

Landscape and Society in Medieval Cumbria

ANGUS J.L. WINCHESTER

Department of Continuing Education
University of Liverpool



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APPENDIX

The Medieval Landscape Reconstructed

The following pages take a detailed look at the landscape of six townships in western Cumbria, to illustrate how some of the themes discussed in earlier chapters came together to influence the landscape at the local level. The six case studies have been selected because of the survival of sufficiently good documentary evidence to enable the medieval landscape of each to be reconstructed in some detail. Although all the townships described below lie within twenty miles of each other, they embrace a wide variety of terrain, from the dune belt on the Irish Sea coast to a mountainous dalehead in the heart of the Lake District. The six case studies are: Buttermere, Lorton, and Setmurthy, three townships in contrasting parts of the forest of Derwentfells; Kinniside township in Copeland forest; the township of Winscales on a hilltop in the coastal lowlands, inland from Workington; and the parish of St Bridget Beckermeth, embracing both lowland and upland landscapes in a strip stretching inland from the coast south of St Bees to the fells on the edge of Copeland forest.

1. BUTTERMERE [NY 11]. See Figures 31 and 32.

Note: Swinside, a detached part of Buttermere township lying near Lorton, is excluded from this account as it is treated below under Lorton.

Buttermere lies at the head of the Cocker valley, within the forest of Derwentfells. The township boundary encompassed a vast acreage of mountain pasture on the fellsides surrounding the dalehead: in 1845 only 1,027 acres (416 ha.) of the township's 6,851 acres (2,772 ha.) was enclosed. (C.R.O., DRC/8/35) though that figure excluded two large fellside enclosures (Gatesgarth side and Blakerigg) which were presumably considered to have reverted to the waste at that date. The enclosed land was concentrated where there was flat land on the valley floor: at Gatesgarth, at the head of the valley, and at Buttermere village, between the lakes of Buttermere and Crummock Water, though by the nineteenth century there were also extensive enclosed pastures on Birkness, the steep fellside south-west of the lake. In the sixteenth century there was a cluster of farms in Buttermere village, at the edge of the valley floor where Sail Beck entered the main valley, a small hamlet at Gatesgarth, and a scatter of single farms on the lower fell slopes behind Buttermere village.

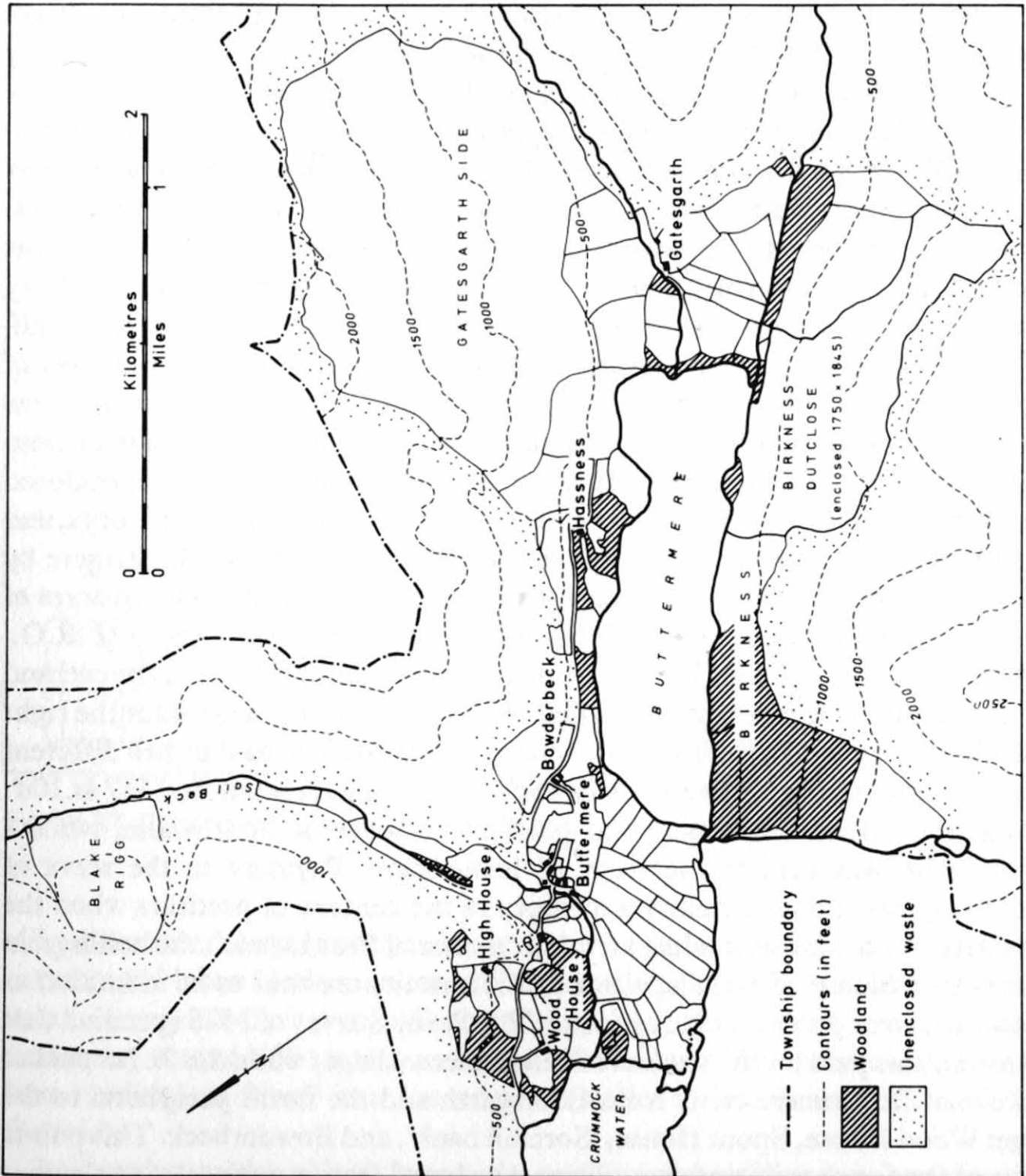


Figure 31. Buttermere in 1845.

a. Buttermere village

Mention of a mill at Buttermere before 1215 (C.R.O., D/Lec/299a, Lucy Cartulary, no.91) suggests that a farming community had settled the delta flats between the lakes by the end of the twelfth century. On the partition of the honour of Cockermouth after the death of Alice de Rumilly in 1215, Buttermere descended with the de Lucy share of the estate until the honour was reunited in 1323 (*Cal. Docs. relating to Scotland*, i. no.1106). Meanwhile, in 1247, the southern half of the forest of Derwentfells, including the fells behind Buttermere village, was assigned to the lord of the other half of the honour, the earl of Aumâle (Lucy Cart., no. 119). As in the Lucy's manor of Braithwaite (see above, p. 40), this separation of lordship between the settled area and the surrounding waste led to problems. By 1256 settlement had taken place on the earl's land — the lower slopes of the fells behind Buttermere village — restricting the access of the Lucys' tenants in Buttermere to their common rights on the waste. An agreement was made that the Lucys' tenants should have two driftways onto the waste, each forty feet wide, past the arable land of the earl's tenants (*Cal. Docs. re Scotland*, i. no. 2051). The agreement is of particular interest in establishing the chronology of settlement in Buttermere because the parties also agreed not to make any new enclosures on each other's forest, while reserving the right to continue to enclose land within their own shares of it. In other words, any extension of the enclosed area at Buttermere after 1256 would be held of the earl, rather than the Lucys, and it is clear from the agreement that the earl already had tenants at Buttermere by 1256. On the earl's death in 1259 there were four tenants holding eleven acres of land at Buttermere, and by *c.*1270 his widow had ten tenants there (P.R.O., SC11/730, mm.1v.,13-14). The key to identifying the land held from the earl and the Lucys respectively lies in a due called 'walking silver' (a payment for the right to full cloth in the lord's fulling mill), which continued to be paid to two different reeves long after the two halves of Derwentfells had been reunited. In 1547 4s.10d. walking silver from Buttermere was paid to the reeve of Braithwaite, while a further 2s.7d. was paid to the reeve of Buttermere. Payment to the reeve of Braithwaite was almost certainly a memory of the century of partition when the Lucys' share of the forest was known as the 'manor of Braithwaite': the holdings in Buttermere which paid walking silver to Braithwaite are thus to be identified as those which were part of the Lucy estate. The Percy Survey of 1578 specified that the 4 s.10d. was paid by the tenants of Buttermere village, while the 2s.7d. paid to the reeve of Buttermere came from Gatesgarth and the farms peripheral to the village: Wood House, Spout House, 'Sorekill bank', and Bowderbeck. This points to the conclusion that Buttermere village developed from a nucleus of settlement which existed by 1200, while the farms on the lower fellsides to the north and east probably represent colonisation in the century after 1215, much of it between the agreement of 1256 and the reunification of the estate in 1323.

In 1578 there were thirteen tenants in Buttermere village. As Table A.1 shows, an analysis of the rents paid for those holdings in 1578 and 1547 suggests that the thirteen were the result of subdivision from eight basic units, but it is impossible to know over what timespan the subdivisions took place. In 1578 each holding in the

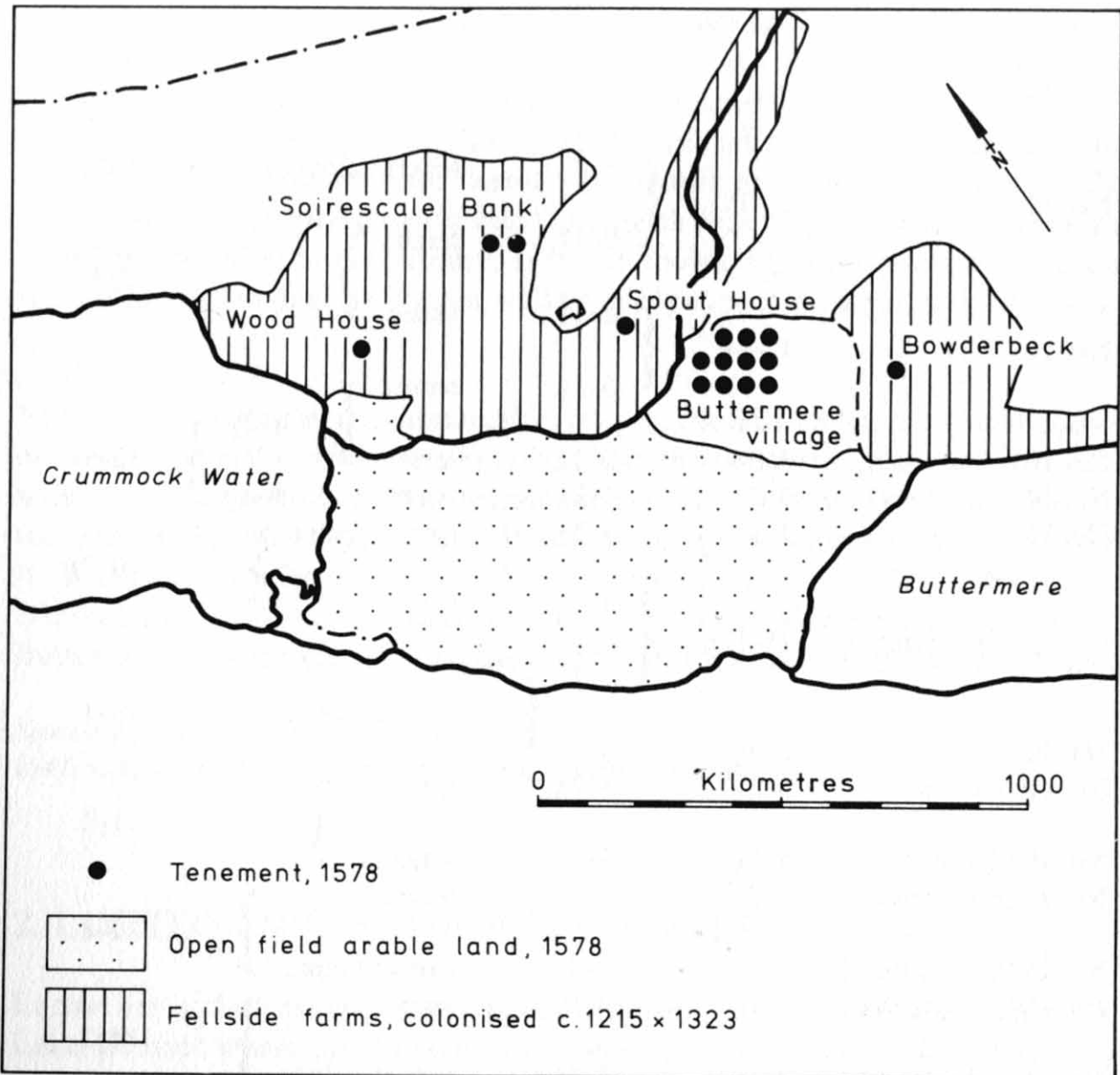


Figure 32. Buttermere: the medieval landscape.

village consisted largely of open-field arable and meadow on the flat valley floor between the lakes: Nether or Lower Field consisted of forty customary acres (*c.*64 statute acres) in which every village holding had a share; Over Field, totalling $20\frac{1}{2}$ customary acres (*c.*33 statute acres) was shared by all but two holdings; and the four holdings at 'Yate' also shared two smaller fields, Scarr Field and Drigg Garwick.

In contrast to the village farms, the peripheral holdings consisted largely of closes in 1578. Only Bowderbeck held a quarter share in 'Hassenesse and Grennesse', a lakeside enclosure of which the tenants of Gatesgarth held the other three shares. The other peripheral farms were Spout House, which appears to have included the tongue of enclosures up the Sail Beck valley; Wood House, a ring-fenced holding on the shore of Crummock Water; and 'Sorekill' or 'Soirescail' Bank, a pair of half-tenements, possibly represented by the nineteenth-century farm of High House.

Table A.1: Buttermere Village: Analysis of Rents, 1547 and 1578

1578 Holding	Rent s d	Rent s d	1547 Holding	Basic Rent Unit? s d
No. 12	17-1½	{ 8-8½ 8-4¾	tenmt., Hollegarthe	8-8½
No. 15	11-6½		tenmt. }	16-9½
No. 18	3-2½	{ 8-4¾ 3-1¼	tenmt. }	6-2½
No. 14	6-2½		tenmt. }	
No. 13	5-4	5-3¾	part of tenmt. }	12-5
No. 10 (two tenmts.)	11-10¼	{ 5-3¾ 6-7	tenmt. }	
No. 26	6-6½		6-7	13s-1d: tenmt.
No. 27 (½ tenmt.)	5-7½	5-7½	½ tenmt. }	11-3
No. 28 (½ tenmt.)	5-7½	5-7½		
No. 22 (½ + ¼ tenmt.)	7-2	7-2	tenmt. }	14-4
No. 23 (½ + ¼ tenmt.)	7-2	7-2	part of tenmt. }	
No. 24 (½ + ¼ tenmt.)	7-1½	7-1½	tenmt. }	14-3
No. 25 (½ + ¼ tenmt.)	7-1½	7-1½	part of tenmt. }	

b. Gatesgarth

The area at the head of the valley was retained as a demesne forest pasture, valued in 1259 at 10s, when it was said to be capable of supporting sixty cows and their offspring (P.R.O., SC11/730, m.1v.). By 1267 Gatesgarth was a vaccary belonging to the countess of Aumâle and it remained in demesne, managed by the countess' officials, until her death in 1293. As well as the vaccary buildings, which housed the herd of forty milk cows in winter, the dalehead contained enclosed meadows and a 'park' (P.R.O., SC6/824/7-14). By 1310 the vaccary had been let to tenants at will, an annual rent of £4 being paid for the 'pasture' of Gatesgarth (P.R.O., E199/7/3). By the sixteenth century there were three holdings there, all held by members of the Hudson family and displaying a regularity of rent suggestive of planned subdivision either by seigniorial decree or as a result of partible inheritance. As well as the core of land at the dalehead, the farms at Gatesgarth also included shares in the lakeside close called 'Hassensse and Grennesse' and land south-west of the lake called Birkness Field, which was in the manor of Loweswater.

The early history of Gatesgarth Side, the huge enclosure on the slopes of Robinson, is probably related to the area's history as a vaccary. It may represent the 'forest of Gatesgarth', the boundary of which was given in 1578 from a perambulation made in 1489, though few points on the boundary can now be identified. The use of the term 'forest' presumably preserves the memory of the area's status as demesne pasture, and Gatesgarth Side may perhaps represent the 'park' associated with the vaccary. It is not known when the present boundary round Gatesgarth Side, a drystone wall probably of post-medieval date, was built.

c. Blake Rigg

Blake Rigg is a tongue of mountainside, deep in the fells, between two tributaries of Sail Beck at NY 18 18. It was described in 1578 as a pasture close shared by nine tenants in the township, and the remains of an enclosing bank, faced with stone on the outer side, can be seen today. It was described as 'newly enclosed' in 1568 (C.R.O., D/Lec/299, court bk. 1567-9, Derwentfells ct., 17 Nov. 1568, Peill v Dixon) and seems to have been a communal undertaking by seven tenants in Buttermere village together with the tenants of Spout House and Wood House.

Sources not cited in text:

1547: C.R.O., D/Lec/314/38; 1578: Percy Survey, ff.170-2.

2. LORTON [NY 12]. See Figures 33 and 34

Lorton lies within the bounds of Derwentfells forest, on the north-west edge of the Lake District where the Cocker valley widens as it enters the lowlands. The township's total acreage of 5,317 acres (2,152 ha.) included 3,867 acres (1,565 ha.) of upland wastes which were enclosed in 1835 (C.R.O., QRE/1/55). The settled area in the valleys of the Cocker and its tributary, the Whit beck, contained two contrasting land types, the almost flat valley bottom with gravelly soils developed on a pro-glacial lake bed, and the lower slopes of the fellsides with mixed soils derived from glacial and fluvio-glacial tills. The human landscape reflects these physical differences: in the nineteenth century the valley floor contained the two linear villages of High and Low Lorton, between and to the south of which the fields were typically narrow, strip-like enclosures. In contrast, the lower fellsides were dotted with a series of small hamlets and single farms set in a patchwork of small, irregularly-shaped fields.

Lorton appears to have been a core of early settlement in the forest. Its name, thought to embody a Norwegian stream-name, probably dates from the period of Scandinavian settlement in the tenth or eleventh century (*P-N Cumb.*, ii. 408). By the end of the thirteenth century the township contained a number of freehold estates as well as land held directly from the lords of the honour of Cockermouth, the mixture of tenures being reflected in the fairly complex settlement pattern described above.