

*Department of Humanities, Northumbria University*

**Honours Dissertation**

**The Role of the commons of Cumberland and  
Westmoreland in the Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536**

**Peter John Weightman**

**BA Hons History and Politics**

2015

This dissertation has been made available on condition that anyone who consults it recognises that its copyright rests with its author and that quotation from the thesis and/or the use of information derived from it must be acknowledged. © Peter John Weightman.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of BA (Hons) History and Politics.

## **Table of Contents**

Introduction .....	- 2 -
Chapter One: Economic Grievances.....	- 8 -
Chapter Two: Religious Grievances.....	- 17 -
Chapter Three: Political and Constitutional Grievances .....	- 28 -
Conclusion .....	- 37 -
Appendix .....	- 39 -
Bibliography .....	- 40 -

## Introduction

In the autumn of 1536 the largest rebellion in English history broke out in Lincolnshire.<sup>1</sup> Soon it had spread to the whole of the North of England and became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace.<sup>2</sup> This huge popular rising, officered by local gentry and nobles who were coerced into joining by their own tenants, marched south under a banner depicting the Five Wounds of Christ, to confront King Henry VIII. The origins of this revolt are contested. The banner would suggest that the motives were religious, the decision to march south and seek the King would suggest political grievance and the fact that the rising was predominantly driven by the peasantry could suggest that this rebellion was motivated by economic grievances. In this study I will analyse each grievance separately to determine which held the most importance in inspiring rebellion in the far north-western counties of England: Cumberland and Westmoreland (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

The reason for focussing on these counties is that much of the literature which exists today on the Pilgrimage of Grace focusses predominantly on the actions and motivations of Robert Aske and the Pilgrims in Yorkshire. The northwest does have special importance however; the final rising in the Pilgrimage took place at Shap Abbey, in Cumberland and resulted in the execution of seventy-six rebels from Cumberland and Westmoreland for their attempt to capture on the county town of Carlisle.<sup>3 4</sup> Moreover post pardon trails only took place in three places, Durham, York and Carlisle.<sup>5</sup> Carlisle's prominence in Cumberland therefore gives special importance to the region in relation to the rebellion. Towards the end of the introduction to this dissertation are two maps illustrating the areas where the main events covered in this study transpired.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Joseph Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1984) p. 82

<sup>2</sup> Richard W. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) p.11p.5

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536-7: The Rebellion That Shook Henry VIII's Throne*, (United Kingdom: Orion, 2003) p.198

<sup>4</sup> Hoyle, *Politics of the 1530s*, p.11

<sup>5</sup> Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.361

I will focus this dissertation on the driving force of the rebellion; the common people or as Geoffrey Moorhouse described them: “the ugly power of the mob.”<sup>6</sup> The study will aim to decipher the motivating factors of this group with an aim to differentiate them from the rebels further south in Yorkshire.<sup>7</sup> I will also consider how the rebellion in Yorkshire influenced the commons in Cumberland and Westmoreland to join the largest rebellion in English history.

In the first chapter economic grievances will be considered in detail. Rising taxation, tyranny of local landlords and the enclosure movement had a disproportionate impact on the north-western counties of Cumberland and Westmoreland. The economy was almost entirely agrarian and therefore enclosure posed a significant threat to the farming communities. The extraordinary taxation and entry fines levied against the commons rose ominously during the reign of Henry VIII. In Cumberland the impact of the rising taxation was felt doubly hard due to the county’s location on the border of Scotland.<sup>8</sup> In this chapter a close look will also be taken at the earl of Cumberland, Henry Clifford, as he was seen as a prime example of a tyrannical landlord. I will conclude by arguing that, although not the catalyst for the revolt in Cumberland and Westmoreland, economic discontent played a huge role in swelling the numbers of the rebels and will be considered as the most important grievance the rebels held.

The next chapter will take a look at the religious grievances of the rebels. Any study of The Pilgrimage of Grace must be carried out in the context of the English Reformation as this caused significant upheaval in the lives of the people of England. The Dissolution of the Monasteries is cited by most historians as the cause of the Pilgrimage of Grace and therefore it will be seriously considered in this study. Clerical involvement will also be taken into account to determine how far they influenced the rebels. The chapter will conclude by arguing that religion played an important role in uniting the different socio-economic groups in the rebellion and

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.362

<sup>7</sup> Michael Bush, *The Pilgrims' Complaint: A Study of Popular Thought in the Early Tudor North* (United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing, 2009) p.179

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p.178

offered legitimacy for the rebel's cause. Religious grievances acted in the short term as a catalyst to spark the commons into motion. However, if it was not for the existence of the economic grievances on the commons of Westmoreland and Cumberland religious grievances would not have been enough to cause the rebellion on their own.

The third chapter will take into account the revisionist school of thought surrounding the Pilgrimage. This will take constitutional grievances into account and discuss how far they influenced the actions of the rebels. The theme of tyranny will be discussed focussing mainly on the role of the King's chief minister: Thomas Cromwell and explore the idea that the Pilgrimage was a 'loyal' rebellion. The articles submitted to King Henry by the rebels will also be described and interpreted before looking at the Council of the North and the attitude that the south had towards the north. I will conclude by arguing that political and constitutional grievances concerned the rebels in Cumberland and Westmoreland far less as has been described in the work of Geoffrey Elton and Michael Bush.

Much of the analysis will be based on primary evidence found in the online archives of Henry VIII's Letters and Papers. These give an essential insight into the events involving the key protagonists in the Pilgrimage and shed light on the contemporary interpretation of these events. However consideration must be taken over the author of these sources. As illiteracy was almost universally for the commons in Tudor England it is likely that the primary sources will not be penned by the peasants taking part in the rebellion. Therefore I will use a wide range of secondary sources to supplement my argument. With many authors such as Diarmaid MacCulloch and David Callaghan arguing that religious grievances were the driving force behind the pilgrimage and others like Michael Bush and Geoffrey Elton putting forward the case for political grievances, this dissertation will conclude by putting forward a third argument; that the main motivation of the Cumberland and Westmoreland commons in join the rebellion was their underlying economic and agrarian grievances. Religious grievances will be acknowledged as

playing a specific role in uniting and legitimising the rebellion and the abrogation of holy days as acting as a catalyst for it.

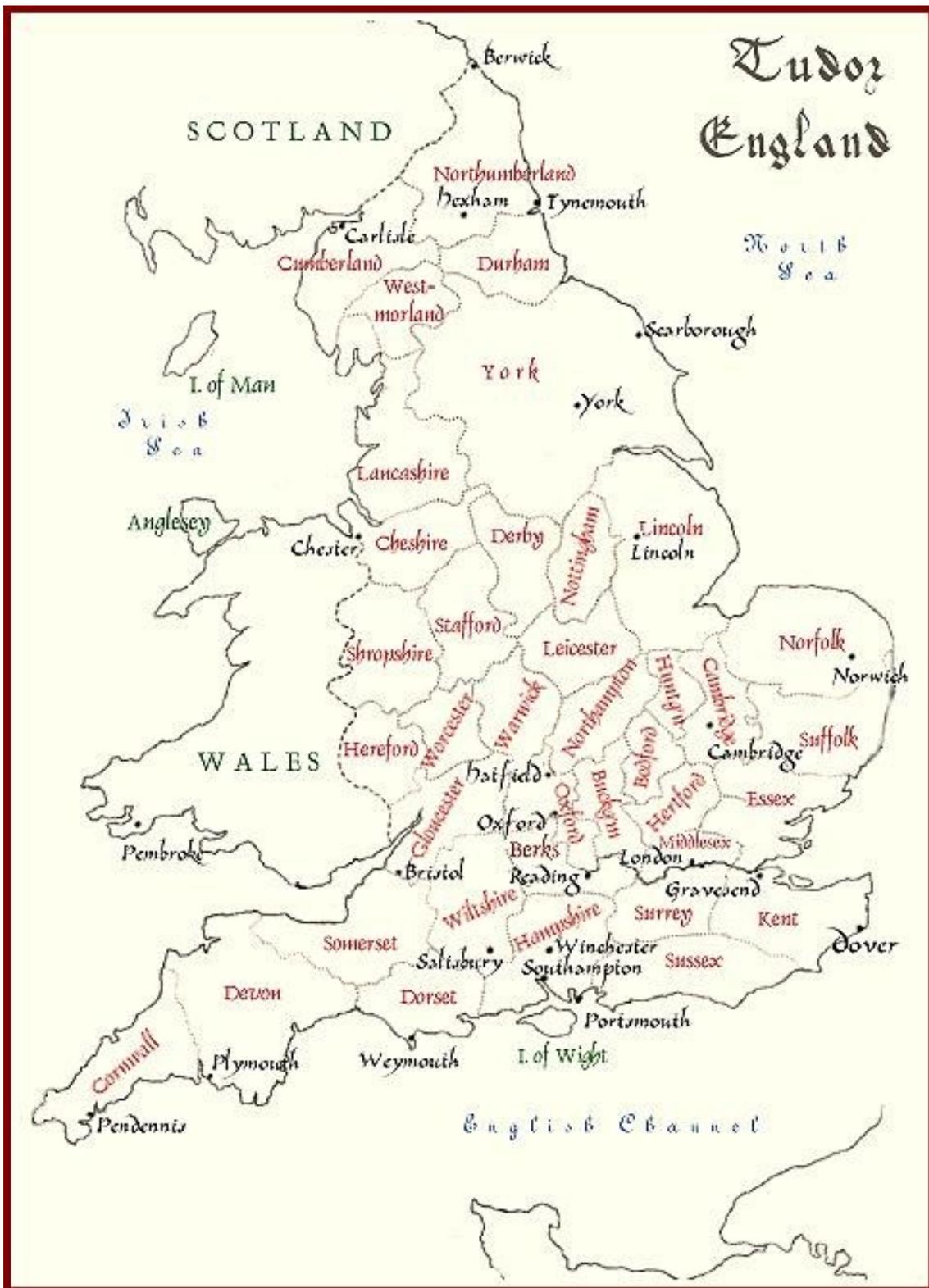


Figure 1: The counties of England in the 16th century; Cumberland and Westmoreland are situated to the far north-west of England.



Figure 2: A map of the north-west of England in the 16th century detailing Cumberland and Westmoreland.

## Chapter One: Economic Grievances

The rising that occurred in 1536, which took place in seven counties covering a third of England, gained widespread support, particularly from the commons, but also from members of the clergy and in some cases the acquiescence of the gentry.<sup>9</sup> To understand why the revolt was so widespread and involved people from almost every level of the social strata, one must consider a range of grievances which effected people in different regions geographically, but also spiritually and economically. This chapter addresses the economic grievances and also examines where these overlap with other issues to be discussed in this study.

Stanley Bindoff sets the scene for the Pilgrimage of Grace thus:

In the North, as elsewhere, there was plenty of mass-discontent waiting to be mobilized: discontent fomented by taxation, by rising prices, by enclosure and rack-renting. And in the North there were people able and ready to mobilize it: magnates who resented Wolsey and the Cromwells, gentry and towns becoming conscious of their under representation in parliament, traders jealous of the hegemony of London.<sup>10</sup>

This introduction is useful as it provides a number of different explanations for the discontent. This chapter will take a close look will be taken at the economic grievances. First it will uncover the economic grievances the northerners held. Secondly it will state which was the most important. And lastly, it will consider whether the economic grievances were as straight forward as they seemed, or were they merely a representation of more deep rooted dissatisfaction within the northern communities? To understand this, primary source material from the letters and papers of Henry VIII will be used to give an insight into the region at the time of the rising, which will be supplemented with an analysis of the secondary material to give an idea of the debate

---

<sup>9</sup> C. S. L. Davies, "The Pilgrimage of Grace Reconsidered", *Past & Present*, No. 41 (1) (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) pp.54-5

<sup>10</sup> Stanley Thomas Bindoff, *The Pelican History of England: Tudor England*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977) p.107

surrounding the rebellion. The chapter will begin with a description of the economic grievances, especially those of taxation, rents and enclosure.

Henry VII revolutionised the way income was generated by the crown through taxation and extortion. This meant that when Henry VIII came to the throne he inherited a brimming treasury; by the time his reign came to an end however he “bequeathed an empty one to his son.”<sup>11</sup> This was due to his massive expenditure on waging war in the early years of his reign. His first war cost him almost all the money left to him by his father, after that he had to raise more through taxation, confiscation and depreciation.<sup>12</sup> The bulk of the taxation was levied against property and income, certainly this was the case in Cumberland and Westmoreland where accounts of extortionate rents and *gressums* (that is, payment on taking up a tenancy by inheritance or sale or entry fines) are widespread.<sup>13</sup> An important thread that runs through the discourse of almost all the rebellious factions is the desire to return to the conditions that existed under Henry VII. At this time direct taxes amounted to an average of £11,500 a year, under his son Henry VIII this rose to an average of £30,000 per year.<sup>14</sup> Henry VIII’s demand for higher incomes was obvious to those seeking favour within his court.

Wolsey and subsequently Cromwell, saw their way to find favour was with Henry was to increase the income of the crown; this was often to the detriment to the commons. For example, the crown acquired rents of over £100,000 a year from properties confiscated during the Dissolution of the Monasteries.<sup>15</sup> The policies of higher taxation on people and property, confiscations during the dissolution and the acceleration of process of enclosure were not well met and found their origins lying with the ministers within Henry’s government, a point fully

---

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.112

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, p.113

<sup>13</sup> Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, 5th edn.(United Kingdom: Pearson/Longman, 2008) p.40

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p.114

understood by the commons. These policies had a disproportionate impact on those in the far north, an area already amongst the poorest regions in the country.

It is evident that the grievances expressed in Cumberland and Westmoreland in 1536 were predominantly economic.<sup>16</sup> The target of much of the dissatisfaction was the Earl of Cumberland himself, Henry Clifford. In becoming such a great magnate, Clifford had gained a reputation as being the hardest landowner in the North. He was described by his contemporaries as “an avaricious man who put profit before the principles of good lordship.”<sup>17</sup> Moorhouse argues that the bitterness directed at Clifford by the Cumbrians was for two clear reasons; firstly, because he did not fulfil his duties as Earl of Cumberland as his seat was Skipton Castle in Yorkshire and secondly because he was too distracted by his family feud with the Dacres to pay attention to the needs of the commons.<sup>18 19</sup> This would fit in with scepticism over whether the criticisms of the people of Cumberland and Westmoreland were purely economic or more political. Moorhouse explains; “he was seen more ‘as an incompetent and absentee warden of the west march rather than as an extortionate lord.’”<sup>20</sup>

Lord William Dacre was part of a family that held significant power and influence in Cumberland.<sup>21</sup> A letter sent by Dacre to Cromwell in June 1537 told of the greed of Clifford. The letter speaks of a member of Dacres family who “has often requested my lord of Cumberland for repayment of the yearly farm of the goods, offices, and tithes which were the subject of a decree by Cromwell between the said lord and himself and his uncle Sir Christopher, but is always put off by reason of a former date of an indenture of the captainship of Carlisle, by which Cumberland claims the profits from the Michaelmas”<sup>22</sup> This is certainly evidence of Clifford’s avarice. However,

---

<sup>16</sup> Davies, *Reconsidered*, p.55

<sup>17</sup> Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.85

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85, p.181

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p179

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.85-6

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> James Gairdner, ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509 -47*, 21 Volumes (London, 1862-1932) LP, XII, no. 112.

the feud between Dacre and Clifford is well documented and so any descriptions of the other must be seen to be rather subjective. Due to the quantity of accounts from different sources however, Dacre's account can be believed.

More widespread avarice and greed from the landowners of the north was particularly evident through the payment of *gressums*. Davies describes that the rebels' main goal was that "*gressums*' and other extraordinary dues should be moderated or abolished."<sup>23</sup>

Peter Middleton is a fine example of a Cumbrian landowner who embodied the commons economic grievances. He was described by Moorhouse as, "a rackrenting landowner with an unpleasant history of tenant evictions ever since his acquisition of estates in the district five years earlier."<sup>24</sup> Following the failure of the rebels to take Carlisle, on their journey home Middleton was besieged on an island in Derwent Water Lake. This event was not unique; occasions where rebels took matters into their own hands to administer justice were common place and suggest that not only were economic grievances widespread but also strong enough for the commons to resort to violent action.

The commons did not however take matters into their own hands immediately. Primary source material exists showing that they did at first attempt to follow the proper practice of appealing to their local Lord. This excerpt from a letter sent to Lord Darcy in November 1536 describes the dissatisfaction that the commons of Westmoreland felt having the pay both their ordinary taxes and *gressums* on top of them.

Ask him to show them some favour concerning the wealth of their country, by giving them advice 'conserynge the gyrsumes for power men to be laid a parte but only penny farm (?) penny gyrsum, with all the tythes to remayn to every man hys awne, doynge therfor accordynge to thair dewtye, also taxes casten emongst the benefest men, as well tham in abbett with in us as thai that is notte incumbent.'<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Davies, *Reconsidered*, p.55

<sup>24</sup> Moorhouse, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.183

<sup>25</sup> L&P, XI, 1080

This highlights the grievances that the 'power men' (the rich landowners, such as Middleton) were levying this extraordinary taxes on the 'penny farms' (the poorer members of the commons) and discusses the negative impact this is having on the wealth of the country.

This introduces another grievance which has been considered as a potential cause for the rising in the far north. This concerns the threat that Scotland caused to these counties and a grievance which is unique to the counties of Cumberland and Northumberland. The source of these concerns was the argument that, although the landlords of Cumberland and Westmoreland were not breaking any particular laws by imposing this extraordinary taxation, they were nevertheless acting against the best interests of the country and the King. As a result of their actions they were impoverishing the north; this prevented the commons to fulfil their obligations to defend the northern border of England from the Scots.<sup>26</sup> This goes to show that the revolt in the northern counties was a 'loyal rebellion'. The commons believed that through the policies of the King's governors and the gentry the commonwealth was being weakened. The *gressums* were cause for grievance, but if we look deeper we see that the wider grievance was this idea of the deepening vulnerability of the north as a result of harsh economic policies. Haigh goes as far as to suggest that the idea that a "shortage of coin could drive the north into either rebellion or treaty with the scots was probably not without foundation."<sup>27</sup>

In the Second petition submitted on the 4th December 1536 by the Pilgrims in Yorkshire, of the twenty-two articles, the two which described economic grievances came specifically from the rebels of the upland north; Articles nine and thirteen spoke of the greed of landlords and contempt for tenant rights.<sup>28</sup>

Another policy which had a disproportionate impact on the counties in the far north of the country was enclosure. There is debate between scholars over whether it was a significant

---

<sup>26</sup> L&P, XI, 1246 (2)

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Haigh, *Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969) p.60

<sup>28</sup> Michael Bush, "The Tudor Polity and the Pilgrimage of Grace", *Historical Research*, 80 (2007) p.48

enough grievance to enflame the commons into rebellion. Both Palliser and Harrison dismissed its importance when they considered the pilgrimage as a whole;

Enclosure was almost certainly the less important of the two... it was only a grievance in the valley communities of the west riding, in the lake county uplands and in certain densely populated areas such as the Vale of York, Furness, the Eden Valley and parts of the Cumberland Coast.<sup>29</sup>

Despite this analysis for this study enclosure should be considered seriously. In Cumberland in particular it was an important grievance as, although sparsely populated, it affected many communities disproportionately due to the nature of the farming in the Lake District, much of it hill sheep farming. Davies describes that the commons of Cumberland complained about the enclosure of both waste and forest.<sup>30</sup> He puts this on a par with the disagreements over *gressums* and in many ways the two overlap.

Further dismissal of the significance of enclosure comes from Fletcher and McCulloch. They argue that "Entry fines were a far more serious matter of complaint West of the Pennines than enclosures."<sup>31</sup> It is true that these were better documented, as they affected every member of the community. However enclosure was still an issue which particularly affected those in densely populated areas near the Cumbrian coast and the hill sheep farmers of the Lake District. Therefore we should not necessarily lessen the significance of this as an economic grievance. Enclosure ended the open field system which had operated in England for Centuries. It began in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries the process accelerated significantly.<sup>32</sup> Once enclosed the once open fields became restricted to the owner, and were often leased back to the people. This process can be linked to other grievances. Firstly the act of leasing land back to the people who once freely used it would involve the payment of a *gressum*; therefore as a result of

---

<sup>29</sup> David Palliser, *Tudor York*, (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1979) p. 49, 80; Scott Michael Harrison, *The Pilgrimage of Grace in the Lake Counties, 1536-37*. (United Kingdom: Royal Historical Society, 1981) p.60-6

<sup>30</sup> Davies, *Reconsidered*, p,55

<sup>31</sup> Fletcher& MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, p.40

<sup>32</sup> Joan Thirsk, *The Rural Economy of England: Collected Essays* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1984) p.71

enclosure this practice became more widespread. Secondly enclosure led to a rise in pastoral farming, particularly sheep. This was due to the growing wool trade and also because it required fewer men to work the land, it was therefore a way to maximise profits. However, it also led to a smaller grain yield which made England more susceptible to famine (as experienced earlier in the 1530s) and also higher grain prices.<sup>33</sup> This would lead the people of the north to feel the weight of taxation more heavily and thus further impoverish the region. As a result they felt less well prepared to combat the threat from the Scots. This led to many northern dissidents to hark back to the time under the previous king where the levels of taxation and corruption were not so high. The enclosure process was often equated with a loss of common rights, the acceleration of which was blamed on Henry VIII and particularly his chief minister Thomas Cromwell.<sup>34</sup> Therefore there is a theme which runs through the grievances of the northern rebels; this was the wish to return to conditions as they existed under Henry VII. Taxation had risen throughout Henry VIII's reign and factors such as enclosure and the Dissolution of the Monasteries exacerbated the problem. However the pilgrims and northern rebels were adamant that the blame did not rest with the king but with his ministers, particularly Cromwell. "The Westmoreland Commons mentioned ... in their letter to Lord Darcy... that it was they [the local gentry] and 'not our prince and nor our king' who 'do take our commonwealth from us.'"<sup>35</sup>

As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, the *gressums*, which formed a large part of the letter to Darcy, were an example of new, extraordinary taxation which was only serving to weaken the northern communities. When writing to Darcy, the commons; "think that they may put in their room to serve God others that would be glad to keep hospitality, for some of them are no priests that have the benefice in hand, and some are Lord Cromwell's chaplains."<sup>36</sup> This

---

<sup>33</sup> David R. Holeton, "Fynes Moryson's Itinerary: A Sixteenth Century English Traveller's Observations on Bohemia, its Reformation, and its Liturgy." *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice*. (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 1996) pp. 379–410.

<sup>34</sup> Maurice Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989) p.28

<sup>35</sup> Fletcher & MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, p.40

<sup>36</sup> *L&P*, XI, 1080

passage of the letter describes the mistrust the Westmorelanders had for members of the clergy; particularly those who they believed were in the employ of Cromwell. The investigations of Layton and Legh are examples of 'Lord Cromwell's Chaplains' who were particularly prominent in the dissolving of the Northern Monasteries in 1535-6.<sup>37</sup> This further impoverished the north as the abbeys and monasteries had been a source of charity to those who needed it most and fulfilled this function far more often in the north than elsewhere. This act was significant to the commons in two ways. Firstly, it served to tie together their religious with their economic grievances and second was seen as a policy being implemented from the south to subjugate the poor northern people. Thompson supports this argument; he states that enclosure was above all a plain case of class robbery.<sup>38</sup>

Enclosure affected those at the lower levels of society, for they were the ones that lost their jobs, had higher rents to pay and ultimately paid more for grain to feed their families. Therefore it led to rising disdain for those who implemented it; distrust for those in the service of Cromwell was clear through the acts of the rebels themselves. Both Harrison and Bush interpret the "attacks on tithe barns" in Westmoreland not as attacks on the Church "but rather an element in the bitterness against unpopular landlords... an attempt to modify a system which both laymen and clerics had corrupted."<sup>39</sup> Once again this shows the rebels' grievances were not only over economic matters such as *gressums* and rents but rather the wider environment of corruption and change which was emanating from the south and the King's advisors.

In conclusion, the cause of much of the discontent in Cumberland and Westmoreland was the rise in the extraordinary taxes and the acceleration of the enclosure act. These came hand in hand with *gressums* and also caused rising food prices and unemployment.

---

<sup>37</sup> Moorhouse, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.91

<sup>38</sup> Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (United Kingdom: Penguin, 1991). P.237

<sup>39</sup> Bush, M. L., *The Pilgrimage of Grace: A Study of the Rebel Armies of October 1536*. (United Kingdom: St. Martin's Press, 1996) p.173

<sup>40</sup> Harrison, *Lake Counties*, pp.47-60

As Palliser and Harrison described enclosure was only a real concern to the commons west of the Pennines and as it coincided with an increase in the payment of *gressums* it can be considered the most important economic grievance which the people of the north faced. Policies like enclosure were seen as attempts by the south to subjugate the north, as taxation had been on the rise throughout Henry VIII's reign. The acceleration of the policy of enclosure was greeted with hostility toward the perceived perpetrators, those in the gentry and ministers within Henry's government. Moreover with the latent threat from the Scots, the commons of the north, in conjunction with those taking part in the Pilgrimage in Yorkshire, saw this as their duty to protect the country from threats both inside and out. Therefore although economic concerns were not the catalyst for sparking the revolt in Cumberland and Westmoreland, once it had begun the economic grievances definitely served to swell the numbers of participants.<sup>41</sup> This was because many saw that this was their opportunity to express their dissatisfaction and affect change. Therefore it can be argued with a high degree of confidence that without the underlying economic grievances the rebellion would not have had the uptake as it did and potentially may not have joined the rebellion at all. Thus this grievance must be seriously considered when exploring both religious and political motivations.

---

<sup>41</sup> George. W. Southgate, *English Economic History*, (United Kingdom: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1934) p.67

## Chapter Two: Religious Grievances

Religion in the 16th century held superior importance for the people of England. In the 1530s the Church was in upheaval. The Reformation in England was in full swing and it was proving to be a long and complex process. It was essentially a break from the Catholic Church in Rome but it had political motivations as well; it represented:

An assertion of secular control over the Church; a suppression of Catholic institutions such as monasteries and chantries; a prohibition of Catholic worship; and a protestantization of services, clergy and laity.<sup>42</sup>

What is very interesting about the historiography concerning the reformation with respect to the Pilgrimage of Grace is that it is almost impossible to find an author who does not link the rebellion directly to the upheaval caused by the Reformation.<sup>43</sup> It is true that this event meant that religion became more than ever a point of identity, and the emphasised the idea that change was considered bad for the commonwealth. The commons in Cumberland and Westmoreland did indeed display a particular aversion to the Dissolution of the Monasteries and the abrogation of Holy days. In this chapter the reliance of the far northern communities on the abbeys and monasteries will be explored and also the reaction to the changes in worship exhibited in Westmoreland. I will also discuss the influence of clerics in channelling the discontent of the commons through propaganda such as 'The Pilgrims' Ballad' and consider the involvement of the clergy in the rebellion in Cumberland and Westmoreland. I will conclude that although religious concerns existed, this was not significant enough to cause the rebellion in Cumberland and Westmoreland on their own. Rather it was the glue which bound the various discontented groups together and offered the legitimacy required to stage such an overt display of opposition to governing elite in London.

---

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Haigh, "The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1982) p. 995

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1006

As mentioned, it is difficult to find an author that does not attribute rebellious action to religious malcontent. Bindoff is no exception; he argues that the Rising in the North's main purpose was to halt the dissolution of the Monasteries.<sup>44</sup> MacCulloch would agree; interpreting the rebels actions as "the whole commonwealth of the north... making known it's hatred of religious change."<sup>45</sup> The Pilgrims did adopt the 'Five Wounds of Christ' as their banner to march under in Yorkshire.<sup>46</sup> In the far northern counties the religious grievances did indeed serve to unite disgruntled groups. Bindoff acknowledges this, describing the dissolution as "the occasion rather than the cause of the rebellion" and identifies religion as the uniting factor of a number of different and on occasion conflicting socio-economic groups.<sup>47</sup> The nature of the grievances in Cumberland and Westmoreland did differ slightly from those felt elsewhere in the north and therefore it must be considered how far they influenced the actions of the rebels in this particular area. The first to be considered is the dissolution of the monasteries which began in 1535.<sup>48</sup>

At the time of the Pilgrimage "the north set greater store by the monasteries than the south, and if they were to find champions it would be there."<sup>49</sup> This was certainly proven to be true in the northwest, where a song known as the 'Pilgrims Ballad' was used to spread awareness and garner support for the Pilgrimage. This evidence is particularly relevant to this study as it merges religious and economic grievances; equating the attack on the monasteries to an attack on the poor.<sup>50</sup> The Ballad was composed by the monks of Sawley Abbey in Lancashire and was circulated across the north to encourage support for the Pilgrimage. However, the claims made in this piece of primary evidence must be approached with caution. The monks across the north were hit hard by the Dissolution of the Monasteries and many lost their professions and

---

<sup>44</sup> Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p.107

<sup>45</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London: Penguin Books: 2004) p.200

<sup>46</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Alters: Traditional Religion in England; c. 1400- c.1580*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) p.248

<sup>47</sup> Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p.107

<sup>48</sup> Herbert Maynard Smith, *Henry VIII and the Reformation*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1964) p.75

<sup>49</sup> Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p.107

<sup>50</sup> Fletcher and MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, p.42

livelihoods. Sawley Abbey was itself dissolved under the Act of Suppression in 1536.<sup>51</sup> Therefore one can imagine that they would have a vested interest in encouraging the rising, especially in linking the commons primary economic grievances with religious concerns. This point is easy to argue, for, as a result of the Pilgrimage, Sawley Abbey was restored.<sup>52</sup> Therefore the 'Pilgrims Ballad' can be interpreted as propaganda and the claims made within not necessarily a reflection of the circumstances that existed in the northwest in 1536. For this study however it still holds significance due to its widespread influence in Cumberland and Westmoreland.

The 'ballad' states that the commons' economic and political grievances are inextricably linked to the plight of the monks and the religious suppression. The idea of the commonwealth was prominent in the minds of the commons at this time. This was the idea that economic, religious and political rights and liberties were central to the common good of the land. Due to the upheaval of the 1530s the commonwealth (or commonweal) was seen to be under threat. The Catholic Church showed how easily this idea could be exploited to suit their own ends and propaganda like "The Pilgrims' Ballad" was a prime example.<sup>53</sup> It states in the first stanza:

Crist crucifyid!/ For thy woundes wid/ Us commons guyde/ Which pilgrimes be/ Thrughe Godes grace/ For to purchache/ Old welth and peax/ Of the Spiritualtie.<sup>54</sup>

This suggests that it is due to a fall in the piety of those in power and the nation as a whole that the economic grievances and the poor leadership have come about. It is the 'commons... which pilgrims be' who must rectify this problem and in doing so find their own grievances resolved and restore the commonwealth. The mention of the 'spiritualtie' in the last line shows the link

---

<sup>51</sup> William John Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History*. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914) p.257.

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Haigh, *Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1969) *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2008) p.53

<sup>54</sup> L&P, XI, 786(3)

between the wealth of the people and the wealth of the church. The second stanza further emphasises this:

Gret godes fame/ Doith Church proclame/ Now to be lame/ And fast in boundes/ Robbyd, spoiled  
and shorne/ From Catell and corne/ And clene furth borne/ Of housez and lands.<sup>55</sup>

From the emotive language used in the ballad, 'robbyd', it can be interpreted that the Church advertised themselves as a helpless victim of the current political situation. The government had been tampering in the ecclesiastical process greatly over the course of the 1530s. The clergy did not take kindly to the government's "attacks on sanctuary and benefit of clergy, and by its subjection of the spirituality to a layman."<sup>56</sup> This theme is consistent throughout the ballad, the second verse is particularly scathing:

Alacke! Alacke!/ For the church sake/ Pore commons wake/ And no marvell!/ For clere it is/ The  
decay of this/ How the pore shall mys/ No tong can tell.<sup>57</sup>

This verse is particularly relevant to our analysis and the idea that religious and economic grievances were one in the same created this idea of the commonwealth. The monks argue due to the decay of the church, there is no telling how great any impact this will have on the poor. Evidence such as the ballad can be used to suggest that the Lake Counties were far more concerned with religious grievances than Scott Harrison and Michael Bush had concluded.<sup>58</sup> These were important to the people of Cumberland and Westmoreland because they sought to legitimise their opposition to the ruling elite through the church and God. If the church preached that what they were doing was right, the rebels' action could serve the ends of both the monks and the commons themselves.

---

<sup>55</sup> L&P, XI, 786 (3)

<sup>56</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.59

<sup>57</sup> L&P, XI, 786 (3)

<sup>58</sup> Fletcher and MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, p.41

The second article of the 'First Five Articles' submitted to the King in October 1536 called for a desire for the maintenance of the Church's liberties and restoration of the abbeys.<sup>59</sup> It is clear that the rebellion did serve these interests; the rebels succeeded in restoring "Sixteen of the fifty-five monasteries that had been dissolved under the act of suppression in 1536."<sup>60</sup> Particularly important to note for this study is the fact that all four suppressed monasteries in Cumbria were re-opened including Cartmel, Cornishead and Sawley.<sup>61</sup> Therefore "The Pilgrims' Ballad" clearly achieved its aim; it furthered the support for rebellions and thrust religious concerns to the forefront of the demands of the rebels. If the Ballad was indeed no more than propaganda, it was effective, this confirmed by the part it played in the restoration of Sawley Abbey. Whether or not the grievances expressed in the Ballad were truly reflective of the situation in 1536, the commons believed them, and this was enough to unite many groups across the north of England in rebellion. As a result religious grievances must be seriously considered as a motive for the rebellion in Cumberland and Westmoreland.

The evidence put forward by Fletcher and MacCulloch rejects Bindoff's suggestion that the rebellion failed in its professed objects in Cumberland and Westmoreland. Bindoff argues that the Dissolution of the Monasteries was not halted, it was accelerated.<sup>62</sup> Of course, if we look at the wider picture fifty-five monasteries were dissolved under the act of suppression in 1536 and with only sixteen reinstated following the pilgrimage it would be easy to conclude that it was a failure. However, with this study focussing on the monasteries in Cumberland and Westmoreland, of the four that were dissolved, four were reopened. Therefore Bindoff was wrong to make the claim that "the rebellion failed in more than its professed objects" as the success in Cumberland

---

<sup>59</sup> L&P XI 902 (2)

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p.108

could indicate that the restoration of the monasteries must have been high on the agenda of the Northern rebels and it was certainly achieved.<sup>63</sup>

Another important source of discontent at the time of the Pilgrimage, and indeed since the time of William the Conqueror was the perceived domination of the south over the north.<sup>64</sup> This complaint was not always distinct but often a theme within other grievances. For example, some religious holidays observed in the north were not observed in the south following the Reformation. The Church of England, whose head was King Henry VIII, wanted firmer control on the ecclesiastical process throughout the country. The most vivid manifestation of this was the abrogation of certain holy days which had been a pillar of local custom for many centuries in parts of Cumberland and Westmoreland.

In the south-west of Cumberland and parts of Westmoreland the abrogation of Holy days produced the most dissatisfaction. An example of this occurred at Kendalton where the commons were “stirred up suddenly at Bedes bidding and would have had the priest bid the Bedes the old way and pray for the pope.”<sup>65</sup> At Kirkby Stephen in Westmoreland the curate refused to bid St. Luke’s Day.<sup>66</sup> Sir Robert Thompson; the Vicar of Brough was brought to the Tower of London to explain the event. In his testimony he describes that “the parishoners would have killed him [the curate]” and that the event led to a muster the next day on Sandefurth Moor.<sup>67</sup> This reaction certainly pushes religious grievances to the forefront of the argument. However, Thompson goes on to explain that the muster was inspired “because they were up in Richmondshire, Yorkshire and Durham.”<sup>68</sup> This would suggest that although the event caused social unrest, the rebellion would not have taken place unless other areas of the north had not already risen. In which case this event can only be considered in the short term as a catalyst for the revolt in north-west, an

---

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.107

<sup>65</sup> Fletcher and MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, p.40

<sup>66</sup> Hoyle, *Politics of the 1530s*, p.233-4

<sup>67</sup> L&P, XII, 687(1)

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

area where long term grievances such as enclosure and the imposition of entry fines were causing more significant disquiet amongst the commons.

Here the merging of different grievances can be seen once again. Was this truly just a religious grievance or was the anger directed more at the suppression emanating from the south and the perceived subjugation of northern culture? Penry Williams took this view stating that; “Fundamentally, the Pilgrims were protesting against the unprecedented intrusion by the crown into their local communities and traditional ways.”<sup>69</sup> The closing of the monasteries was seen in this way and represented by some, such as the Sawley monks, as a threat to the piety of the people. To the commons this was more vividly brought home by the threat it posed to communities.

For a Tudor community the abbey was not only the focal point for their social life, but also provided education, safe deposit for valuables, tenancies for farmers and also a place to dispose of unmarried daughters and look after aged relations through the system of *corrodies*.<sup>70</sup> In the North West these benefits were considered more essential than elsewhere in the land; leader of the Pilgrimage Robert Aske gave a particular mention to the effect the dissolution would have on the “commons of Craven, Dent, Setbaugh, Kendall, Furness and Boulond.”<sup>71</sup> This was because these areas were located in the mountainous Pennines and South Lakes. Here clothing, food, hospitality and charity offered on a daily basis could be the difference between life and death. This made the monasteries and abbeys invaluable to the communities as a whole.<sup>72 73</sup>

Religious grievances are considered particularly seriously by Davies, he warned that “it was to the accident of political circumstances, not to any peculiar lukewarmness of religious

---

<sup>69</sup> Penry Williams, *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) p.321

<sup>70</sup> A corrody was a grant of money or victuals, made by a monastery or other religious or charitable corporation to dependents, Richard I. Harper, “A Note on Corrodies in the Fourteenth Century”, *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (The North American Conference on British Studies, 1983) p.95

<sup>71</sup> L&P, XII, 6(1)

<sup>72</sup> Fletcher and MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions*, p.42

<sup>73</sup> Harrison, *Lake Counties*, p. 12

feeling, that England owed its immunity from religious war in the sixteenth century.”<sup>74</sup> This suggestion that religious war was a potential eventuality was not too difficult to envisage if one considers the events that had occurred on the continent as a result of religious upheaval. A prime example was the Peasants War of 1524-5 which was caused by the Protestant Reformation in Germany. The circumstances surrounding this were very similar to those which existed in England in 1536.<sup>75</sup> Another indicator of how far religious grievance played its part is through the involvement of members of the clergy in the rebellion itself.

To explore this, a discussion must be formed on whether the commons wanted the clergy involved. This would indicate the grievances of those involved in the direction of the rebels and their overall aims. The clergy had been the main target of many of the government policies implemented over the past few decades but Callaghan argues that “there is little reference to a broader clerical involvement in the Pilgrimage.”<sup>76</sup> He describes that clerics in Yorkshire adopted an administrative role due to their vows and their literacy. According to Davies, this came naturally to them; “as a principal intermediary, a major dispenser of news between the world at large and his parishioners.”<sup>77</sup> The monks at Jervaulx Abbey in Yorkshire are an example of this. Here the gentry seemed much more essential for the leadership of the revolt than the clergy; they were often coerced into becoming leaders of rebelling parties. The situation in Cumberland and Westmoreland differs however. Here the rebels did not pursue members of the gentry to lead them; instead those in charge were selected from within the ranks of the commons with important roles given to the clergy as well.

---

<sup>74</sup> Davies, *Reconsidered*, p.76

<sup>75</sup> Friedrich Engels, “The Peasant War in Germany”, Marx & Engels Collected Works 10 (New York: International Publishers, 1978) *Passim*.

<sup>76</sup> David Callaghan, *The Role of the Clergy in the Pilgrimage of Grace*, (University of Warwick, 2009) p.38

<sup>77</sup> Davies, *Reconsidered*, p. 31

The Victoria County History describes that in Cumbria the monks did not necessarily join the Pilgrimage reluctantly. Abbot Carter was a prominent figure in Cumberland in 1537.<sup>78</sup> His actions made him a proactive supporter of the rebellion;

The Abbot of the Cistercian house of Holmcultram urged his tenants join the insurrection, held processions in church for their success and went in person to Carlisle to urge its surrender, seeing all this as a way to save his abbey<sup>79</sup>

This certainly shows involvement, if not in person then definitely in spirit. The composition of the leadership of the rebels in Cumberland showed physical involvement by members of the clergy. In Penrith four Captains had been chosen to lead the rebels; Anthony Hutton, John Beck, Gilbert Whelpdale and Thomas Burbeck, who took the titles of Charity, Faith, Poverty and Pity respectively. Alongside these there were other positions of authority assigned to members of the local clergy. The cross bearer was Sir Edward Penrith, alongside him four chaplains of poverty were selected, all of them eminent clerics.<sup>80</sup> They were Dr Bernard Towneley, Christopher Blenkow, vicar of Edenhall; Christopher Slee, vicar of Castle Sowerby; and Roland Threkeld.<sup>81</sup> Also heavily involved in the rising was Robert Thompson, the vicar of Brough. Towneley described him as a “prophet” and went as far as to blame him for instigating the rebellion in Cumberland by “reading a letter from Richmondshire calling them to rise.”<sup>82</sup> More recently, Scott Harrison has described Threkeld as “the worst example in the region of a wealthy pluralist and absentee cleric of the type the rebels had determined to overthrow.”<sup>83</sup> This would contradict Michael Bush’s analysis that the clergy’s involvement was on reputation rather than commitment. The involvement of the clergy does suggest that religious grievances were important or else they

---

<sup>78</sup> L. & P. XII, 687(1)

<sup>79</sup> James Wilson ed., “A History of the County of Cumberland: Volume 2”, *Victoria County History, Cumbria*, ii, (London: Victoria County History, 1905) p. 170-1

<sup>80</sup> Callaghan, *Clergy*, p.39

<sup>81</sup> L & P, XII, 687 (I)

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> Harrison, *Lake Counties*, p. 102

would not have been approached. In Cumberland and Westmoreland the grievances expressed were due to the Suppression of the Monasteries and also the abrogation of Holy days. The events in Kirkby Stephen surrounding St. Luke's Day were arguably the key flashpoint during the insurrection in Cumberland and Westmoreland.<sup>84</sup>

Another useful indication of whether or not religious grievances were a significant cause of the rebellion is who would be held responsible and punished for them? Despite the clergy making up around two per cent of the population in England at the time of the rebellion, sixteen per cent of those executed after revolts were members of this group.<sup>85</sup> The clergy as a term must be understood however. In Tudor England, 'clergymen' did not carry the same meaning as it does today. It was used to describe many men who were in lower orders who had secular professions. For example, the ordinary parish priest was a small farmer, cultivating the land belonging to his church whilst the higher clergy were involved in professions such as teachers, lawyers, librarians, doctors, statesmen and civil servants. During this time it has been estimated that there was one member of the clergy for every fifty members of the adult population.<sup>86</sup> The proportion of the members of the clergy sentenced to death as punishment for the rebellion was disproportionate. This is a phenomenon which has been repeated throughout history. These figures were often raised to positions of leadership whenever collective action takes place and as a result are often held accountable.<sup>87</sup> Christopher Haigh described the reasons the clergy adopted prominent roles in any collective action: "they were literate and could frame articles of complaint, but also because their presence gave legitimacy to the protest and their people naturally turned to them for advice."<sup>88</sup> In Cumberland and in Westmoreland as described previously, four chaplains were chosen to be part of the company of rebels in Penrith and following the rebellion the Bishop of

---

<sup>84</sup> Hoyle, *Politics of the 1530s*, pp.233-4

<sup>85</sup> Callaghan, *Clergy*, p.7

<sup>86</sup> Bindoff, *Tudor England*, p.77

<sup>87</sup> Callaghan, *Clergy*, p.3

<sup>88</sup> Christopher Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation' in Haigh, C., *The English Reformation Revised*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987) p. 70

Carlisle was executed along with “the quondam abbot of fountains, the abbots of Whalley, Sawley, Jervaux and Barlings, and the prior of Bridlington [who] were all hanged...”<sup>89 90</sup>

The fact of the matter was that many of the grievances influencing the insurrection in Cumberland and Westmoreland overlapped. The weight of taxation was exacerbated by the Dissolution of the Monasteries, as these institutions were the main source of charity. Poverty was the main cause of the perceived vulnerability to the invasion of Cumberland by the Scots as in the northern marches people could not afford to purchase the provisions necessary to protect themselves and communities.<sup>91</sup> Religious grievances also served two very important purposes to the rebels. They united different groups together and served to legitimise the cause of the rebels in the eyes of God. Evidence for this is the composition of the leadership of rebels in Penrith and the actions of Abbot Carter in Holmcultram. The most important grievance for the commons of Cumberland and Westmoreland remained economic however, the religious oppression emerging from the south, particularly the abrogation of holy days, was the catalyst which ignited this time bomb of discontent.

---

<sup>89</sup> L&P, XII, 126 (2)

<sup>90</sup> Maynard Smith, *Henry VIII and the Reformation*, p.92

<sup>91</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press) p.492

### Chapter Three: Political and Constitutional Grievances

Recently the Pilgrimage of Grace has been reconsidered by a revisionist school of historians. Most notably Michael Bush who hypothesised that the cause of the rebellion stemmed from tyranny of those in government and a threat to the rights and liberties of the people.<sup>92</sup> He concludes that if considered down these lines the Pilgrimage was a success. Arguing that by 1540, many of the articles presented to Henry had been fulfilled and therefore that constitutional grievances must have been the primary motive of the rebels. However, Geoffrey Elton argues that the infringement of the rights of the rebels was added anachronistically and that at the time political considerations did not resonate loudly with the Pilgrims and lack significance. Instead Elton argues that it was the work of the defeated Aragonese faction in Henry's court which managed to raise support by exploiting economic and religious grievances in the north. This faction's main protagonist was Lord Darcy who was a prominent gentleman in the Pilgrimage of Grace in Yorkshire. He was ultimately executed for high treason by Henry for surrendering Pontefract castle to Robert Aske.<sup>93</sup> The evidence to support Elton's hypothesis is scarce however and it centred on the events which had little impact on Cumberland and Westmoreland. Therefore it will not be considered in the conclusion of this study.<sup>94</sup>

In this chapter constitutional grievances will be explored and an attempt made to equate them with the grievances of the rebels in Cumberland and Westmoreland. Firstly I will look at the claims made by the rebels that this was a 'loyal rebellion' by focussing on the charge of tyranny directed at the king's ministers: most notably Cromwell. Secondly I will consider the articles that the Pilgrims presented to Henry in 1536, some of which were directly related to the concerns highlighted in the first two chapters. Next I will look at how far the re-establishment Council of

---

<sup>92</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.47

<sup>93</sup> James Gairdner, "Darcy, Thomas". in Leslie Stephen, *Dictionary of National Biography* 14. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1888) pp. 49–53.

<sup>94</sup> Simon Adams, *Leicester and the Court: Essays on Elizabethan Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) pp.100-1

the North can be considered a positive outcome for the people of the Northern counties and lastly I will look at the impression the north had on the south taking a closer look at the Progression King Henry made in the region in 1541. I will conclude that political grievances may have held influence in some circles, such as the leadership of the Pilgrimage in Yorkshire, but in Cumberland and Westmoreland the economic and agrarian grievances were more significant and this is personified by the rebels action to march north to Carlisle to voice their complaints rather than to march south to join the Pilgrims in Yorkshire.

The Pilgrims were careful from the outset not to level complaints at the King. Instead they blamed his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell. He was described by prominent rebel Dr John Pykeryng as a “southern Turk” bent on “subverting our laws and spoiling Christ’s church.”<sup>95</sup> Bush insists that Cromwell was detested as a tyrant for a variety of reasons.<sup>96</sup> The rebels argued that the government was guilty of infringing on the constitution for four main reasons. Firstly that they were treating the estates of society with contempt, secondly because it had ignored customary procedures essential to the running of Parliament, thirdly because it had interfered with local government in a way that was not traditionally permitted and finally because it had made laws and practices which favoured the crown at the expense of the realm and church.<sup>97</sup> As a result the rebels labelled the rebellion as a ‘loyal’ rebellion; as it was not carried out against King Henry but against his ministers who were subverting his rule. Bush sums the situation up thusly:

An upturning of the society of orders through a rising of the commons was regarded by them not as a revolutionary coup but as a temporary re-arrangement, an expedient to be taken in an emergency, a device to be used until the higher orders recovered their lapsed capacity to perform the traditional function of resisting tyrannical government.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> L&P, XII, 1025 (5)

<sup>96</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.56

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p.50

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* p.63

One particular charge brought against Parliament in the Chaloner Statement was the accusation that “a great number of burgesses in the commons” live outside their constituencies.<sup>99</sup> This was the case in the Upper Eden Valley; Harrison’s description of Threkeld as “the worst example in the region of a wealthy pluralist and absentee cleric” certainly held significance to the local commons of Cumberland.<sup>100</sup> But more importantly as Henry Clifford, the Earl of Cumberland lived at Skipton castle in Yorkshire.<sup>101</sup> Chaloner concluded his statement by judging that Parliament was full of absentee members who were “of neither authority nor virtue.”<sup>102</sup>

The next constitutional grievance brings economic and religious grievances under the umbrella of politics. New taxes were imposed on the benefices of the clergy in 1534; these were known as “tenths” and “first fruits.”<sup>103</sup> The argument put forward by the Pilgrims was that the northern convocation were not consulted over the granting of them.<sup>104</sup> Further disagreement came over landholding customs; as landlords “sought to replace fixed by revisable rents and dues and to deny free grazing rights on wasteland by using enclosures to create new farms or rented pastures.”<sup>105</sup> This was interpreted as an attack on the tenants’ rights, both communing and tenurial and was certainly evident in Westmoreland. This grievance was cited by the rebels as a reason for assembling at Pontefract in harness; burial, christenings, marriages should not be taxed and that “such things had never been thought of.”<sup>106</sup> It is not difficult to see the manifestation of this attack on the rights of the commons causing armed rebellion, but due to the distance from London and Cumberland and Westmoreland isolated location within England, often these grievances were interpreted by the rebels in as economic rather than constitutional.

---

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51

<sup>100</sup> Harrison, *Lake Counties*, p. 102

<sup>101</sup> Hoyle, *Politics of the 1530s*, pp.254-5

<sup>102</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.52

<sup>103</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p.44

<sup>104</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.53

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p.62-3

<sup>106</sup> L&P, XI, 826

The best indication of the grievances expressed by the rebels comes from the petitions that were submitted to King Henry. 'The First Five Articles' were submitted on the 26<sup>th</sup> October and subsequently twenty four more were submitted on the 4<sup>th</sup> December 1536.<sup>107</sup> Constitutional complaints figured prominently in the articles. Article three introduced a common thread in the argument of the Pilgrims throughout the north; a demand for the common law to revert to the practice of 1509; and article four required the punishment of certain ministers of the crown for subverting the law.<sup>108</sup>

The second petition expanded on the First Five Articles substantially. Fifteen out of the twenty-two related to violations of the rights and liberties of the people. The misuse of parliament was prominent (articles twelve, sixteen and twenty-one), article fourteen rejected lay taxes granted in 1534; and article twenty which required the repeal of the Act of Uses.<sup>109</sup> However, for this study Articles nine and thirteen are especially relevant as these specifically came from the rebels of the upland north, who spoke of the greed of landlords and contempt for tenant rights. The argument was that the landlords of the upland north were acting against the best interests of the country and king, not by breaking the law but by going against custom. Through their actions, they were impoverishing the north and thus preventing them to fulfil their military obligations defending the borders from the Scots.<sup>110</sup> Furthermore article eleven described the actions of Thomas Leigh and Richard Leyton, who "quickly earned a reputation for lining their own pockets as they carried out their legitimate occupation of investigating all aspects of religious life."<sup>111 112</sup>

Such complaints were difficult to express preceding the Pilgrimage of Grace. The distance from London and the absenteeism of the powerful northern lords meant that the re-

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.48

<sup>108</sup> L&P, XI, 902 (2)

<sup>109</sup> L&P, XI, 1182 (3)

<sup>110</sup> L&P, XI, 892 (3), 1246 ; L&P, XII, 914

<sup>111</sup> Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.31

<sup>112</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p. 56

establishment of the Council of the North can be considered as a tremendous boon to the rights and liberties of the northern commons. How far the absence of such an instrument of government caused rebellion in the far northern counties is difficult to establish.

The underrepresentation of the northerners in Parliament and the absenteeism of the Earl of Cumberland and other leading members of the aristocracy meant that the commons had nowhere to have their petitions heard.<sup>113</sup> This changed after the Pilgrimage of Grace as the Council of the North, which was first established in 1526, was reinstated.<sup>114</sup> This meant that cases could be heard without the need to travel to London, a very expensive and dangerous trip.<sup>115</sup> It has been argued that this council further oppressed the north following the Pilgrimage of Grace. Bindoff echoes this sentiment; he interprets the establishment of the Council of the North as an extension of the power of the south over the north.<sup>116</sup> Further support for this hypothesis comes from James Raine, who insists that the Council in the North “must not be regarded as a concession of what we may call ‘Home Rule’, but as a strengthening of the royal authority in a distant and somewhat unruly part of the kingdom.”<sup>117</sup>

However, Bush contests this view arguing that “the Council of the North was... prominently manned by ex-Pilgrims, with authority to hear northern equity cases in compliance with article twenty three.”<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, by 1543 the Council ensured *gressums* were set at a fixed rate, consistent with Article nine of the December petition.<sup>119</sup> For the commons of Cumberland and Westmoreland the Council of the North represented an instrument where they could have their grievances heard and it meant that in future they would not have to resort to open rebellion. If this organisation had existed before the rebellion had taken place in the north

---

<sup>113</sup> Moorhouse, *Pilgrimage of Grace* p.38

<sup>114</sup> Peter J Gwyn, *The King's Cardinal: the Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1990), p.115

<sup>115</sup> Moorhouse, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.38

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108

<sup>117</sup> James Raine, *Historic Towns: York*, (United States: Kessinger Publishing, 2010) p.105

<sup>118</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.69

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

there is a possibility it could have been avoided and they would not have needed to resort to armed rebellion in order to have their grievances addressed. Therefore the absence of the Council of the North can be interpreted as a significant factor which caused the rising. However, this may only have diffused the economic grievances of the rebels if it had existed and therefore these must still be considered the most important factor.

Henry's progression through Yorkshire in 1451, although some 4 years after the pilgrimage had come to an end, can still be considered relevant to this study. The king intended to do it immediately following the 1537 rebellion.<sup>120</sup> When Henry began to understand the implications of the rebellion, he was keen to reassert his authority as soon as time would allow. It is possible however that the king did not see this threat from the north as seriously as has been suggested. Perhaps his lack of urgency was again an indication of the contempt he had for the north, for it had always been the case that the north was ruled over by the south. This contempt was widespread, Archbishop Cranmer described that it was inhabited by:

a certain barbarous and savage people, who were ignorant of and turned away from farming and the good arts of peace, and who were so far utterly unacquainted with knowledge of sacred matters, that they could not bear to hear anything of culture and more gentle civilization ...<sup>121</sup>

It can be deduced from this withering description that the north was not going to receive any favourable treatment by the policy makers at court in the south. Tim Thornton echoes this analysis, describing Tudor England as; "a country of brooding tyranny, with the north more acutely a victim of the trend even than the south and most subjects of Henry's more united realm there coerced rather than co-opted."<sup>122</sup> Christopher Sansom supports this, and expands it to not only the King and his court but the ruling elites who were bound to the king through compulsory

---

<sup>120</sup> L&P, XII (1), 399, 1118, 1313; XII (2)

<sup>121</sup> Moorhouse, *Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.39

<sup>122</sup> Tim Thornton, "Henry VIII's Progress Through Yorkshire in 1541 and its Implications for Northern Identities", *Northern History*, Vol.46, no.2 (2009) p.234

rituals of submission and forgiveness.<sup>123</sup> The pilgrimage and wider rebellions across the north, including the revolt in Cumberland certainly forced a reaction from the King in the years following 1537. Perhaps this was the only method they could think of to have any influence over his policy making, therefore the contempt the south had for those in the north could be interpreted as a cause for the rebellion in Cumberland and Westmoreland as, even if they could have petitioned the king, they knew that this course of action would be futile.

For fifty years no king had progressed into the North. But as Smith infers, Henry merely “decided to appease the northerners by going to Yorkshire himself.”<sup>124</sup> This did not result in any real reform pertaining to the north crown and perhaps, as there were no further immediate rebellions, we can interpret this grievance as not a significant one. When Henry did arrive in the north his motives were clear. He aimed to remind the northerners that he was fully aware of their rebellion, that he had won victory over the Pilgrims and to claim the Percy inheritance.<sup>125</sup> This shows Henry did not alter his approach to ruling the north; he continued to do so through domination rather than negotiation.

It can be argued that the Pilgrimage of Grace was a manifestation of a protest against sacrilege, greed and ultimately a defence of the people’s rights and liberties. Constitutional grievances came to the fore as they legitimised opposition to religious change and economic exploitation; uniting the three orders of society, the commons, the clergy and the gentry.<sup>126</sup> It is difficult to argue, as Elton did, that consciousness of the threat that a political and social value was not widespread in the minds of the Tudor people. The system of kingship which had seemed so familiar under Henry VII was under attack by the new King’s chief ministers, particularly Thomas Cromwell. He was accused of installing his own supporters through by-elections in

---

<sup>123</sup> Christopher J. Sansom, “The Wakefield Conspiracy of 1541 and Henry VIII’s Progress to the North Reconsidered”, *Northern History*, Vol. 45 (2008) pp.217–38

<sup>124</sup> Ralph Bernard Smith, *Land and Politics in the England of Henry VIII: The West Riding of Yorkshire 1530–46* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 210.

<sup>125</sup> L&P, XVI, 677 (8)

<sup>126</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.59

parliament and pushing through a number of bills in the years immediately preceding the Pilgrimage, enhancing the power of both the King and Parliament. This was in contravention of the coronation oath, parliamentary sanction and convocational consent. The failure of these devices, which had been in place for centuries in order to preserve the rights and liberties of the commons, justified their rising as a means to protect the commonwealth. However, the rising lacked a common thread and there were certainly discord among the commons, gentry and clergy who each had their own interests to pursue – as we have seen in the previous two chapters. This is the reason that the pilgrimage did not achieve more than it did.

It is true that the rebellion in Cumberland and Westmoreland was ultimately determined by self-interest, whether this was to restore a local abbey, to be permitted to observe a certain holiday or to be exempt from a particular tax or fine. Furthermore, as Cumberland was a border county it had historically been exempt from many taxes which were levied on the rest of the country, this was a means to better equip the region to combat the threat from the Scots.<sup>127</sup> This complaint can be interpreted as the loss of rights and liberties of the people of Cumberland, but more fundamentally it was seen by them as an economic grievance. The effect these extraordinary taxes had on the commons of Cumberland and Westmoreland in their day to day life and were far removed from the politics of London. And although the actions of Cromwell, who intended to make Henry the “richest prince in all Christendom”, impacted indirectly on the subjects of this study, it was not made reference to directly in any of the primary evidence that originated in Cumberland or Westmoreland.<sup>128</sup> Furthermore a separate rising in Kendal cited the desire to observe St. Luke’s Day as a reason to rebel; this emerged out of the Reformation which led to the abrogation of Holy days as well as the suppression of the Monasteries. To further fan the flames of unrest was the absenteeism of the Lord of Cumberland, Henry Clifford. This was made worse by the under representation of the region as a whole in parliament. This meant that

---

<sup>127</sup> Bush, *Tudor Polity*, p.62

<sup>128</sup> L&P, XI, 1244

the rebels had no official procedure to follow to voice their complaints. Therefore it is easy to understand how the events taking place many hundreds of miles south can be interpreted to have sparked such an extreme response in the counties of the far north. However, if constitutional grievances were a major influence on the actions of the rebels in Cumberland and Westmoreland they would have marched south to join Robert Aske and the Pilgrims. Instead they marched north, to Carlisle. This illustrates the local nature of their grievances, far more economic and agrarian than constitutional.

## Conclusion

In conclusion the rebellion was caused by a number of overlapping long term and short term grievances. As acknowledged in the introduction to this dissertation, the primary sources have been used with caution. The historiography did shed light on different interpretations of why the rebellion occurred in Cumberland and Westmoreland in 1536. Those championing religious grievances included Davies, Haigh and Callaghan, but what is important to note is that this secondary literature was focused on the reformation and described the Pilgrimage of Grace as a side note. Bush cited widespread awareness of political and constitutional grievances by the commons in his work but I would agree with Elton that these were attached to the Pilgrimage anachronistically and doubt how far these played a role in the minds of the Cumberland and Westmoreland commons. This idea could benefit from future research. George Southgate was far closer to the answer, citing economic grievances as the force behind swelling the numbers of the rebels. The research discussed here not only supports this argument but puts forward religious grievances as the catalyst for the rebellion.

The agrarian and economic grievances played the greatest role in motivating the commons of Cumberland and Westmoreland to join the rebellion. Extraordinary taxation and the enclosure movement attacked at the heart of the commons daily lives and livelihoods and thus provoked the most widespread opposition. Religious grievances legitimised rebellion, the clerical involvement in Cumberland meant that peasants felt they were doing what was right. The refusal of some clerics to bid holy days such as St. Luke's Day definitely acted as a catalyst in the South Lakes. Due to the composition of the leadership of the rebels in Cumberland political grievance such as those Elton put forward can be rejected. Ultimately the commons of Cumberland and Westmoreland were aware of the events happening in Yorkshire and saw this as their opportunity to have their economic grievances addressed. These circumstances and grievances combined to

explain why the commons of Cumberland and Westmoreland joined the largest rebellion England has ever seen in 1536.

## Appendix

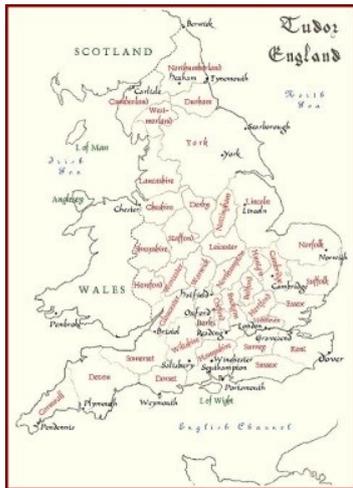


Figure 3: Map of the counties of Tudor England. [Online] (<http://elizabethan.org/compendium/map-england.html>) Accessed: 24/04/2015



Figure 3: Map of Cumberland and Westmoreland including key places. In Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that shook Henry VIII's Throne*, (United Kingdom: Orion, 2003) p.102

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Gairdner, J., ed., *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII* (London, 1864-1932, 21 Volumes) [Online] <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/letters-papers-hen8>

### Secondary Sources

Adams, S., *Leicester and the Court: Essays on Elizabethan Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002)

Beresford, M. W., *The Lost Villages of England*, (Gloucester: Alan Sutton, 1989)

Bindoff, S. T. *The Pelican History of England: Tudor England*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1977)

Bush, M. L., *The Pilgrims' Complaint: A Study of Popular Thought in the Early Tudor North* (United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing, 2009)

Bush, M. L., "Tudor Polity and the Pilgrimage of Grace", *Historical Research*, Vol. 80 (2007) pp. 47-72

Callaghan, D., *The Role of the Clergy in the Pilgrimage of Grace*, (University of Warwick, 2009)

Davies, C. S. L. "The Pilgrimage of Grace Reconsidered", *Past & Present*, No. 41 (1) (London: Oxford University Press, 1968) pp.54-76

Duffy, E., *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New Haven: Yale University Press)

Engels, F. "The Peasant War in Germany", *Marx & Engels Collected Works 10* (New York: International Publishers, 1978)

Fletcher A. and MacCulloch, D., *Tudor Rebellions*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn.(United Kingdom: Pearson/ Longman, 2008)

Gairdner, J., "Darcy, Thomas" in Stephen, L., *Dictionary of National Biography* 14. (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1888)

Gwyn, P.J., *The King's Cardinal: the Rise and Fall of Thomas Wolsey* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1990),

Haigh, C. 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation' in Haigh, C., *The English Reformation Revised*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

- Haigh, C., "The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation", *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Cambridge University Press, 1982)
- Haigh, C., *Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press for the Chetham Society, 1969)
- Haigh, C., *Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1969)
- Hardy, W. J., *Documents Illustrative of English Church History*. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914)
- Harper, R. I., "A Note on Corrodies in the Fourteenth Century", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (The North American Conference on British Studies, 1983)
- Harrison, S. M., *The Pilgrimage of Grace in the Lake Counties, 1536-37*. (United Kingdom: Royal Historical Society, 1981)
- Holeton, D. R. "Fynes Moryson's Itinerary: A Sixteenth Century English Traveller's Observations on Bohemia, its Reformation, and its Liturgy." *The Bohemian Reformation and Religious Practice*. (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 1996) pp. 379–410.
- Hoyle, R.W., *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) Williams, P., *The Tudor Regime* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979)
- Linebaugh, P., *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2008)
- MacCulloch, D., *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*, (London: Penguin Books, 2004)
- Maynard Smith, H., *Henry VIII and the Reformation*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1964)
- Moorhouse, G., *The Pilgrimage of Grace, 1536-7: The Rebellion That Shook Henry VIII's Throne*, (United Kingdom: Orion, 2003)
- Palliser, D. M., *Tudor York*, (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1979)
- Raine, J., *Historic Towns: York*, (United States: Kessinger Publishing, 2010)
- Ralph Bernard Smith, *Land and Politics in the England of Henry VIII: The West Riding of Yorkshire 1530–46* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970)
- Sansom, C. J., "The Wakefield Conspiracy of 1541 and Henry VIII's Progress to the North Reconsidered", *Northern History*, Vol. 45 (2008) pp.217–38
- Scarisbrick, J. J., *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1984)
- Southgate, G. W., *English Economic History*, (United Kingdom: J. M. Dent & Sons LTD, 1934)
- Thirsk, J., *The Rural Economy of England: Collected Essays* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 1984)
- Thompson, E. P., *The Making of the English Working Class*, (United Kingdom: Penguin, 1991)

Thornton, T., "Henry VIII's Progress Through Yorkshire in 1541 and its Implications for Northern Identities", *Northern History*, Vol.46, No. 2 (2009) pp. 231-244

Wilson J., ed., "A History of the County of Cumberland: Volume 2", *Victoria County History*, Cumbria, ii, (London: Victoria County History, 1905)