

THE ANCIENT ORIGINS OF THE LORDSHIP OF BOWLAND

Speculation on Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norse and Brythonic roots

William Bowland

The standard history of the lordship of Bowland begins with Domesday. Roger de Poitou, younger son of one of William the Conqueror's closest associates, Roger de Montgomery, Earl of Shrewsbury, is recorded in 1086 as tenant-in-chief of the thirteen manors of Bowland: Gretlintone (Grindleton, then caput manor), Slatebourne (Slaidburn), Neutone (Newton), Bradeforde (West Bradford), Widitun (Waddington), Radun (Radholme), Bogeuurde (Barge Ford), Mitune (Great Mitton), Esingtune (Lower Easington), Sotelie (Sawley?), Hamereton (Hammerton), Badresbi (Battersby/Dunnow), Baschelf (Bashall Eaves).



William Rufus

It was from these holdings that the *Forest and Liberty of Bowland* emerged sometime after 1087. Further lands were granted to Poitou by William Rufus, either to reward him for his role in defeating the army of Scots king Malcolm III in 1091-2 or possibly as a consequence of the confiscation of lands from Robert de Mowbray, Earl of Northumbria in 1095.

As a result, by the first decade of the twelfth century, the Forest and Liberty of Bowland, along with the adjacent fee of Blackburnshire and holdings in Hornby and Amounderness, had been brought together to form the basis of what became known as the Honor of Clitheroe. Over the next two centuries, the lordship of Bowland followed the same descent as the Honor, ultimately reverting to the Crown in 1399.

This account is one familiar to students of Bowland history. However, research into the pattern of land holdings prior to the Norman Conquest is now beginning to uncover origins for the lordship that predate Poitou's lordship by many centuries. By following lines of aristocratic and monarchical descent, these origins may be traced – albeit speculatively - through the land holdings of the Earls of Northumbria to the Angles' Kingdom of Northumbria and through a marriage alliance in the mid-seventh century as far back as the Kings of Rheged.

For the first time, long forgotten Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norse and Brythonic roots are being exposed and as a result, the history of the lordship lengthened by more than six centuries. Even conjecture on the likely tribal origins of the lordship, rooting it in the ethnic soil and myth of pre-Roman Britain, becomes conceivable.

WEST SAXON

Before 1066, the manors of Bowland were in the possession of Tostig Godwinson, Earl of Northumbria, brother of the ill-fated King Harold. Tostig – who became Earl in 1055 – struggled to control his Northern territories and died in the battle against Harald Hardrada's Norwegians at Stamford Bridge, just three weeks before his brother's defeat at Hastings.

After the Conquest, William the Conqueror appears to have annexed the lands of the Earldom to the Crown. He sought to manage the rebellious North through the appointment of a number of short-term client Earls – English and Norman –

many of whom met sudden and bloody ends: Morcar (1066), Copsi (1067), Oswulf (1067), Gospatric (1067-68), Robert de Comines (1068-69), Waltheof (1072-75), William Walcher (1075-80), Aubrey de Coucy (1080-86), Roger de Mowbray (1086-95). The infamous Harrying of the North took place in the winter of 1069-70. William Rufus finally dismembered the Earldom of Northumbria in 1095 following the rebellion, for the second time, of Roger de Mowbray.

Tostig's Earldom was the final phase of a West Saxon ascendancy in the North stretching back to the early tenth century. Tostig had been preceded by seven Earls of Northumbria: Siward (1033-55), Erik Haakonson (1016-33), Uhtred the Bold (1006-16), Ælfhelm (994-1006), Thored (975-94), Oslac (966-75), Osulf (955-63). The tenth century was an exceptionally turbulent one characterised by Viking incursion, struggles for supremacy and bloodshed.



A coin from the reign of King Æthelstan

Although the West Saxon King Æthelstan had granted the western lands of Northumbria to Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, in 934, it appears to have taken a further twenty years (954) before his kinsman, Eadred, was able to stamp full West Saxon authority on Northumbria and thereby establish the basis for the Earldom of Northumbria first held by Osulf (955-63).

Up until that time, Viking Kings of York – Ragnall (918-21), Sigtryggr (921-26) – had ruled the territory. An alliance between Sigtryggr and Æthelstan had laid the groundwork for Eadred's later assertion of authority when the Viking King of York married Edith, Æthelstan's sister, in 926.

ANGLO-NORSE

The etymology of "Bowland" is Old Norse, a name deriving from *boga-/bogi-*, meaning "a bend in a river". It is a tenth-century coinage perhaps used to describe the topography of the Hodder basin, with its characteristic meandering river and brooks but as a place name, it is not evidenced before the early twelfth century (Boelanda).

The closest we get to Bowland at this period is Amounderness, a territory adjacent to Bowland whose name survives today as that of a Lancashire hundred. In the early tenth century, Amounderness was a strategically important land bridge between Dublin and Viking York.

Amounderness is thought to be named after *Agmundr*, a Norse chieftain or *holdr*, vassal of Eowils, Halfdan and Ingwaer, co-kings of York, all four of whom who died at the Battle of Tettenhall fighting the combined forces of Mercia and Wessex in August 910.

Victorian antiquarians often cited a 7th-century grant made at Ripon by Ecgfrith of Northumbria and Æthelwine as proof that Amounderness existed before the 10th century. In fact, the grant itself has not survived; its only source being an early 8th-century hagiography of the Northumbrian bishop Wilfrid – *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi* – by Stephen of Ripon.



A re-enactment of the Battle of Tetterhall

There is no reference to Amounderness in this text, merely to lands "iuxta Rippel" (next to the Ribble). The historical misattribution may be due to the sixteenth-century antiquarian John Leland who cites Hasmundesham (possibly Amounderness) in his *Collectanea*, but does so without proper supporting evidence.

It is likely that Amounderness came into the possession of Æthelstan in 926 following the death of his brother-in-law Sigtryggr. In the King's grant to Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, in June 934, the extent of Amounderness is clearly much greater than its present-day counterpart, being described as the land "from the sea along the Cocker to the source of that river, from that source straight to another spring which is called in Saxon, Dunshop, thus down the riverlet to the Hodder, in the same direction to the Ribble and thus along that river through the middle of the channel to the sea".

In his "Place-Names of Lancashire" (1922), Eilert Ekwall corroborates this, describing the ancient eastern boundary of

Amounderness as "being formed by the fells on the Yorkshire border" (p.139). This places the boundary within the modern-day Forest of Bowland where Dunsop Bridge sits close to the eastern mouth of the Trough of Bowland that straddles the traditional Lancashire-Yorkshire border. After the Norman conquest of England, this eastern portion of Amounderness was subsumed into the Lordship of Bowland.

Agmundr's lordship of western Bowland opens up the prospect of Bowland falling under the rule of Norse kings based in York before the Vikings' expulsion from Dublin in 902. These kings ruling between 867 and 900 were: Knutr (900), Sigfrothr (895), Guthfrid (883-95), Halfdan Ragnarsson (876-77), Ricsige (872-76), Ecgberht (867-72), with an interregnum in 877-83.

NORTHUMBRIAN

The fall of York in 866 to the Great Heathen Army - a coalition of Norse warriors, originating from Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, who came together under a unified command to invade the four Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of England – spelt the end of the Angles' rule of Northumbria which had dated back to Oswiu in the mid-seventh century.



Northumbria in the early ninth century

Twenty-eight kings of Northumbria ruled between 654 and 867: Osberht (867), Aelle (863-67), Osberht (849-63), Æthelred (844-49), Raedwulf (844), Æthelred III (841-44), Eanred (810-41), Eardwulf (810), Ælfwald II (808-10), Eardwulf (796-808), Osbald (796), Æthelred II (790-96), Osred II (788-90), Ælfwald I (779-88), Æthelred I (774-79), Alhred (765-74), Æthelwald Moll (759-65), Oswulf (758-59), Eadberht (738-58), Ceowulf II (731-38), Ceowulf I (729-31), Osric (718-29), Coenred (716-18), Osred I (705-16), Eadwulf (704-5), Ealdfrith (685-704), Ecgfrith (670-85), Oswiu (654-70).

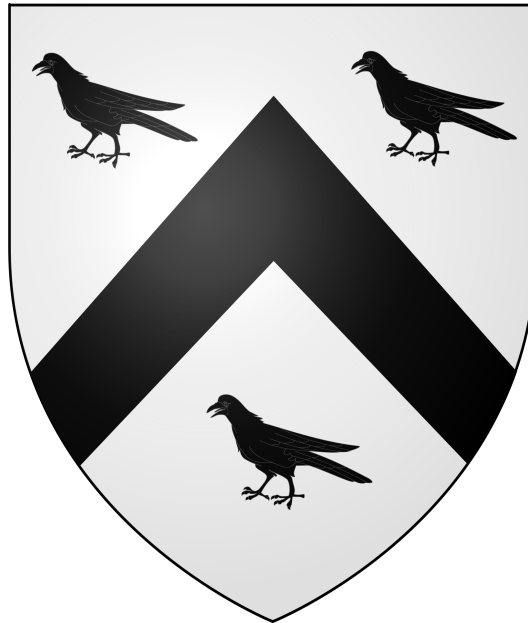
The incorporation of lands north of the Ribble into the kingdom of the Angles had taken place through a marriage alliance in 638 between Oswiu and Rieinmellt, a princess of the Brythonic kingdom of Rheged.

KINGS OF RHEGED

One of the kingdoms of the Hen Ogledd ("Old North") founded in the wake of the collapse of Rome, Rheged was a Brythonic kingdom which may have stretched into modern-day Scotland and as far south as the Ribble. Its language was known as Cumbric. Rheged's legendary founder was Coel Hen (c.350-c.420), the "Old King Cole" of nursery rhyme fame. Coel Hen fathered a dynasty of eight kings up until the incorporation of Rheged into Northumbria in the mid-seventh century: Ceneu (420-450), Gwrast (c.450-c.490), Meirchion Gul (c.490-535). The kingdom split in 535 with South Rheged possibly ruled from Ribchester by Elidyr Llydanwyn (535-560) and Llywarch Hen (570-613) before its reunification with its northern sister under Elffin (613-616) and Rhoedd (616-c.638). The marriage of Rieinmellt, daughter of Rhoedd, to Oswiu, later King of Northumbria, unified two kingdoms which had been traditional enemies.

Rheged may have represented a post-Roman resurgence of Brigantian tribal identity. The Brigantes were the dominant Celtic tribe of Northern England, a highland people, with a sept

known as the Setantes occupying the territory from Bowland across to the western coast of Lancashire.



Arms attributed to the Kings of Rheged

The Setantes were present on both sides of the Irish Sea. Their existence is recorded in Ptolemy's second-century "Geographia" in the form of the place name *Portus Setantiorum* (Port of the Setantes). Its precise location remains unknown but may have been in the vicinity of Rossall Point. The hydronym *Seteia* is assumed by its position in Ptolemy's text to refer to the River Mersey, which may have the Setantes' southern tribal boundary.

The unearthing of a late Iron Age farmstead in the vicinity of Barker House Farm on the South West campus of Lancaster University in 2003 offered a rare insight into this shadowy Setantian presence in the foothills of Bowland.

SONS OF SETANTA?

The ethnonymic founder of the Setantes was purportedly Setanta, better known as the legendary warrior Cú Chulainn, who appears in the stories of the Ulster Cycle, as well as in Scottish and Manx folklore. Setanta was believed to be an incarnation of the three-faced god Lug(h), who is also his father.

Lug(h) was a variant of the pan-Celtic god Lugus identified by the Romans with Mercury. He was descended from the Fomorians, a supernatural race in Irish mythology.



The three-faced Celtic god Lugus

Here we catch a tantalising glimpse of a tribal creation myth stretching back into the mysterious mists of prehistory.

CONCLUSION

Extrapolation has allowed us to draw links between a Norman lordship and Iron Age tribesmen across a span of more than one thousand years. We have done so by chasing shadows on the ground rather than through the strict application of scholarly rigour. Few of the claims made in this article are conclusive but they beg questions which in themselves merit further consideration. Putting meat on speculative bones is certainly work for another day.