

THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD

RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

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Introduction

Early medieval studies in the North West

Whilst superficially a little studied period, at least in formal archaeological terms, there are a relatively large number of works covering the period in the North West. Both Lancashire and Cheshire have volumes in *The Origins* series (Kenyon 1991; Higham 1993) and a more general volume in the *Regional History of England* series has also been produced for the North (Higham 1986). In addition, county summaries for the period have been produced in the last 20 years or so for Cheshire (as part of the *Victoria History of the counties of England* series (Thacker 1987)), Merseyside (O'Hanlon 1986), with a further summary specific to the Wirral (Chitty 1978), Greater Manchester (Holdsworth 1983), and Lancashire (Garstang 1906; Kenyon 1991; Newman 1996), although no such work has synthesised the evidence for Cumbria. Full publication of the early medieval sculptural material is now in progress. A comprehensive illustrated *Corpus* has been produced for Cumbria (Bailey and Cramp 1988); pending completion of a similar volume for the rest of the region, there are good handlists available for both Cheshire and the ancient county of Lancashire by Thacker (1987) and Edwards (1978). Recent general surveys, setting these monuments in their context and explaining their chronology, include work by Bailey (1980; 1984) and Lang (1988); more specifically focussed on material from the southern part of the region is a paper by Bailey (2003). In addition, two works by Edwards (1992; 1998) have summarised the evidence for Viking activity in the region.

Background

One of the greatest challenges facing those attempting to interpret the early medieval period in the North West is the evidence, or lack of it, currently available. As N.J. Higham has said (1986, 242-3), 'the end of the artificial, Roman, economy has deprived the archaeologist of diagnostic, artefactual evidence on all but a small minority of sites, and has left us dangerously dependent on documentary sources, the interpretation of which is unusually difficult . . . To set beside these [few] sources are a handful of inscriptions and a very limited amount of archaeological evidence, much of which is of questionable value if only because of chronological imprecision'.

Traditionally, historians and archaeologists have used these scanty documentary sources, the much larger corpus of place-names, and the slender archaeological evidence to divide the period into three broad phases, each lasting approximately 200 years. Firstly, in the fifth and sixth centuries, following the withdrawal of Roman governance, it seems that the region fragmented into a number of small kingdoms. Whilst there is perhaps some indication that these were beginning to coalesce into larger polities, the major changing force was that, during the seventh century, these became subsumed within the rapidly expanding Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the majority of the region becoming part of Northumbria, and most of Cheshire being subsumed by Mercia. By the end of that century, however, the Mersey seems to have been largely accepted as the border between the two. Northumbria's decline from political eminence from the later eighth century left a power vacuum, and from then onwards, until the Norman Conquest and beyond, the region appears to have remained politically unstable, and subject to external pressures, both from the south, north, and beyond the seas. It seems that the pressure from Scandinavians and Hiberno-Norse and, at least in the south of

the region, from Danish influences from the east acted as the catalyst for this instability, but by the early tenth century, pressure also came from the expanding English kingdoms, firstly from Mercia but more importantly from Wessex. There Alfred, having recovered his kingdom from the onslaught of Danish armies, established the dominance which led to his successors becoming the first lords of a genuinely united England. Intervention from the north came firstly from Strathclyde, which penetrated far into Cumbria, and then from the growing unity of the Scottish kingdom, and this had a direct influence on the region until the mid twelfth century, and less directly throughout the rest of the medieval period. Whilst the southern part of the region was incorporated into the newly conquered kingdom of William I in 1066, the land that subsequently became Westmorland formed the frontier in the later eleventh century, and Cumberland first came under Norman rule in 1092, when William Rufus took Carlisle (Earle and Plummer 1892). Indeed, the northern part of modern Cumbria only fully became part of the English realm after 1157, when Henry II established a number of powerful landholdings to secure the Scottish border (Kapelle 1979).

It is clear from the growing corpus of archaeological information that has been identified in the last few years that the broad historical chronology outlined above is much harder to identify on the ground than might have been expected some 25 years ago, when the historical narrative was just about all there was. At that time, the only evidence for the period consisted of randomly recorded and largely unstratified finds, often found more than a century ago and recorded in antiquarian literature. The county Sites and Monuments Records still suffer from the legacy of these records, so that any attempt to quantify the amount of known early medieval activity using them is likely to be wildly inaccurate. Indeed, it is perhaps remarkable to note that it is only really since the 1970s that sites, other than burials, that are firmly associated with the early medieval period in the North West have begun to be identified, often during the excavation of sites of other periods. Even though the sites concerned can be counted on the fingers of two hands, however, it is true to say that our ideas about the period have been revolutionised as a result of this work. In addition, the linking of palaeoecological studies with archaeology, on conventional archaeological sites, and also the realisation that the study of the vast resources of peat within the region can expand our understanding of the past exponentially, has provided a whole new view of the period. In particular it has started to remove a dependence on scanty cultural indicators in favour of more use of absolute dating, primarily through radiocarbon assay. Unsurprisingly, this has demonstrated that there was quite extensive early medieval activity which had previously simply not been recognised.

The challenges experienced by students of this period are in many ways, however, common to all archaeologists in the North West. Whilst the interests of antiquarians were not centred on the early medieval period, but on the far larger and more visible monuments of the prehistoric period and the Roman army, the challenge of modern development-led work is to employ methods to recognise sites that do not have an abundance of associated material culture, an issue relevant for rural sites of most pre-industrial periods in the region. The related issue of site visibility, particularly in the lowlands, stems from the geological complexity of post-glacial deposits and relatively non-intensive land-use in the present day and is discussed above (p. **).

Environment

Whilst the evidence for the environment and the landscape in the early medieval period is not without some bias, since much of the lowland peat with evidence for this period has been removed by cutting over the last 1000 years or so, enough survives to give at least a sub-regional picture. Many peat deposits have suffered from oxygenation as well as truncation, but deposits with good pollen preservation spanning the late Holocene do exist in north-west England (see for instance Hughes *et al* 2000). The current paucity of knowledge is due largely to the poor chronological control of analysed sequences, though new well-dated palaeoecological work is beginning to highlight activity in the early medieval period (for instance, Coombes 2003; Wimble *et al* 2000; Wells *et al* 1997; MacKay and Tallis 1994). In addition, the palaeoecological records from lake basins, such as Coniston Water, Cumbria

(Pennington 1997, 48-50), and from marginal lake deposits (for instance, Littlewater (C); LUAU 2000), help to redress this problem of the diminishing peat resource in the lowlands. The pollen derived from these sources may originate from both atmospheric and alluvial deposition, however, and thus come from a wide catchment area.

Before the advent of radiocarbon dating programmes, changes recognised in the palaeoecological record were largely linked to the past through known historical events. For example it was presumed that large-scale woodland clearances were linked to the coming of the Romans, and any subsequent regeneration was an artefact of the collapse of Roman rule. Over the last 20 years or so, this has been shown to be an over-simplification of the situation, and where radiocarbon dating of the onset of woodland regeneration has been undertaken, it has been shown to have occurred, not in the fourth or even the fifth century, but in the sixth. The palynological evidence throughout the region does not show a consistent pattern, however. Whilst such regeneration is recorded at sites throughout the North West, there are also several sites in Cumbria where the landscape seems to have remained open; indeed, Walker (1966) argued that the period after AD 400 witnessed the first 'permanent' and vigorous clearance of much of the Lake District. Some evidence for clearance activity also exists, as well as agricultural indicators, within the early medieval period as a whole (for instance, at Ehenside Tarn, Walker 2001; at Coniston, Pennington 1997 (where the episode is dated to between cal AD 660-880 (1270±50 BP; SRR-1871) and cal AD 780-1020 (1110±60 BP; SRR-1870)); at Littlewater, LUAU 2000; at Glasson Moss, Cox *et al* 2000). In southern Cumbria, two phases of increased woodland clearance have been noted (Wimble *et al* 2000), although it is unfortunate that these have been equated with events in a pseudo-historical manner. Synthesis of this data is, however, in its infancy and as yet neither regional differences, nor what the more complex picture now revealed really means in human terms, has been established.

Dendrochronological dating for the period is almost non-existent in the region, with the exception of material from Carlisle. Whilst far less abundant there than for the early Roman period, nevertheless three dates have been recovered. A post from a well at Blackfriars Street (McCarthy 1990, 72) produced a date of AD 633, which suggested that the tree had been felled after AD 655. Additionally, a timber-lined pit at Castle Street provided a felling date of AD 770-803 (McCarthy 1991, 49) and another in the Southern Lanes contained a re-used timber with a felling date of AD 771-816 (McCarthy 2000, 69).

It seems that, at least in parts of the region, relative sea levels had more or less stabilised by the early medieval period (Plater 2004), although areas such as Morecambe Bay and the Sefton coast were susceptible to local changes in geomorphology. Proxy climatic data from Bolton Fell Moss suggest there was a brief downturn in the climate at *c* cal AD 714-980 (1170±50 BP; Hv-33594; Barber 1981, 115), but in general the warmer, drier conditions of the Romano-British period continued throughout the medieval warm epoch (Hodgkinson *et al* 2000). In Cumbria and north Lancashire, work has indicated that there were periods of increased rainfall and/or decreased air temperatures *c* AD 450 and again around AD 800-1000 (Chiverell and Innes 2004). These periods of wetter and/or cooler weather would have had implications for landuse, in particular for the reliability and productivity of crops. They would also have exacerbated any potential for soil erosion caused by vegetation clearance or ploughing. Such erosion has been identified in upland areas (Cundill 2000; Harvey and Renwick 1987; Harvey and Chiverrell 2004), which has been suggested to date from the later part of the early medieval period, although it could easily have extended into the medieval period, given the wide date range produced by radiocarbon evidence. Indeed, in the Lake District, erosion that by analogy had been suggested to have occurred in the early medieval period was recently dated to several hundred years later (Wild *et al* 2001).

Settlement and Landuse

There are still few traces that can give an idea of early medieval settlement in the region, although recent work has begun to transform the picture to allow a clearer view, at least in

Cumbria and Merseyside. Nevertheless, the general pattern of settlement from the seventh century onwards is still largely predicted from place-name evidence (Armstrong *et al* 1950; Smith 1967; Ekwall 1922; Dodgson 1970a; 1970b; 1971; 1972; 1981; Fellows-Jensen 1983; 1985). This has been proven increasingly to be an unreliable form of evidence when used in isolation and the traditional view of place-names equating to the settlement of people is considered to be over-simplistic (Roberts 1989-90). It is clear, for instance, that names with the Old Norse stem *-by* were still being given, probably in the twelfth century, in the Carlisle area, where land was being parcelled out to the followers of William Rufus (Earle and Plummer 1892). Similarly, whilst the place-name 'scales', denoting shieling sites, is of Scandinavian derivation, the lack of hard archaeological evidence for an early medieval origin for transhumance in the uplands, so much a facet of medieval society, coupled with the clear continuing use of a dialect including Scandinavian elements to the present day, means that the period of origin for this activity is unclear. Despite this *caveat*, place-names remain an important tool for indicating particular types of settlement, such as those elements from the British, Old English, and Old Norse referring to church sites (*eccles*, *cherch*, *kirk*; Kenyon 1991), or the *burh* place-names of Cheshire and the Mersey Valley (Thacker 1987). Clusters of Old English names, particularly of the *-ham* and *-tun* type, have been recognised, usually in areas of better agricultural quality, which suggest early foci, perhaps permanently cleared in the Roman or even the later prehistoric periods (Higham 2002).

Urban centres

As yet, no firm evidence for the continued formal occupation of towns has come to light, as seen, for instance, at Wroxeter (White and Barker 1998). Neither Chester (Carrington 1994) nor Carlisle (McCarthy 1993), the two significant urban centres of the region, has produced unequivocal evidence, nor centres such as Lancaster (Howard-Davis *et al* forthcoming), Ribchester or Manchester, which had developed through the Roman period as market centres. At Lancaster, evidence suggests a contraction of the extramural settlement from the mid-fourth century, with continued occupation only being evident in the Wery Wall fort and its immediate surrounds (Howard-Davis *et al* forthcoming). The name 'Carlisle' is significant in this context, with its *caer* prefix, and some findings there hint at continuing use of buildings in the town; indeed, the sequence of building at Blackfriars Street (McCarthy 1990) must have projected beyond the end of the fourth century. A gold *solidus* dating to AD 388-92, found in the underfloor heating ducts of a Roman house at 66-8 Scotch Street, also suggests use into the fifth century (McCarthy 1993), as does activity adjacent to the *principia* of the Roman fort, the latest phase of which post-dated at least two coins of AD 388-402 (Zant forthcoming). At Blackfriars Street, a sequence of features was identified cutting the latest Roman contexts, which did not respect earlier building and road alignments; a well at the end of this sequence produced a felling date of after AD 655. In addition, a small assemblage of material dating to the seventh to ninth centuries was recovered (McCarthy 1990). At Castle Street, to the west of the cathedral, a number of timber-lined pits dated to the late eighth or early ninth century (McCarthy 1993). These were not deep enough to have been wells, but may indicate some industrial purpose. Elsewhere in the city, as in Chester and Lancaster too, the ubiquitous dark earth is widespread, although how this should be interpreted is still widely debated. In Carlisle, for instance, the dark earth in Keays Lane contained a notable charcoal distribution and levels of phosphates and soluble organic matter that indicated faecal material (McPhail 1980). Elsewhere, there is some evidence for the bringing in, or removing, of soil, as in the south of the Carlisle fort (McHugh 1989) and on the edge of Roman Lancaster (Drury forthcoming). Logic also demands an acknowledgement that surviving Roman structures, still visible in the medieval period and even today, such as the fort defences at Chester and, to a certain extent, at Carlisle (Zant forthcoming), and the Wery Wall at Lancaster, were both important and utilised parts of the urban landscape in the early medieval period.

Evidence from Chester increasingly points to its urban renaissance from the tenth century onwards, following the establishment of a Mercian burh there in AD 907 (Carrington 1994). Some evidence exists however, at the site of 25 Bridge Street, for activity pre-dating this, with radiocarbon dates indicating activity from perhaps as early as the later eighth century onwards

(D Garner pers. comm.). Occupation has been found widely across the site of the Roman fort, apart from its north-western corner, and to its south, centred on Lower Bridge Street (Mason 1985). Elements of several buildings of the period have been excavated, all of timber, including hall-type structures, as at Hunter's Walk and Crook Street, which are the largest buildings found to date, whilst others had cellars, such as those in Lower Bridge Street. Other buildings were partly sunken, with the main floors below ground level, such as others found in Lower Bridge Street and Hamilton Place (Carrington 1994). This latter building technique (together with other evidence) has led to the suggestion that there was a considerable population of Anglo-Scandinavians in the city. Elsewhere in the region, the development of urbanism is clearly a product of the late twelfth or thirteenth century, although a coin of William Rufus has been recovered from the top of the dark earth immediately to the south of the medieval castle in Carlisle (Zant forthcoming) and the morphology of Penrith might suggest an earlier progeniture (Winchester 1987, 124). The limited archaeological excavations so far undertaken within that town have failed to yield any evidence for this, however (Newman *et al* 2000).

Forts

The excavations at the Roman fort of Birdoswald (Wilmott 1997) have transformed our view of the earliest years of the period, completely overturning the traditional view of the end of Roman Britain. There, the concept of the Romans themselves becoming different without knowing it, as Dio Cassius (Cary and Foster 1969) said of the peoples being incorporated within the Empire, has been elegantly demonstrated, although a considerable change in the construction techniques and styles used in building was recorded. Perhaps most importantly, the excavations have led to a model being formulated to explain how at least some of the war bands of the fifth and sixth centuries recorded in historical sources may have come into existence. Evidence was recovered of the continuity of a military force of some sort from the Roman *limitanei* onwards, until, perhaps, the sixth century. This evidence took the form of large, hall-like half-timber and timber structures, built out of, and on, the decaying remains of the fort's granaries. Dating is dependent on a worn coin of Theodosius, and a few pieces of jewellery, but the sequence is sufficiently long to imply extended occupation that, whilst subtly changing, nevertheless indicates a continuity of attitude. The buildings respected the fort layout, but reflect changes such as the narrowing of the eastern and western gates, and in form are unlike Roman structures, rather having parallels in the British tradition seen to the north of Hadrian's Wall, for instance, at Doon Hill (Reynolds 1980). They seem to have been built of crucks, placed on post pads. Other smaller but associated structures utilised postholes, and subsequently were of slot-construction, butting against the west wall of the fort. In the same context, the structures immediately outside the fort at Castlefield in Manchester should perhaps be mentioned (Holdsworth 1983), although their interpretation and dating remain problematic.

Rural settlement

In the rural hinterland, there is some evidence to suggest that the typical Romano-British farmsteads continued. The collapse of the Roman bulk trade meant that the flow of 'exotics' (i.e. cultural material identifiable as Roman) ceased by the beginning of the fifth century, and thus there is little other than absolute dating to provide a continuing chronology for these sites. Unfortunately, the vast majority of excavated rural sites were examined more than 40 years ago. Thus, few have been radiocarbon dated, and their chronologies are dependent on finds alone. The presence of sometimes only a single sherd of Roman pottery has led in the past to the dating of all activity to the Roman period, although as long ago as 1933 R.G. Collingwood noted the problems of dating such sites in this manner. Most of the recognised examples are situated in the uplands, surviving as upstanding earthworks, and were clearly originally of stone, potentially of durable and long-lived construction. The vast majority of these structures have not, however, been excavated and are listed either as Romano-British, on typological and analogous grounds, or are simply given an 'unknown' classification within the county SMRs. This whole issue has been given extra weight recently, by a radiocarbon date of the eighth to tenth centuries for an apparent reoccupation of a Romano-British site adjacent to Lancaster University (J. Quartermaine pers. comm.).

Recently findings from three sites in Cumbria excavated in advance of development suggest that there was a parallel or slightly later tradition of rectangular buildings in a rural context. This would support the supposition of Higham (1979a; 2004) that a large structure on the limestone uplands of Orton Scar, with passing similarities to Ribbleshead (King 1978; 2004), may be of early medieval date. The most secure of the recently excavated examples is at Fremington (C), just to the east of the Roman fort at Brougham and adjacent to the road over Stainmore (Oliver *et al* 1996), where four sunken featured buildings were identified in 1991, during pipeline construction. These are the first and only *grubenhauser* from a rural context in the region, with clear parallels from the east of the country, despite the fact that the majority of material within their backfills was Roman. They were, however, associated with diagnostic loomweights of seventh/eighth century date, and also a purse clasp, again diagnostic of the period, though a little later, was recovered from the ploughsoil. In addition, the *grubenhauser* were associated with a pit, apparently the remains of a kiln, filled with more than 100 sherds of crude handmade pottery, and the corner of what appeared to be a post-built rectangular hall-type structure. Neither the apparent size of this structure, nor its methods of construction, would be out of place in an early medieval context (James *et al* 1984). Subsequently, two other sites have produced similar rectangular, post-built structures, nearby, on the edge of the Whinfell Forest, and on the outskirts of Shap village (Heawood and Howard-Davis 2002). The former can only be tentatively dated by analogy, but the latter was also associated with three loomweights, which could be regarded as forms intermediate between annular and bun-shaped examples of early medieval date; few other diagnostic artefacts, other than a single sherd of abraded, possibly Romano-British pottery and a less badly damaged sherd of medieval incompletely reduced green-glazed ware, were recovered.

A tradition of stone building seems to have continued in the uplands from the Romano-British period onwards. Evidence of rectangular stone-founded buildings has been identified, as at Bryant's Gill, in upper Kentmere (C), where a 10m long sub-rectangular stone-founded structure was excavated in the 1980s (Dickinson 1985), producing diagnostic spindle whorls, as well as whetstones and some ironwork, and iron-working slag. It also produced three radiocarbon dates, giving evidence of occupation of the settlement in the seventh to tenth centuries (cal AD 619-875; 1320±60 BP; RCD-434; cal AD 654-976; 1250±80 BP; HAR-5944; cal AD 691-997; 1170±70 BP; HAR-8067), and may thus represent a class of early medieval stone-built upland settlements with parallels at Ribbleshead (King 1978; 2004), just into North Yorkshire, and Simy Folds, in upper Teesdale (Coggins *et al* 1983; 2004).

In the agriculturally richer lowlands, timber structures have been recognised, often on multi-period sites, as at Tatton (Ch) (Higham 2000), and Irby (M) (Philpott and Adams forthcoming). There, buildings that could be described as hall-type structures have been excavated, and both seem to have evidence for more than a single phase of activity that might be attributed to the early medieval period. At Tatton, a possible palisaded enclosure associated with the remains of a timber hall and ancillary building, storage pits, a possible threshing floor, and a cobbled surface was interpreted from its position in the archaeological sequence as sub-Roman; an associated radiocarbon assay gave a date of cal AD 130-610 (1660±90 BP; HAR-5715). The presence of rotary querns, when added to the structural evidence, led Higham to suggest a site of some status, where the products of a mixed agricultural economy were processed, stored, and consumed (Higham and Cane 1999). A later phase, seemingly after an hiatus, but arguably before the Norman Conquest, given the presence of a single sherd of Chester ware, produced evidence of a timber-framed posthole building, *c* 14.4m long by 4.6m wide, with an internal hearth. It should perhaps be noted that this formed the beginning of a sequence of unbroken occupation that stretched through much of the medieval period, to at least the later fourteenth century (Higham 2000; 2004).

Similarly, in Greater Manchester, a scatter of postholes was identified below the medieval moated site of Timperley Old Hall, in Trafford (Nevell 1997). Whilst the precise nature of the activity remains uncharacterised, the postholes were associated with a fenceline and a hearth, which produced a radiocarbon date of the eighth to ninth century, strongly suggesting an early

medieval precursor to the twelfth century manorial site. Elsewhere in Cheshire, evidence is restricted to a small number of sites, such as Grange Cow Worth, near Ellesmere Port, where a residual sherd of Chester ware provides some evidence of activity (Brotherton-Radcliffe 1975). To date, no such settlements have been identified in the post-1974 county of Lancashire.

At Irby, in the Wirral, a sequence of activity has been recognised post-dating the Romano-British activity there, apparently following a period of abandonment (Philpott and Adams forthcoming). The earliest was represented by three probably elliptical, or bow-sided, buildings, clearly later than ditches filled in the fourth century and third to fourth century roundhouses, followed by more amorphous activity that also clearly cut late Roman layers. Later still, a further building was constructed in a different manner, comprising a rock-cut foundation slot with clay packing at its base. This contained a Saxo-Norman spike lamp of tenth to twelfth century date. On analogy, it is unlikely that this sequence of activity encompassed the entire early medieval period, but is probably concentrated from the ninth/tenth century onwards.

At Hoylake Road, Moreton, also in the Wirral, three superimposed timber buildings were found within an enclosure, the ditch of which had been recut three times; a structure within an enclosure was a feature also seen at Tatton (Higham and Cane 1999). Whilst finds were inevitably extremely scarce at Moreton, a unique tenth-century coin came from the upper fill of the enclosure ditch (Philpott 1990), and a hone of possible early medieval date was also recovered. Whilst no unequivocally earlier phase of occupation was identified, a small assemblage of Roman material was also recovered. A possibly similar settlement has been examined at Court Farm, Halewood (M), where a significant Romano-British settlement seems to have been superseded by a possible enclosure, which in turn was cut by a series of pits. A wooden stake within one of the pits yielded a radiocarbon date of cal AD 680-980 (1210±60 BP; Beta-108098; Adams and Philpott forthcoming).

It seems that the early medieval activity at Fremington (Oliver *et al* 1996) and at a site at Telegraph Road, Irby, Wirral (Philpott and Cowell 1992), represented shifting settlement from a Roman focus, perhaps indicating a strong measure of continuity of landuse from the Romano-British to the early medieval period, at least in these richer agricultural lands. In addition, stray finds, particularly in Cheshire and the Wirral, display a consistent pattern of discovery close to Romano-British sites or to concentrations of finds of the same date (Philpott 1999). Where there is evidence for an hiatus in activity on a particular site, as at Irby (Philpott and Adams forthcoming) and Tatton (Higham 2000), the question occurs as to whether such reoccupation was for the purely practical reasons that had led to the original settlements: good, free-draining soils with a nearby water source, or whether it could represent a deliberate statement of land ownership, visibly superseding the previous, albeit abandoned, settlement (Philpott and Adams forthcoming).

Landuse

At present, the dataset is so small that little analysis of the landscape and territories of the early medieval North West can be undertaken, beyond the evidence that place-names can provide. However, the tantalising prospect has been held out, particularly in the south of the region, of the continuity of boundaries as visible features in the landscape. At Alderley Edge (Ch), for instance, a bank and ditch, marking the former boundary between two townships, was certainly in existence by the fourteenth century, and may well have been in existence by Domesday (J. Prag pers. comm.), and this sealed a buried soil producing evidence for iron working (Gifford and Partners 2002). In addition, Philpott (1999) has pointed to the evidence of settlement drift (as defined by Taylor 1983, 104), perhaps indicating that the estates within which the settlements were established remained static themselves, and thus the boundaries of such land units are of ancient origin, particularly where they are marked by natural features (e.g. Higham 1979b; Cowell and Innes 1994). It is also becoming increasingly clear that the nascent parish structure can be defined before the Norman Conquest, particularly in the south

of the region, where the more prevalent documentary sources give weight to the visual evidence (Higham 2002).

Recent work to the north of the Mersey has begun to reveal traces of early foci in the modern landscape, suggesting that, in some instances, the outlines of early land enclosures may have become fossilised in the modern field pattern (Cowell and Philpott 2000). Whilst such features are by their very nature extremely difficult to date, being recognised on morphological grounds, they are likely to represent the first attempts at landscape enclosure. Such enclosures are usually oval in shape and may extend over several hectares, parallels having been identified in Cheshire (Sylvester 1956; Roberts and Wrathmell 2002), Lancashire (Atkin 1985), and southern Cumbria (Atkin 1993). Sylvester (1956) noted that two adjacent oval enclosures in the Hunsterson township of Wybunbury (Ch) appeared to have defined the extent of the township's arable land in the medieval period. Higham (1986) has suggested that a number of embanked enclosures that are linked to distinctive Brittonic names, such as Castle Carrock (C), may be evidence of influences from Strathclyde in the tenth century. The lack of any excavation, however, means that this hypothesis has not, as yet, been tested.

Little evidence has to date been produced for agricultural practices in the period in the North West, although most sites where the preservation allows have produced evidence for grain consumption (bread or club wheat, barley, oats and rye), and peas and beans appear more commonly than in previous eras. The only structural evidence to date, however, is a potential drying kiln found above a Bronze Age cemetery at Ewanrigg (C) which has produced radiocarbon dating of *c.* cal AD 790-900 (Huntley 1995). Whilst cereal pollen is not particularly prevalent in pollen diagrams, it is regularly present in small quantities, and it seems likely that mixed arable and pastoral farming was being undertaken throughout the region, although the balance between them is likely to have differed radically between the richer soils of the lowlands and the upland fells. The presence of oats may hint at a regional bias, and may relate to a mix of climatic and cultural factors, although the number of sites, the number of samples taken, and the volume of sediment processed are extremely small and thus the data cannot be assumed to be representative (Huntley and Stallibrass 1995). Animal bone samples are similarly small, with no rural assemblages, and only small samples from a few urban sites, although the amount of bone in the 'dark earth' over the fort at Carlisle should be noted (Zant forthcoming). The very small sample from Blackfriars Street, Carlisle, has indicated that a range of species was exploited, with domestic fowl and goose perhaps being more important than in earlier periods (Rackham 1990).

Whilst the ubiquitous cairnfields of the uplands of Cumbria are generally taken as being of Bronze Age date, excavation of a clearance cairn near Devoke Water has suggested that it continued to be added to in the early medieval period (Quartermaine and Leech forthcoming). There, evidence of two phases of cairn building were revealed, the initial cairn of large stones being supplemented by smaller stones, removed during the use of the surrounding area, which rolled down the cairn, forming a tongue to the north-east, implying that the area being cultivated was also in that direction. Radiocarbon dating of material taken from the buried soil horizon beneath the smaller stones of the cairn provided dates of cal AD 662-979 (1230±70 BP; CAR-911) and cal AD 977-1229 (970±60 BP; CAR-911).

Four pit alignments, excavated in advance of construction of the second runway at Manchester Airport, seem to represent lines of trees, the pits being formed by wind-blown tree loss. The alignments suggest some management of these trees, and they perhaps defined small fields with dimensions of some 10-30m by at least 65m (Garner forthcoming). Radiocarbon dating of charcoal from pits in three of the alignments produced calibrated dates in the fifth to seventh centuries, and the tenth to thirteenth centuries.

Ritual, Religion and Ceremony

When thinking of the early medieval period in the North West, the mind is perhaps still most naturally drawn to Christian sites, as it is here that the picture of activity in the region is

perhaps the most complete. It is generally assumed that a Christian population survived in sub-Roman Britain, but this remains largely archaeologically invisible, and the evidence continues to be debated, depending largely on later (although still early medieval) documentary sources, and a small corpus of material. This has been documented by Thomas (1971).

A single possible specific site from the earlier part of the period is known in Cumbria, at Ninekirks, east of Brougham. Significantly close to a Roman road, nineteenth century renovations to the church produced several skeletons, one in a stone cist, accompanied by a silver-gilt cup mount that has been dated to the eighth century (Bailey 1977a). Although considerably later than the sub-Roman period, this does at least indicate activity on the site in the early medieval period. Aerial photography has revealed an unusual ditched enclosure surrounding the present church, and Loveluck suggests that an early Christian focus at Ninekirks may have supplanted a Celtic and Roman cult centre to Belatucadrus at Brougham (Loveluck 2002, 144). A very few burials, again in Cumbria, may be associated with this period, although none have been securely dated: isolated cists at Beckfoot and Ravenglass (significantly, perhaps, both the sites of Roman forts); a long-cist from beneath the nave of Kirkby Stephen church; a possible short cist cemetery at Moresby (again, a Roman military site); and a row of oriented burials at Roosebeck, near Barrow-in-Furness, found during agricultural activity, with another near Carnforth, Lancashire (O'Sullivan 1985). In addition, an extensive and oriented cemetery at Southworth Hall Farm, Winwick, in northern Cheshire (Freke and Thacker 1987), seemed to focus on a Bronze Age burial mound, a feature seen elsewhere in the early medieval period (Williams 1997). There, over 800 apparently Christian graves, since there was a complete lack of grave goods, were excavated in an area of 0.12ha, their spatial distribution perhaps suggesting the presence of a building amongst them.

A very few potentially pagan Anglian burials have been recognised; for instance, two urns, presumably from pagan 'Anglo-Saxon' burials, have been found at Red Bank, Manchester (Holdsworth 1983) and near the river Ribble (L) (Myres 1969). Very recently, skeletons from Heronbridge (Ch) have been subject to radiocarbon assay and provided dates of *c.* AD 430-640 and *c.* AD 530-660 (D. Mason pers. comm.). Three further tantalising sites have been identified in the region. A log coffin from the Quernmore area (L) was made from two pieces of oak from the same tree, dated to between the sixth and tenth centuries (Edwards 1973), and what seems to have been deliberately placed heads and front feet of two or more cattle were found in Solway Moss (C) during peat cutting (Hodgkinson *et al* 2000). These have been dated to the later seventh to eleventh centuries, and seem to represent some survival of pagan tradition, perhaps propitiating a water deity. Lastly, material from the Roman and early medieval periods has been recovered, along with human remains, from the Dog Hole, Haverbrack (C) (Benson and Bland 1963), although the precise circumstances of deposition have not been established.

There is also some tentative evidence for the re-use of earlier burial mounds, perhaps from both the periods of conversion of pagan peoples to Christianity in the sixth and late ninth/tenth centuries. This is particularly the case in Lancashire and Cumbria, where such activity is found exclusively in the east of the county, in the upper Eden valley, such as in the vicinity of Crosby Garrett (C), most re-using prehistoric burial mounds (O'Sullivan 1985; Loveluck 2002). A further possible example has been identified at Hardendale (C), where an early medieval strap end was recovered from a Bronze Age cairn (Howard-Davis and Williams forthcoming). Excavation of a barrow at Withington, to the west of Macclesfield (Ch), also revealed an isolated fragmentary inhumation burial immediately to the south-east of the mound, which produced a radiocarbon date of the later sixth to eighth century (Wilson 1981).

It is, however, the quality and scale of early medieval Christian stone sculpture that marks the region out and gives a firm indicator of the pattern of churches in the early medieval landscape, although this pattern cannot be seen as absolutely complete. The sculpture clearly indicates the development of church sites, and their continued use, since the vast majority of

sites producing Northumbrian work have also produced Scandinavian examples as for instance, at Dacre (C) and Workington (C) and Halton (L). The number of inscriptions associated with Northumbrian material has led to the view that much of this material was produced in a monastic context, a view supported by documentary evidence at sites such as Dacre (Newman and Leech forthcoming), and by the inclusion of a sun dial on the Bewcastle cross (C), although it would be imprudent to suggest that any Northumbrian sculpture must indicate a monastic site.

English stone sculpture was an art form which arrived with Christianity, the earliest examples in the region being Northumbrian and dating to the eighth century (for instance, the Bewcastle cross; Bailey and Cramp 1988). Geological and art-historical evidence shows that the surviving crosses, slabs, tomb-covers and architectural fragments were usually produced in the immediate locality to that in which they are now found. Unlike more mobile forms of art, such as metalwork and manuscripts, sculpture therefore provides an unambiguous index of changing local tastes and thus of the economic, social and political influences which shaped them. Since most of these carvings are in parish churches or churchyards they have the additional importance of providing the most accessible form of early medieval art. Within the region there are monuments of national, indeed European, importance, e.g. Sandbach in Cheshire (Hawkes 2002) and Bewcastle, Irton and Gosforth in Cumbria (Bailey and Cramp 1988), but there are also several hundred other fragments, still in their original sites, which provide vital evidence for regional history at a period when documentary sources are so rare.

Pending final completion of a complete corpus of material in Lancashire and Cheshire, an interim survey suggests that there are some 29 sites yielding pre-Norman sculpture in Lancashire, 30 in Cheshire, and 36 in Cumbria. The number of monuments in the region totals about 320 pieces. The potential for further discoveries, however, has been dramatically illustrated by finds during excavation work, as yet unpublished, at the church of St Michael, Workington, that followed a disastrous fire in 1994; there the number of known monuments rose from 8 to 28.

The carvings are not equally distributed across time and space. Work which can be assigned to the Anglian (pre-Viking) period of the eighth and ninth centuries is relatively rare as compared with material from the later pre-Norman centuries. Thus in Cumbria there are 20 sites with pre-Viking sculpture but at least 36 with carvings of tenth and eleventh-century date. More importantly, in the same area, there are only 28 sculptures from the earlier period to be set against 111 from the subsequent two centuries. Chances of survival cannot explain this discrepancy, which is repeated across the rest of Northumbria; rather it reflects the enthusiastic adoption of a once-monastic art form by the new aristocratic patrons of the Viking-age North West. As such it represents important evidence for cultural assimilation between the Christian Anglo-Saxon church and settlers who had no tradition of stone sculpture.

Pre-Viking sculpture is markedly limited in its geographical distribution. There is, first, a major gap between a series of sculptural sites in the Lune valley and scattered Cheshire carvings such as those at Sandbach and Overchurch. This gap seems to reflect a cultural and political divide across the region since it is clear that the animal art of these Cheshire monuments links southwards to Mercia whilst material from sites like Heysham (L), Lancaster, Halton (L) and Hornby (L) can be stylistically grouped with the Northumbrian carvings of Cumbria. North of the Lune the surviving Anglian carvings are concentrated in limited geographical areas: around Penrith, with the unique and significant outlier at Bewcastle; on the narrow coastal plain of Cumbria; in the Kent and Lune valleys. This pattern, which is not entirely explicable in terms of geology or our current understanding of economic power, may be related to particular kinds of monastic activity (Cambridge 1984).

Pre-Viking sculpture reflects the elaborate network of national and international contacts of the learned monastic world in which it was produced (Bailey 1996). Thus the vine scrolls of Lowther and Irton in Cumbria, of Lancaster and Heysham in Lancashire, are regional versions

of a theme which ultimately derives from the eastern Mediterranean (Bailey and Cramp 1988, 15-17). Similarly, an understanding of the iconography of crosses like those at Sandbach, Hornby and Bewcastle demands familiarity with the contemplative, often esoteric, approach embedded in the liturgy and the commentaries of the early Christian fathers which were central to monastic life (Hawkes 2002; O’Carragain 1987; Bailey 2003, 219-21).

The more numerous examples of carvings dating to the Viking period are more evenly distributed across the region. Of significance are those sites where there is still no evidence of sculptural continuity (Heversham (C) and Kendal provide classic examples) since this may be an indicator of social disruption in the late ninth and early tenth centuries; equally the emergence of Chester as a major centre of sculptural production in the tenth century reflects an important change from its earlier status and function. This period saw an increasing regionalisation of sculptural tastes consequent upon the political break-up of Northumbria and the destruction of the Anglian monastic network (Bu’Lock 1959; Bailey 1980, 176-206; Bailey and Cramp 1988, 33-40; Edwards 1998, 78-84). The whole area, from the Mersey to the Solway, then looked to the west and drew upon a common repertoire of Scandinavian-derived and regionally-developed motifs and forms. It is far from being uniform, though, in its selection from that repertoire. Strong Scandinavian influence is limited to areas on and north of the Lune, and at sites like Aspatria (C), Dearham (C) and Gosforth (C) (Bailey and Cramp 1988, 50-1, 94, 100-9); and it is in this same northern area that the building-shaped monument known as the hogback is found, which has been described as a ‘Viking colonial monument’ (Lang 1984). The significance of other motif links and, importantly, non-links along the west coast (and across to North Wales, Man, Ireland and South-West Scotland) has still to be fully explored. It is already clear, however, that the Cumbrian coast was closely linked (?by sea) to Chester and its hinterland in a way which cuts out most of Lancashire (Bailey 1984; 1994, 116-19); there is thus a cultural diversity even across such a small region.

The cultural assimilation of settlers and traditional Anglian tastes north of the Lune is impressively signalled in the daringly novel iconography of the Gosforth cross, where pagan mythology and Christian teaching are patterned against each other (Bailey and Cramp 1988, 100-4); similar exploitation of Scandinavian mythology can be traced at Lowther and Halton (Bailey 1980, 116-25; Bailey and Cramp 1988, 130), but alongside these novelties were carvings which responded to traditional Christian teaching, such as the redemption theology of Dacre or the appearance of Isaiah’s execution on the great cross at Winwick (Bailey 1980, 159-61, 172-4).

Though sculpture continued predominantly to be used within an ecclesiastical context, often as grave markers, through the tenth and eleventh centuries there is evidence that, in the Peak District of eastern Cheshire, round-shafts were apparently given a function as territory markers (Sidebottom 2000). This is a reminder of the importance of sculpture as a still relatively untapped source of historical information.

Whilst the presence of early medieval sculpture is the most reliable evidence of a pre-Norman foundation for a church, this cannot be taken as a definitive list, as new pieces of sculpture are being found at regular intervals. At least some church sites in the south of the region are listed in the Domesday Survey, although the evidence is limited, particularly north of the Ribble (Morgan 1978; Faull and Stinson 1986; Tupling 1949). The lack of standing elements of early medieval churches, in comparison with other parts of Britain, is perhaps noteworthy, although this may simply reflect their construction in materials other than stone; both Whithorn (Hill 1997) and the Hirsell (Cramp forthcoming a) in southern Scotland have produced evidence of stone-founded churches, with presumably less durable superstructures. The isolated example of the church at Morland (C) is perhaps the exception that proves this rule (Taylor and Taylor 1965), particularly since it is situated in that part of the county where there is a prevalence of long segmented churches, such as those at Brough, Orton, Kirkoswald and Crosby Garrett (Pevsner 1967), some of which have evidence of cobbled foundations beneath the stone superstructure.

The morphology of a settlement can perhaps be used to suggest the site of an early church, as at Penrith (Winchester 1987), and, when combined with place-name evidence, in Cartmel (C) (Crowe 1984). In addition, many of the settlements which developed urban functions in the medieval period also have churches that have produced early medieval stone sculpture (R.J. Cramp pers. comm.). Dedications can also indicate early sites, although again, such evidence should be used with caution, unless corroborated by other sources. Perhaps significantly, there are considerable numbers of churches within Roman forts in Cumbria and Lancashire, such as at Ribchester, Lancaster, and Bewcastle. These cannot, however, be taken as reflecting direct continuity, since at Brampton Old Church, at any rate, there is no evidence for occupation of the Stanegate fort after the development of the Hadrian's Wall frontier to the north (Simpson and Richmond 1936). However, it is at least possible that the foundation of ecclesiastical sites within the ruins of Roman forts or towns may have been a conscious act, as a system of revival, and in Kent, and, indeed in much of Europe, female monasteries are frequently found inside Roman sites (R.J. Cramp, pers. comm.). In this context, the documentary reference to the female monastery at Carlisle is highly significant (Webb 1998).

It is perhaps unsurprising, given the wealth of sculptural material, as well as the work of the Venerable Bede, that considerable weight has been placed on religious sites of the period in the North West. Two sites in Cumbria that may have been Northumbrian monasteries have been excavated, although both have produced evidence for continuing occupation through to the Norman Conquest and beyond, becoming parish churches. In addition, there are documentary references to a monastery in Carlisle and another nearby, and there is clear evidence of Christian burials of the period to the west of Carlisle cathedral (Keevill forthcoming). Dacre is referred to by the Venerable Bede in his *Ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Colgrave and Mynors 1969), written in the 730s, and in this case referring to the early eighth century, when a monk underwent a miraculous cure for blindness through the goodwill of the recently deceased St Cuthbert. This can be juxtaposed with the reference in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Earle and Plummer 1892) to a meeting taking place 'at Eamont' in AD 926/7 between Athelstan, king of the English, and the King of Scots, as well as others. William of Malmesbury gives the place of this meeting as Dacre, and additionally says that the son of the King of Scots was baptised there (Giles 1876). Bede does not locate Dacre other than by the inference that it was in Northumbria at the period of writing, yet William of Malmesbury clearly had a source or sources available to him which linked this geographically with the Eamont. This site has also produced important stone sculpture, both Northumbrian and Anglo-Scandinavian. The latter, in particular, is unique in its theological programme (Bailey and Cramp 1988; Bailey 1977b) and could indicate that some missionary or teaching activity went on at that site (R.J. Cramp pers. comm.).

Excavations to the north of the parish church at Dacre revealed a Christian cemetery of more than 230 graves, associated with at least two buildings pre-dating the development of the parochial church from the eleventh/twelfth century (Newman and Leech forthcoming). One was a rectangular post-built structure, of similar dimensions to those recognised as early medieval in the region (for instance at Fremington (Oliver *et al* 1996)), although its dating remains uncertain and it may actually belong to medieval farming activity also identified immediately beyond the medieval churchyard. The other was either apsidal or D-shaped, again post-built, and had been affected by the construction of the churchyard. It contained a sequence of hearths, the latest of which was a re-used millstone (paralleled at Goltho in Northamptonshire, in a late Saxon context (Beresford 1987)), and was associated with a collection of bun-shaped loomweights characteristic of the period, and window glass, only seen in an ecclesiastical context at this date. The area around it produced about a dozen pieces of early medieval jewellery, mostly pins, but also including a purse clasp, which dated from the eighth to the eleventh century, and six pre-Conquest coins (one *sceatta* and five *stycas*) were also recovered from the site. Cramp has suggested that such structures, particularly when they seem to date to a period after the *floruit* of the Northumbrian monastic world in the seventh to eighth centuries, may represent the change of at least elements of such sites to a more secular, market-orientated focus, despite the continuation of a church nearby (Cramp forthcoming b).

To the south of the church a drain, excavated first in the earlier twentieth century (Huddleston 1932), was re-excavated, and proved to be constructed of re-used Roman stones, fairly crudely retooled, draining the area of the present churchyard and leading out into the field to the south. This also produced three key pieces of early medieval metalwork: a gold ring, a possible book escutcheon, and a stylus. The weight of evidence of Christian burial, high-class metalwork, window glass, and literacy thus fully supports the interpretation of Bede that this site was a monastery of some significance and as such is unique in the region (Newman and Leech forthcoming).

At St Michael's Church, Workington, excavations following a disastrous fire in the parish church produced evidence not only of an earlier structure, but of a substantial cemetery (P. Flynn pers. comm.). The sculptural assemblage there had an early inception, although, as at Dacre, there is evidence for a sequence through to the end of the period, late material having been found built into the foundations of the twelfth century church. Again, a considerable assemblage of metalwork was recovered, perhaps indicating an increasingly secular focus on the church site, as has been suggested at Jarrow (Cramp forthcoming b).

Other clearly important sites, producing sculpture, although, like St Michael's, not documented in the early medieval period, have also been examined over the last 30 years or so, at Heysham (Potter and Andrew 1994) and to the west of the cathedral in Carlisle (Keevill forthcoming). At Heysham, where the linking of Christian and Scandinavian subjects on a hogback stone may, like the Dacre stone, indicate teaching or missionary activity (R.J. Cramp pers. comm.), the fabric of both St Patrick's Chapel on the headland and St Peter's (the present parish church) has been dated to the late eighth century, St Patrick's having the additional evidence of wall plaster with painted lettering and a remarkable eagle-headed sculpture. This latter piece may have been built into the fabric of the chapel (Potter and Andrews 1994, 106-9), although it bears marked similarities to pieces interpreted as the arms of ceremonial chairs, such as bishops' *cathedras* and abbots' seats (Bailey 2003, 217, with references). The contemporaneity of multiple churches on a single site is paralleled elsewhere in Northumbria, for instance at Jarrow (Cramp 1976; 1994b) and Whithorn (Hill 1997). The site, a headland like that of St Michael's, Workington, seems to have originated as a cemetery, the famous rock-cut graves apparently forming the earliest activity there, and perhaps designed from the beginning to contain disarticulated bone. A perimeter wall was then built, seemingly contemporary with the construction of St Patrick's Chapel. The chapel was subsequently refurbished and extended, the eastern extension covering the base of a cross, before the cemetery was abandoned by the twelfth century, on the basis of the radiocarbon dating of burials (Potter and Andrews 1994, 128).

Work in Carlisle, particularly on the slight eminence in the centre of the Roman and medieval towns on which St Cuthbert's church and the Cathedral stand, has suggested that a site of some importance existed there. It has been claimed that an early church exists beneath St Cuthbert's, and certainly its orientation differs markedly from that of the Cathedral to the west, seemingly being more akin to that of the pre-existing Roman road leading into the town from the south (McCarthy 1990). The excavations at Blackfriars Street, to the south-east, suggested that this road alignment continued to be respected at least until the fifth century, but at some stage, perhaps in the seventh to ninth centuries, the building alignment was altered radically. The fact that this site produced more fowl and geese bones than is normal in the early medieval period, as was found at the monastic sites at Hartlepool (Cramp and Daniels 1987) and Jarrow (Cramp forthcoming b), could bolster the idea of an ecclesiastical site in the vicinity. In this context, the small group of memorial stones recovered from the area of St Cuthbert's is significant. These are small, literate, well-carved monuments with parallels at Whitby, Hexham and Hartlepool, another example being found near the Cathedral (Bailey and Cramp 1988). Excavations within the demolished nave of the medieval cathedral, to the west of the standing structure, again demonstrated buildings cutting late Roman levels, before apparently, a period of building inactivity, represented by a deposit of dark earth. This had been cut in turn by a later substantial and densely packed cemetery, with three definable

phases, apparently of ninth to eleventh century date, which had been largely sealed by the Norman cathedral. Several fine pieces of metalwork, particularly associated with dress, and *stycas* of ninth century date, were associated with the graves and one skeleton provided an early medieval radiocarbon date (Keevill forthcoming). These burials clearly indicate a growing focus around the Cathedral site, perhaps associated with a precursor. McCarthy has suggested that at least two, and possibly three, early churches were present in this very limited area (McCarthy 2002, 153-4). In a similar context, the recent radiocarbon dating of a burial to the west of St John's Church, Chester, is of interest. There, a rib from the skeleton indicated a date in the ninth to eleventh century (Gifford and Partners 2004), suggesting perhaps a cemetery of some size surrounding the precursor of the Norman church at this clearly important site.

Cramp has suggested that 'the conjunction of Roman or native fort, early place-name and later medieval estate centre on the same parcel of land is one that can be noted again and again in the reconstruction of early settlement' (Cramp 1994a), and the juxtaposition of centres of lay and ecclesiastical power in this context is particularly noteworthy. In Cumbria, examples can be seen, not just at Carlisle, but at Workington and Ravenglass/Muncaster (Cramp 1983), and it is likely that the same feature was occurring at Lancaster, perhaps Penwortham in Lancashire, and Chester.

In the south of the region, Hilbre Island, immediately off the coast of the Wirral, has antiquarian evidence for an early medieval cemetery (Ecroyd Smith 1865) and has also produced a grave slab of tenth to eleventh century date. Documentary evidence indicates that a monastic cell dedicated to St Hildeburgh existed by 1081 (Thacker 1987) and this, together with a cross head, possibly manufactured at the Chester workshop, could suggest the development of a cult site at this period.

It has been asserted that Dacre, St Michael's, Workington, the complex including St Cuthbert's and the cathedral site in Carlisle, and Heysham were the sites of Northumbrian monasteries. Each excavation has examined different elements of the sites, and thus it is perhaps unsurprising that no commonality of layout has been identified, but this does seem to be a common theme of Northumbrian monasteries (Cramp 1994b). Additionally, none has produced any clear evidence of complete abandonment or very radical change to support the traditional view that monasticism was swept away by the political upheavals of the tenth to eleventh centuries, although a change in outlook seems to be represented in the archaeological record; certainly each had been transformed into a parish church by the twelfth century, as had the monastic site at Bangor-is-y-coed (Ch) (Thacker 1987). The greatest physical dislocation at Dacre, in fact, was the cutting of the northern churchyard boundary through the earlier cemetery, some time before the early thirteenth century (Newman and Leech forthcoming). In every case where a monastic site has been postulated, burials have been a central element, of which the most dramatic are the rock-cut graves at Heysham (Potter and Andrews 1994), but also both new sculpture and considerable assemblages of metalwork have been recovered.

Several apparently Viking Age burials have been found, mostly in Cumbria (Cowen 1948) and north Lancashire (Edwards 1998), although most were recorded in an antiquarian context. Burials apparently in purpose-built mounds, or re-using prehistoric monuments, have been recorded at Beacon Hill, Aspatria (C), recently in part re-excavated (Abramson 2000), and Hesketh-in-the-Forest (C), during the straightening of the A6. Road improvements such as this clearly led to a number of such sites being found, for instance, the female burial at Claughton, near Garstang (L) (Edwards 1998). Additionally, a burial, possibly in a mound, was recorded in Ormside churchyard (C), and a cup, previously found there, may be associated (this perhaps suggests a burial pre-AD 900 (Higham 1985; Edwards 1998)). The construction of a burial mound within a churchyard has parallels on the Isle of Man (Wilson 1974, 25-6), although whether this was in an existing churchyard, or the churchyard developed around a primary grave, has not been ascertained. At Eaglesfield (C), a cemetery could be of any phase within the period, although it did produce a sword, a possible spearhead, and a brooch that

belong to the Viking Age (Edwards 1998), but Cowen questioned whether this burial was associated with the others (Cowen 1967). The number of distinctive hogback stones, generally dated to the tenth century, from church sites in Cumbria, north Lancashire and the Wirral should be noted in this context, and these may well indicate enclaves of Scandinavian influence, as well as rapid conversion to Christianity (Lang 1984; Chitty 1978).

A ring-headed pin was found beneath the church tower at Brigham (C), perhaps indicating a burial, a sword was found in Morland church (C), although its original provenance is unknown, and another example came from Rampside churchyard (C), these all presumably reflecting burials during a period of Christian conversion (Edwards 1998). A further sword was found at the foot of Whitbarrow, in Witherslack (C), this time not associated with a churchyard. In all, 12 possible or certain Viking Age burials have been identified in Cumbria and Lancashire (*ibid*), although no such examples have been found to the south, apart from a single possible example from Meols, identified from finds recorded by Charles Potter (Griffiths 2004). There are, however, other antiquarian reports that might be of such graves, that have not to date been recognised in more recent literature. One such example relates the finding of bones and a sword during the building of a house called Conyngur Hurst, in the mid nineteenth century, at Pennington in the Furness peninsula (Tweddell 1870), indicating that the list of known sites is by no means exhaustive.

Recently, a small cemetery comprising six burials, four male and two female, has been identified at Cumwhitton (C) from an initial metal detector find and subsequent formal excavation (OA North forthcoming). This is the first such group to be excavated under modern conditions, and has gone a long way towards confirming the views that the burials identified tend to be of undoubtedly high status and represent the first generation settlers who died as pagans but whose heirs rapidly converted to Christianity (Graham-Campbell 1995). Griffiths has suggested (2004) that such furnished burials may be 'a conscious display of cultural conservatism designed to establish a presence in the landscape of Norse-dominated territories, from which a fast-changing cultural admixture amongst the living population could derive a sense of the historical legitimacy of their leaders' power'. An intriguing facet of the Cumwhitton group is that all the graves were aligned approximately east-west, perhaps demonstrating some gesture towards Christianity.

Technology and Production

Only the slightest hints have as yet been gleaned as to technology and production in the period, of which the most startling, and salutary, was the discovery in Glasson Moss in northern Cumbria of evidence of a system of natural pools and man-made ditches which once extended over the central dome of the moss. The presence of *Cannabis sativa* pollen in considerable amounts suggests that the pools were used for hemp retting, the ditches perhaps being used to control water levels. Radiocarbon assay indicated that this activity had begun prior to cal AD 660-970 (1220±60 BP; WK-5479), and had terminated by cal AD 1050-1290 (790±60 BP; WK-5478; Cox *et al* 2000). Cox suggests that it was occurring in such an apparently isolated place because of the pollution caused by the process, the moss perhaps being the only source of open water available which was divorced from the general ground water table, thus allowing the effects to be contained. To this can be added evidence of hemp production in the vicinity of Haweswater (C) which can be dated to cal AD 533-687 (1435±60 BP; AA-33594), having terminated by cal AD 1404-88 (460±45 BP; AA-33595). Here again, high values of hemp and hop (*Cannabis/Humulus*) were recorded in pollen diagrams (LUAU 2000). Recently, an apparently defensive ditch at Heronbridge (Ch) has also produced large quantities of flax, and radiocarbon dates suggesting activity *c.* AD 650-980 (D. Mason pers. comm.). A pit excavated in 1979 (Poulter 1982) at Old Penrith (C) apparently lined with wickerwork, was filled with carbonised grains of barley and oats, and also flax, which gave a radiocarbon date in the mid-tenth century. The feature may have parallels at Tatton in Cheshire (Higham 1986).

The period is well known to have few ceramics, although this could simply be an artefact of identification, or survival in the largely acid soils of the North West, or both. Evidence of pottery production has been found, however, albeit of a crude, handmade type, at Fremington, in Cumbria (Oliver *et al* 1996), although out of context the material would confidently have been dated to the Early Bronze Age. A brief comment in the report on Yeavinger, the Northumbrian palace site near Wooler in Northumberland, of crude 'native' pottery from the earliest phase of that site (Hope-Taylor 1977) may indicate a parallel. This clearly calls for at least some reassessment of existing assemblages from elsewhere in the region.

The only other evidence to date for a 'local' pottery tradition in the region is Chester ware (Rutter 1985), although some caution as to provenance should be exercised as the only known kilns to date are in Stafford (Ford 1995). Finds of the material concentrate in Chester, although small numbers of sherds have been found in the rural hinterland (Rutter 1985; Brotherton-Radcliffe 1975; Higham 2000). It has a wide distribution beyond the southern boundaries of the North West, but has not to date been found north of the Mersey. In Carlisle, the few pre-Conquest sherds are of imported wares from further afield, such as Torksey-type and Ipswich-type wares (McCarthy and Brooks 1992, 22), and from Lancaster there is a single sherd that is neither obviously Roman nor medieval (Newman 1996, 102).

There are hints that at Dacre (Newman and Leech forthcoming), Roman glass was being recycled and at least some vessels of the same material were being used. This illustrates how rare glass was in the period, and the use of window glass seems to have been an exclusively ecclesiastical, if not monastic, trait. Whilst Higham (1986) has suggested that the church was the sole source of patronage for exotic crafts, such as glass manufacture, there were also hints of the recycling of Roman material at Fremington (Oliver *et al* 1996). Excavations at Fremington, Dacre, Bryant's Gill (C) (Dickinson 1985) and Tatton (Higham 2000) have all produced evidence for cloth production in the form of spindle whorls and loomweights.

In Chester there is a wealth of evidence for production and craft working from the tenth century onwards (Carrington 1994), as one would expect of a growing urban population. Antler working and possibly also iron smithing was undertaken at Abbey Green, but this small-scale work contrasts markedly with the large-scale and more intensive tanning industry carried out in Lower Bridge Street in the eleventh century (Mason 1985). This led to the demolition of the cellared buildings that once occupied the site (*see above, Settlement and Landuse*) and the construction of large pits and troughs, leading to the cellars being in-filled with the waste residues of the process.

Evidence for iron working is geographically widespread, being seen at Bryant's Gill (Dickinson 1985), Dacre (Newman and Leech forthcoming), and at Birch Heath, Tarporley (Ch) (Fairburn 2002). At the latter, a sub-circular building with a conjoined annexe, both clearly post-dating the main Roman focus of the settlement, produced a considerable volume of metalwork, suggesting to the excavator that it was used primarily, or even exclusively, for ironworking. The finds from the structure gave no indication that it was not Roman, but a radiocarbon date from a gully within the building produced a date of cal AD 590-720 (1380±40 BP; AA-50087). The evident small scale of the production capable at this site adds weight to the suggestion that economic conditions did not warrant the large-scale production seen in the Roman period (Tylecote 1986). While evidence for iron mining and bloomeries is absent, the quality and accessibility of haematite ores in Cumbria and increasing evidence of the industry from the early twelfth century, documented at Egremont before 1179 (Bowden 2000; Hewer and McFadzean 2000), suggests that production was taking place in the early medieval period (Instone 1995).

Little evidence of other extractive industries has as yet been firmly associated with the early medieval period in the region, although a stone quarry has been identified beneath St John's church, beyond the Roman fort in Chester (Carrington 1994). Perhaps the most surprising *lacunae*, however, given the amount of work undertaken recently, is the lack of firm evidence for an early medieval salt industry in Cheshire (Penney and Shotter 2002), particularly given

the evidence for some continuity at Droitwich, in Worcestershire, and, indeed, the *wich* place-names. This may, however, be due to a lack of diagnostic artefacts, and close dating, and it also seems that the point at which the brine springs emerged has moved through time, presumably causing activity to shift with them (R. McNeil pers. comm.).

Trade, Exchange and Interaction

The exotic imported pottery characteristic of sites of the immediately post-Roman period in the South West and the coasts of Wales, and found as far north as Whithorn, is so far generally a notable absentee from the region, with the exception of a few sherds from Chester (Carrington 1994), where such amphora have been found within the fort. Its absence may simply reflect the general lack of excavation in the region (Loveluck 2002), but the complete lack may rather indicate the dislocation of trading patterns following the removal of Roman governance. There is, however, some slight evidence of the endurance of some form of Mediterranean contact in the form of an Ostrogothic coin and two Byzantine coins from the fort site in Manchester, dating to the sixth to seventh centuries (Conway *et al* 1909, 139).

There was also a complete collapse of coinage at the end of the Roman period, indicating that the monetary economy which had developed in the first four centuries of the millennium had failed, and that, presumably, a system of exchange and bartering returned. Post-Roman coinage did not really develop in Northumbria until the eighth century and again collapsed, with the kingdom, in the ninth century, again reflecting political upheaval. Cheshire was influenced by developments to the south, and thus from the mid ninth century the coinage increasingly mirrored that of Wessex (Dolley 1970). The development of a mint at Chester, from the late ninth century, was part of the policy of the growing power of England against the Norse influences in the old kingdom of Northumbria, and throughout most of the tenth century it was one of the most prolific in the land. Its output suggests blossoming trade around the Irish Sea and its link with Dublin seems to have been particularly close (Carrington 1994). The evidence for this activity can be seen from the number of coins in circulation, but no physical evidence has been identified to date in Chester, nor is there any indication where in the city it lay.

Other evidence for trading is difficult, but there is every possibility that markets developed from at least the eighth century onwards that were linked to monasteries, and the increasingly secular focus of elements of such sites has been noted (above; Cramp forthcoming b). This could provide a context for the above average numbers of coins (although still very few) found in religious contexts, as at Dacre (Newman and Leech forthcoming) and Carlisle (Keavill forthcoming), although it must remain a possibility that this simply reflects a bias in areas of excavation. One tantalising glimpse of long-distance trade was the recovery of traces of brown seaweed from Fremington (Huntley 1995), which may have been used as packaging for goods, such as salt, on the trans-Pennine route.

Away from such sites, there is a marked absence of evidence, apart from the site at Meols, in the Wirral (Griffiths 1992), where the coastal erosion of sand dunes in the nineteenth century uncovered several thousand finds, ranging in date from the Neolithic to the medieval periods, but of which a substantial assemblage was early medieval in date. Whilst the circumstances of recovery have meant that emphasis has been placed on the finds, there are some references to buildings, middens and graves, to suggest a settled population. The proportion of exotica within the assemblage, as well as the location of the site, points strongly to a trading place, similar to others found around the shores of the Irish Sea, as at Luce Bay in Galloway (Cormack 1965). It is perhaps notable that several log boats have been recovered from the Mersey, particularly around Warrington, dated to between the ninth and twelfth centuries (McGrail and Switsur 1979), of a type which could well have been used to carry goods trans-shipped at the coast further inland up the river systems (Griffiths 1992).

Activity in the fifth and sixth centuries at Meols is attested by a group of penannular brooches (Fowler's Type G; Fowler 1963), and a pottery flask from the shrine of St Menas in North

Africa, which was destroyed in the seventh century (Thompson 1956), although surprisingly, no other imported pottery has been recovered. Given the general lack of any unglazed pottery in the assemblage, however, this may perhaps be a result of antiquarian collection policies (Griffiths 1992). Activity in the eighth century is marked by a series of *sceattas*, and a small number of metalwork objects, and that in the ninth century is attested by Northumbrian *stycas* and an increasing variety of Anglo-Saxon, Irish, and continental-style metalwork. A significant downturn in the amount of importation by the end of the ninth century is reflected in the coinage sequence, perhaps unsurprising given the clearly increasing activity at Chester, and thus indicating the presumably altered political geography of the area, although the variety of provenance and quality of the tenth and eleventh century finds implies regular and productive long-distance contacts in England, around the Irish Sea, and beyond.

The juxtaposition of Meols with Chester is of considerable interest, as, indeed, in this context is the activity on Hilbre Island, with Chester seemingly eventually having superseded Meols as the principal trading point of the area. Early medieval imports have been found in Chester, including a fragment from a Carolingian vessel at Lower Bridge Street (Rutter 1985), and St Neots-type wares and Stamford wares have also been found in the city, indicating increasing trading contacts throughout the Midlands. This pattern of change is seen elsewhere around the Irish Sea, where beach or island markets gave way to burgeoning towns on river routes (Griffiths 1992). Griffiths has suggested (*op cit*) that Meols continued for some time, outside the official orbit of the port of Chester, maintaining a separate Scandinavian political identity. Whilst there is no evidence for such activity elsewhere in the region, the similar topographical situation at Ravenglass, when juxtaposed with the important ecclesiastical site at Irton (C), is of note (R.J. Cramp pers. comm.).

The most obvious evidence for the period, not perhaps of trade in the strictest sense, but possibly of forcible exchange and political insecurity, is the number of hoards, mostly of the tenth century (reviewed by Graham-Campbell 2001). There are, however, a few hoards that seem to be earlier, grouped in the area of Manchester (Holdsworth 1983). Of the later hoards, the most remarkable is that from Cuerdale, just outside Preston, dated to *c.* AD 905, the largest Scandinavian hoard in Europe outside of Russia (Graham-Campbell 1992a; 1992b). This has been interpreted as either the pay chest for a war band, or a political payment, perhaps to buy control of strategic land routes, or perhaps the collection of bullion to fund a re-invasion of Ireland, following the expulsion of the Norsemen from Dublin in AD 902 (Edwards 1998). A further find by metal detectorists, on the Cumbria/Lancashire border in the 1990s, of material that could even have come from this, adds tantalising weight to the former interpretation (LUAU 1998). Cumbria and Lancashire are notable for the number of hoards discovered, as well as for casual finds of the period (for instance, the finding of a penannular brooch and a neck ring on Orton Scar (C) (Birley 1964)). These usually contain coinage, but a large quantity of metalwork has been discovered at intervals in the last 150 years around Flusco Pike, near Penrith, which may also be elements of such a feature (Edwards 1998). A collection of metalwork from Asby Winderwath Common (C), largely of copper alloy and ironwork, could also be seen in the same context (Edwards 2002). Other hoards in Cumbria come from Dean (deposited *c.* AD 915), Kirkoswald (deposited *c.* AD 865), and Scotby (deposited *c.* AD 935), each featuring coins, but also containing other metalwork, including ingots at the latter site (Edwards 1998), whilst from Lancashire the great hoard found at Harkirke, Little Crosby, in 1611 (deposited *c.* AD 910), is of note (Edwards 1992). Others have been found at Halton, on the river Lune (deposited *c.* AD 1025), and an unlocated place 'in Lancashire' (deposited *c.* AD 915; Blackburn and Pagan 1986). Fewer examples have been found in the south of the region, one late example having been recovered from Castle Hill, Manchester in 1849 (deposited *c.* AD 1030; Edwards 1992), although four have been found in Chester, ranging in deposition date from *c.* AD 917 (from St John's Church) to *c.* AD 980 (found by the north-west medieval extension to the Roman fort wall; Edwards 1998). The hoards demonstrate that hack silver was as important as coinage in this period, as do the coins of the many nations contained, which suggest their bullion value was far more important than the coins themselves.

In this context, it is notable that a large amount of early medieval metalwork is being reported to the Portable Antiquities Scheme in the North West (N. Herepath and F. Simpson pers. comm.); in particular, concentrations have been found in Cheshire and on the Cumbria/Lancashire border. Whilst these finds may simply reflect areas of particular activity amongst detectorists, there are similarities of distribution, and, indeed, of the objects found, between the south Cumbrian collection and earlier, largely antiquarian finds, which may hint at genuine archaeological patterns of activity. The date range for this assemblage is wide, however, and considerable analytical work will be necessary before a discussion can take place on the contexts of the material, and its contribution to an understanding of settlement and activity patterns in the region.

Defence, Warfare and Military Activity

Throughout the period, political borders seem to have been shifting relatively constantly, but the archaeological evidence for this remains tantalisingly elusive. The only physical demonstration of political unity is, perhaps, the Thingmount in Little Langdale (C) (Swainson Cowper 1891), presumably dating from the tenth century onward, although there are several other place-names throughout the region that suggest that other such meeting places once existed (Kenyon 1991).

The evidence for the continued occupation of at least some of the forts on Hadrian's Wall (Wilmott 1997), and perhaps also in its hinterland (Zant forthcoming), is, however, adding weight to the slight historical evidence for the fragmentation of at least the northern part of the region into war bands or petty kingships (see above; Miller 1975). The anomalous fortification at Buckton Castle, Tameside (GM), bears some resemblance to Welsh and northern British defended elite settlements and has produced radiocarbon dates indicating pre-Conquest activity (M. Nevell pers. comm.), whilst a substantial ditch at the site of the proposed Solway Lido at Silloth (C) may have been a defensive feature of this period (F. Giecco pers. comm.). In addition, apparently defensive activity on the Roman site of Heronbridge (Ch) has recently been dated to the seventh to tenth centuries (D. Mason pers. comm.). Until recently there was little to suggest the reoccupation of hillforts, as seen elsewhere in the country, particularly in the South West, for instance, South Cadbury (Alcock 1972). Recently, however, a radiocarbon date obtained from the organic, apparently primary, fill of the hillfort at Shoulthwaite, above Thirlmere (C), produced dates of cal AD 598-657 (1435±50 BP; AA-33591) and cal AD 618-664 (1400±50 BP; AA-33592; LUAU 1999). This raises the interesting question, not just of reoccupation, but of whether any of the hillforts of Cumbria might be of early medieval, rather than prehistoric, origin. Hillforts elsewhere in the region are not particularly numerous, and none has produced firm archaeological evidence for re-occupation, although it should be noted that Eddisbury in Cheshire is documented as having been fortified in the early tenth century (Thacker 1987). The archaeological evidence for this occupation is not conclusive, however, and has been seriously questioned, depending on an interpretation (or misinterpretation) of VCP found in the ditch (Varley 1950), with the possibility remaining that this involved the fortification of a site at Rainow (Ch), also called Eddisbury (Higham 1993). It should be noted that the prevalence of *caer* and *burh* in the place-names of the region may lend support to the hypothesis of population movement to other types of enclosed site (R.J. Cramp, pers. comm.).

Elsewhere, the evidence is even harder to interpret. The debate on the purpose and age of the bank and ditch known as the Nico ditch, around the south and south-east sides of Manchester, is ongoing. It is possible, although unlikely, that it could derive from a dyke constructed either in the context of the southern frontier of Northumbria or in a ninth to tenth century context, as a defence against the Danes (Higham 1993), or, indeed, it could be earlier. Documentary sources record that the Mersey was fortified by the children of Alfred: Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians, and her brother, Edward the Elder, a chain of burhs being constructed in the early tenth century (Thacker 1987), but archaeologically this is difficult to see, apart from the growing prosperity of Chester. The recent reinterpretation of massive postholes excavated

outside the fort at Castlefield, Manchester, as the remains of refortification in the early tenth century (Griffiths 2001), may, however, be significant in this context.

The burhs of northern Cheshire reflect the expansion and growing power of the English throne, but the ultimate expansion towards the present border with Scotland is even more archaeologically elusive. Whilst there is to date no evidence from the limited excavations of early medieval activity within the town (Newman *et al* 2000), the morphology of Penrith is reminiscent of such burhs (Winchester 1987), as is that of Penwortham in Lancashire (overlooking the river Ribble), and it is tempting to suggest that these might have performed a similar function to those on the Mersey, that at Penrith some 20-30 years later, in the reign of Athelstan. It is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that a meeting took place 'at Eamont' in AD 926/7 (Earle and Plummer 1892), perhaps suggesting that this marked the extent of the territory held by the English at this point, and in this context Penrith could have been an important toehold to the north. The incorporation of the medieval county of Cumberland into the English kingdom is known only from documentary sources, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* again recording that William Rufus marched north to Carlisle in AD 1092, and expelled one Dolfin (Earle and Plummer 1892). Archaeological evidence of such a seminal event, however, to date is in the form of a single penny of William II, found outside the walls of the medieval castle (Zant forthcoming).

No unequivocal evidence for battle sites of the early medieval period exists in the region, although Bromborough in Wirral is one of many candidates for the battle of Brunanburh (O'Hanlon 1986). The records of several possible battle sites in the County SMRs are all based on tradition, although place-name evidence perhaps points more strongly than most to the battle of Arthuret (*Armterid*; AD 573) having been fought in the vicinity of Arthuret or Netherby in northern Cumbria (McCarthy 2002).

Legacy

The last 30 years have produced considerable amounts of new information, removing the total reliance on antiquarian reports and stray finds. The distribution map of 'sites' as recorded on the various county SMRs superficially makes reassuring viewing, but so many of the records are the result of casual antiquarian comment, references for instance to urns found that were not closely provenanced at the time, and have subsequently been lost (e.g. that from Red Bank, Manchester; Holdsworth 1983), or barrows perhaps containing secondary burials that were removed in nineteenth century road improvements (Edwards 1998). Others come from our assumptions of the dating of sites by analogy, or from documentary references, such as those to battles. Place-names still remain the most common indicator of early medieval activity, although they must be treated with caution (see, for instance, Roberts 1989-90). Each piece of evidence should therefore be carefully weighed and the widest range of evidence possible should be considered in any attempt to draw a comprehensive picture of the region in the period. It is, however, notable that recently it seems that wherever and whenever radiocarbon dating has been undertaken, early medieval dates have been returned, even in the most unexpected places, such as from hillforts, or sites that typologically would seem to be classic Iron Age/Romano-British settlements.

Contributions to the Early Medieval period assessment

Bailey, R.N. Pre Norman Stone Sculpture
Dickinson, S. Information on excavations at Bryant's Gill.
Elsworth, D. Notes and information on Furness and Conyngers Hurst
Garner, D. Oversley Farm: Manchester Airport Runway 2, Early Medieval Features
Garner, D. Archaeological Excavation and Watching Brief at Dee House, Chester
Garner, D. 25 Bridge Street, Chester: Stratigraphic Narrative
Griffiths, D. Unpublished draft on settlement and acculturation in the Irish Sea region
Higham, N. Early medieval settlement, defensive sites and religion.
Huckerby, E. Pollen and Environmental Overview
Keevill, G. Carlisle Cathedral Treasury Excavations, 1988
Leah, M. Early Medieval Cheshire
Nevell, M. The Early medieval period in Greater Manchester
North West Medieval Pottery Research Group (edited by J. Edwards). Medieval pottery in the North West 1000 – 1500
Philpott, R.A. The Early Medieval Phases at Irby
Trippier, J. The Early Medieval Period in pre 1974 Lancashire South of the Sands

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