but they are gentle and obliging when treated by their superiors with kindness and respect."<sup>43</sup> He went on:

This class of men is daily decreasing. The turnpike-roads have brought the manners of the capital to this extremity of the kingdom. . . . This change of manners . . . has compelled many a *statesman* to sell his property.

Bailey and Culley, too, were equally unsentimental, seeing the yeoman as an oppressed tenant and a bad farmer.<sup>44</sup> But Housman's much more influential study

<sup>43</sup> *Gen. View of the Agric. of Westmorland* (London, 1794), 302.

<sup>44</sup> e.g., *op. cit.*, II.

(which ran to successive editions of 1802, 1808, 1814, 1816, 1817 and 1821), after writing of "almost every cottager and *statesman*",<sup>45</sup> went on to describe the latter in this manner:<sup>46</sup>

... oppression is little known amongst them; but whenever it rears its head, no people in the world are more impatient under its control. Humble and unambitious, they afford few instances of a rapid increase of fortune; and losses and disappointments are equally rare. Whatever patrimonial estates they inherit, they are generally transmitted to the eldest son without much in addition, or any considerable diminution. . . .

This is much nearer to the image of the simple, virtuous rustic of Gilpin, Gray or West; yet it was combined with much valuable social material and assorted information, and the general plausibility perhaps exceeds that of the well-known account of "a perfect Republic of Shepherds and Agriculturists" in Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*, compiled about a decade later. Wordsworth and his sister, indeed, enter the story about the time of the appearance of Housman's *Topographical Description*. There is evidence that the Wordsworths were aware of the supposed decline of the yeomanry (which had in any case been asserted by Hutton and Pringle in previous years), and Dorothy Wordsworth quotes, in her *Journal* for 18 May 1800, the comment of a neighbour, John Fisher, that "all those who have small estates are forced to sell, and all the land goes into one hand".<sup>47</sup> This, however, may be an example of purely local prejudice against the Flemings of Rydal. What is more to the point is Wordsworth's vigorous plea on behalf of the statesmen addressed to Charles James Fox on 14 January 1801. This follows too closely on the writings of Pringle, Bailey and Culley, and Housman to be totally unconnected with them, although

<sup>45</sup> *Topographical Description* (Carlisle, 1800), 99.

<sup>46</sup> *Op. cit.*, 104-105.

<sup>47</sup> Wm. Knight (ed.), *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, vol. I (London, 1897), 33.

the nominal aim of the letter was to draw attention to the message contained in *Michael* and *The Brothers*;<sup>48</sup> the poet, lamenting the weakening of the bond of domestic affections along the poor in conditions of industrialism, drew

a picture of the domestic affections as I know they exist among a class of men who are now almost confined to the North of England. They are small independent *proprietors* of land here called statesmen, men of respectable education who daily labour on their own little properties. The domestic affections will always be strong amongst men who live in a country not crowded with population, if these men are placed above poverty. But if they are proprietors of small estates, which have descended to them from their ancestors, the power which these affections will acquire amongst such men is inconceivable by those who have only had an opportunity of observing hired labourers, farmers and the manufacturing Poor.

This picture was later to be refined and expanded in the *Guide to the Lakes*, which seems to have been conceived about 1807, and which first appeared in 1810 as the anonymous text to the Rev. Joseph Wilkinson's *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire*.<sup>49</sup> It will be seen that Wordsworth was oblivious to the fact that there were many "statesmen" outside the north of England, and that he was engaged in further distillation of the notion of the simple, virtuous peasant proprietor; this, as we have noted, had a history and a ready currency among romantics. Yet, surely, the Cumbrian Wordsworth, brought up in Hawkshead, had at least one foot firmly on the ground? This is a difficult matter to decide; the great man thought in terms of emotions and general concepts, and it is possible that his understanding of people in society scarcely matched his perceptiveness in face of many other aspects of the

<sup>48</sup> See Chester L. Shaver (ed.), de Selincourt, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, 1787-1805* (Oxford, 1967), 312-314.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: Early Years* (Oxford, 1965), 156-164.

rural scene.<sup>50</sup> As for the argument that Wordsworth "knew" what he was writing about by virtue of direct experience, nobody who has ever studied the Lakeland yeomanry in detail, or who has even lived in a Lakeland village, would imagine that his peasants were all cast in the mould of Michael!

Whatever the case, the *statesmen*, from being recognised by a few constables in a few Westmorland villages, were now central features of the Cumbrian scene, and there is good reason to believe that Housman and Wordsworth together effected this transformation. This does not, of course, *explain* the transformation itself, and one can only suggest a few of its possible causes. A few years after the publication of the text of the (anonymous) Wordsworth *Guide to the Lakes*, we find Bishop Watson, one of the many formerly homespun Westmerians who had risen in the world, commenting complacently on his statesman origins:<sup>51</sup>

I feel a satisfaction in knowing that my ancestors, as far as I can trace them, have neither been *hewers of wood*, nor *drawers of water*, but *ut prisca gens mortalium*, tillers of their own ground, in the idiom of the country, *statesmen*.

It was pleasant for one in his position to be able to claim origins which lay deeply rooted in respectability and virtue. Most of the *arrivistes* of his age could scarcely claim landed family connections going back to the Dissolution or the Conquest, but in the ranks of the statesmen lay a consolation prize. As social and geographical mobility increased, and as men of yeoman or peasant stock migrated to the towns to make reputations or fortunes, antiquarian interest in the yeomanry or statesmen increased when the successful migrants looked back in old age. The story of Bishop Watson's statesman background was not long in being

<sup>50</sup> Well brought out in Mrs Eileen Jay's *Wordsworth at Colthouse* (Kendal, 1970).

<sup>51</sup> R. Watson (ed.), *Richard Watson : Autobiography* (1814).

repeated for the benefit of visitors, and in 1821 Ackermann's *A Picturesque Tour of the English Lakes* was informing its readers that<sup>52</sup>

Dr Watson was the son of a Westmoreland *statesman*, the appellation given, about the lakes, to the proprietors of small landed properties.

Watson, in fact, had started a fashion also, and several famous Cumbrians were to be connected with statesman ancestors in a similar manner, notably Adam Sedgwick and George Moore. Sedgwick's own account of his forbears in Dent is too well known to repeat here,<sup>53</sup> and Smiles's story of George Moore's early life, which is mentioned below, tells us more about the mid-Victorian ethos than it does about northern Cumberland. In any case, these are outstanding men, and there were many others of less fame, but considerable wealth and reputation, who looked back nostalgically to their early rural homes, and who were only too ready to sentimentalise the decline of the yeomen as a social class. As the industrial world wrought its effects, and the strains of urban existence increased, one could regret the passing of the simple life.

Housman's account of the Lake Counties was not without its imitator, meanwhile, and it is instructive to examine the account of the statesmen in George Alexander Cooke's *Topographical and Statistical Description of the County of Cumberland* (second edition of c. 1825):

The *Statesmen*, or small proprietors, seem to have inherited the manner of cultivating their estates from their ancestors; they seem content with their situation. With their own hands they produce almost every necessary article of food; and clothing they partly manufacture themselves; luxury is in no shape the object of their desires. They appear happy, and have a high character for honesty and sincerity.

<sup>52</sup> R. Ackermann, *A Picturesque Tour of the English Lakes* (London, 1821), 64.

<sup>53</sup> In *Memorial by the Trustees of Cowgill Chapel* (Cambridge, 1868), vii and 68.

This passage is worth comparing with a similar one in the second edition (1797) of Bailey and Culley's *General View of the Agriculture of Cumberland*:

These *statesmen* seem to inherit with the estates of their ancestors, their notions of cultivating them, and are almost as much attached to the one as the other; they are rarely aspiring, and seem content with their situation, nor is luxury in any shape an object of their desires; their little estates, which they cultivate with their own hands, produce almost every necessary article of food; and cloathing, they in part manufacture themselves; they have a high character for sincerity and honesty, and probably few people enjoy more ease and humble happiness.

Comment on the coincidence of viewpoint and phrasing is hardly necessary. Journalistic hack-work of the kind performed by Cooke played its part in creating a convention, and compilers of other volumes, like those entitled *The Beauties of England and Wales*, originally edited, for *Cumberland*, by Britton and Brayley (1802), and later, for *Westmorland*, by Britton, Brewer, Hodgson and Laird (1814), contained the now obligatory references to these small proprietors.<sup>54</sup> By the eighteen hundred and twenties, the fashion was in full bloom, and the Reverend Mr Hodgson's *Topographical and Historical Description of the County of Westmoreland* (n.d., but c. 1820) gave an account of the statesmen and their decline<sup>55</sup> which was soon afterwards paraphrased and embellished by the Parson and White *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the Counties of Cumberland and Westmorland* (1829).<sup>56</sup> It is not clear how many of these descriptions were written by men who claimed to have an intimate knowledge of their subject; we must assume that some accounts, at least, were based on original information, and one local journalist and author, John Briggs, was

<sup>54</sup> Britton and Brayley, *The Beauties of England and Wales*, vol. III (London, 1802), 241-242 (where information on *lairds* and *statesmen* is attributed to Housman); and vol. XV (London, 1814), 7-8.

<sup>55</sup> Hodgson, *op. cit.*, 7-8.

<sup>56</sup> *Op. cit.*, 25.

in an excellent position to give an authoritative description of the yeomanry of the Lake Counties.

Yet it may be suggestive, and is certainly strange, that well-informed local observers of this type used the word *statesman* self-consciously as well as didactically; and that Briggs's own *Lonsdale Magazine* (30 September 1822), could refer, when writing about Cartmel, to "the smaller statesmen, as they are called",<sup>57</sup> or as in one of Briggs's "Letters from the Lakes" in the same journal<sup>58</sup> in 1821, to a farmhouse in Langdale "belonging to an old 'statesman', as they term them here". Later in the century, Harriet Martineau's *Complete Guide to the English Lakes* (1855) employed a similarly self-conscious qualification: "the decline of the fortunes of the 'statesmen', as they are locally called, has been regular and mournful to witness".<sup>59</sup> A little-known study of Troutbeck, published in 1876, uses a comparable form of words; "the seats of small landed proprietors, locally called *statesmen*, or *estatesmen*".<sup>60</sup> The impression is given, in each case, that the word is purely or largely a localism.

We must here re-emphasise that it was nothing of the kind; but before making a final survey of the evidence to the contrary, we must still ask how far the word had common currency amongst the dalesmen themselves. Let it be said at once that the term probably grew in popularity, and that it was undoubtedly used by the more articulate and educated inhabitants — quite a numerous company — who read what poets and guidebook writers said about them, or who remembered the occasional traditional use of the expression in certain families and localities. Yet there

<sup>57</sup> *Lonsdale Magazine*, 30 September 1822, 321.

<sup>58</sup> *Lonsdale Magazine*, July 1821, 245. (Published monthly.)

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.* (1st edn., Windermere, 1855), 139.

<sup>60</sup> A member of the Scandinavian Society (J. Wager), *Troutbeck, its Scenery, Old Architecture* (Kendal, 1876), 8.

are some strange silences and *lacunae* when we come to examine the actual writings and comments of members of the yeoman class. Hence, the *Journal and Commonplace Book* of the remarkable yeoman, William Fleming of Pennington, whose copious record covers effectively the period 1798 to 1820, does not once use the word statesman in the volumes which still remain for examination,<sup>61</sup> although he has much to say about the deeds and misdeeds of the yeoman families of his neighbourhood. Fleming himself was interested chiefly in acquiring the title of "Gentleman", and one's guess is that the lesser title of statesman would have meant little to this well-informed and widely read man. Another yeoman diarist, John Grainger of Southerfield, Holm Cultram, likewise does not use the term; his recordings run from July 1826 to March 1828.<sup>62</sup> The yeoman writer of a long and autobiographical letter to the *Lancaster Gazette* of 16 February 1822 certainly fails to mention this title, and signs himself "A Borrowdale Farmer"; but the same newspaper, less than a year later, published — doubtless for the edification of its numerous yeoman readers! — an account of the curious customs of the statesmen of Craven by the lady savant of York, Mrs Catherine Cappe,<sup>63</sup> who certainly used the expression. The widow of that weightiest of Lakeland yeomen, William Pearson, also employed it in her introduction to her edition of his *Papers, Letters and Journals* (1863) — "The family takes its position in the rank of yeoman, or, to use the local term, *statesmen* . . . a class that is gradually lessening." Yet, noting once more the now familiar qualification, "the local term", we find also that Pearson throughout his published

<sup>61</sup> Partial copy on microfilm, at Barrow-in-Furness Library and also at the University of Lancaster, provided by courtesy of Mrs W. Hodgson.

<sup>62</sup> The Record Office, Carlisle, DX/74/5; catalogued in error as Francis Grainger's diary.

<sup>63</sup> *Lancaster Gazette*, 11 January 1823. Mrs Cappe was the widow of a unitarian divine of York, and a well-known writer on charitable activities.

essays on local themes, which touch often upon rural life, never uses "statesman" at all to describe himself or others!

It is very hard to reconcile this apparently complete lack of interest in the word, on the part of yeomen themselves, with De Quincey's description of his own father-in-law (in an unpublished letter):<sup>64</sup>

Mr John Simpson, my wife's father, is of an old Westmorland family immemorially connected with the soil of the County, being of the class known locally by the denomination of "statesman" (i.e. Estatesman) in contradistinction to the labouring part of the rural population. This class are honourably distinguished from those who are obliged to personal labour, and indeed from the *corresponding* classes (in a money sense) of other parts of the kingdom, by good sense — thoughtfulness — gravity of character — and general respectability. But, apart from the consideration which these estates give them, they make no pretensions to the accomplishments or rank of gentlemen.

William Fleming's diary shows the last statement to be nonsense (the superior yeomanry, in any case, as Dr Moor showed, were prone to marry into the gentry), and De Quincey's commentary demonstrates that a powerful Wordsworthian influence had not been eradicated by an unusually intimate relationship with a yeoman family or families. For the rest, it is doubtful how far old John Simpson of the Nab would have been interested in one title as against another. For the truth is that statesman was one of a variety of status-words available to small landowners or proprietors, and we should not forget that "yeoman" not only carried clear overtones of worth and standing, but that it was also widely used in print and writing. Cumbrian directories and other records of the 19th century show conclusively that comparative newcomers to freehold farms and estates would adopt the proud title *yeoman* as though they represented families of antiquity. The

<sup>64</sup> Westmorland Record Office, WD/Ry, letter from De Quincey to W. A. Duckworth of Manchester, 6 December 1828.

word also connoted the military virtues, through association or service with the militia, the Westmorland and Cumberland Yeomanry Cavalry. In the border areas, the word *laird* was certainly in use well into the 19th century,<sup>65</sup> and the superior yeomanry of the Lakes would sometimes, like the freeholders of Colton and Satterthwaite in the 18th century, insist on *Mr* as a form of address. Hence a representative of an old yeoman family like the Brownes of Troutbeck would be known as Mr George Browne by right and not merely by courtesy.

Each of these was a well-established Cumbrian custom, and it seems strange that it should have been necessary to import a word used in Surrey, Sussex or East Anglia in order to give a yeoman the sense of pride that he already had a means of expressing. As regards the geography of the word statesman, the varied nature of which is indicated by the *O.E.D.*, Joseph Wright's superb *English Dialect Dictionary* adds a good deal to the evidence, and shows that the term was in use in East Anglia in 1830<sup>66</sup> (and, as we now know, long before that date), and in Lincolnshire in and before 1866.<sup>67</sup> Granville Leveson-Gower's *Surrey Provincialisms*, published by the English Dialect Society in 1876, shows that the term was employed in the home counties as well, and it has already been shown<sup>68</sup> that it was known in Derbyshire in the 18th century. Only in Lakeland, however, does it seem to have been invested with a special significance during the 19th century.

Before that time, as we have seen, the word cannot have been widely used in polite Cumbrian circles, and

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, J. T. Brockett, *A Glossary of North Country Words* (Newcastle, 1825), 118, 206.

<sup>66</sup> R. Forby, *The Vocabulary of East Anglia* (1830, 2nd edn., enlarged by W. Rye, E.D.S., 1895).

<sup>67</sup> J. E. Brogden, *Provincial words and expressions current in Lincolnshire* (1866).

<sup>68</sup> *Supra*, p. 258.

Wordsworth, assisted by Housman and the agricultural reporters of the time, seems to have given a powerful impetus to its acceptance, at the same time investing it with a special and partially romantic significance. Even the great poet could not have achieved this, single-handedly or otherwise, had the time not been propitious, and as the successful Cumbrian became detached from his roots and increasingly involved in industrial, commercial or professional life, his sentimental interest in his forbears ensured that Wordsworth's comments on the virtuous peasantry had a sympathetic reception. There were, of course, other strands in the story; a rising middle class could not but feel pity for a declining rural equivalent, and, for the rest, visitors were only too happy to romanticise the whitewashed or flower-bedecked farmhouses of the dales. Simple, uncomplicated virtue, rusticity, and the ownership of property — the combination was irresistible, and the word *statesman* began to carry a flavour that even *yeoman* did not bear.

The result, in the end, was middle-class vulgarisation. The statesmen fell into the hands of Samuel Smiles, who, in his biography of George Moore,<sup>69</sup> used them for his own form of moralising:

The difference between one statesman and another consisted principally in character. Where the statesman was slow, sluggish an inert, he gravitated rapidly downwards . . . On the other hand, another statesman of a better sort would keep up the roof-tree by dint of energy and forethought. . . .

From the "perfect Republic of Shepherds and Agriculturists" to Selp-Help — it was in consonance with the story of middle-class myth and image-creation. Now that the word statesman has ceased to have any

<sup>69</sup> *George Moore, Merchant and Philanthropist* (London, 1884), 10, 13. I am greatly indebted to Professor G. P. Jones and to Dr T. G. Fahy for their help in the discussions which preceded the drafting of the present paper. Much of the economic background to this story will be found in Professor Jones's paper, *The decline of the yeomen in the Lake Counties*, CW2 lxii 198-223.

meaning, and now that its curious history has been explored, we might well bury it quietly in the graveyard of English provincialisms. Our forbears, after all, were proud to call themselves yeomen.