

WARTON

in the
MIDDLE
AGES

By

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1. Introduction:

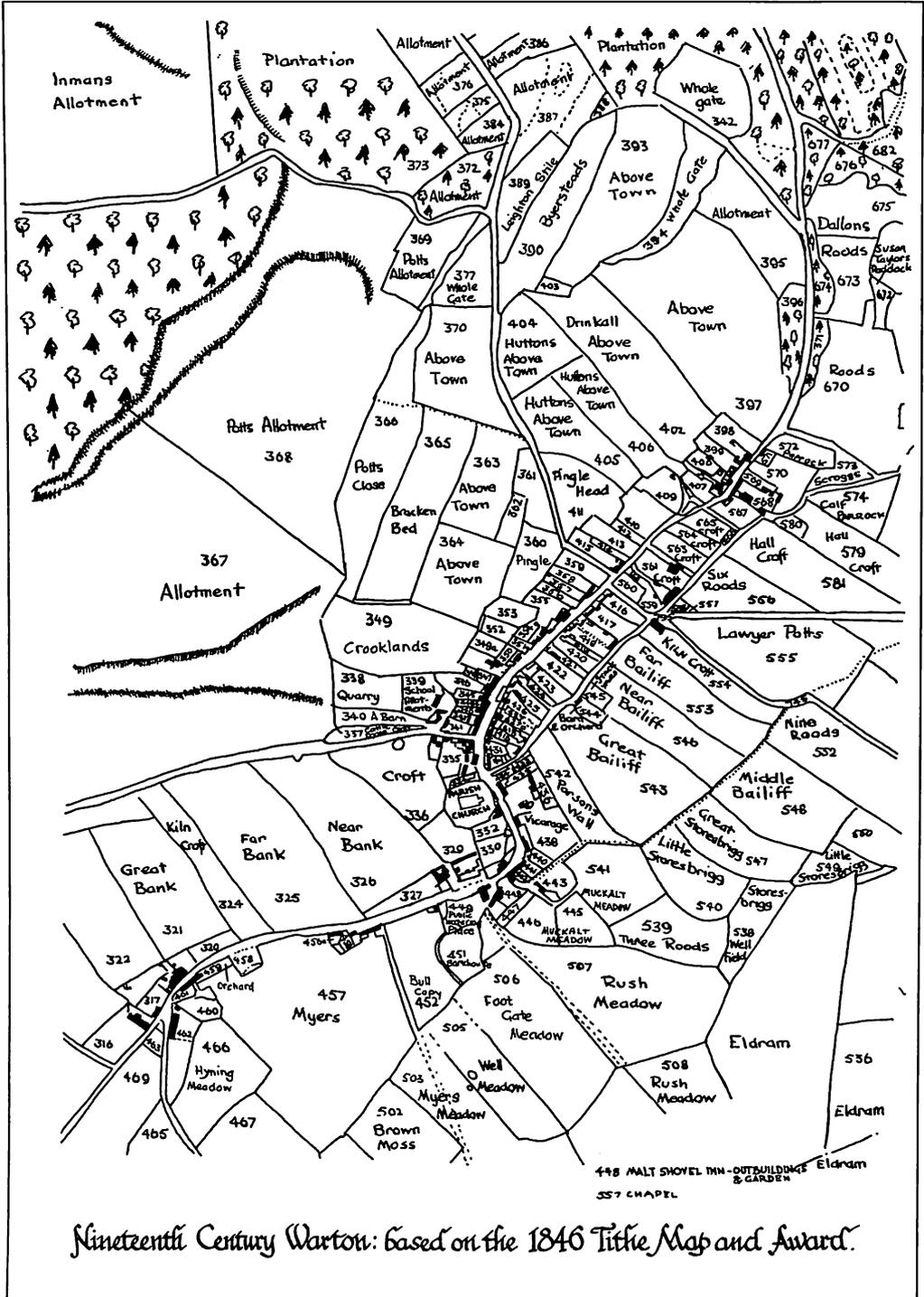
Use your eyes but don't always believe them

In some ways, the story of most English villages is like that of some very elderly living organism. Many years have gone into their growth and development. Changes have taken place: 'diseases' have got a hold, but there has been no clean break in continuity. The creature is still alive and may be in good health. Consequently, the physical remains of Warton's past can be disentangled only with great difficulty from more recent deposits. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was 'redevelopment' on an enormous scale: medieval buildings were altered or torn down without a second thought. Fields were surrounded by hedges and stone walls, radically altering the traditional open landscape, only for them to be removed, to cries of anguish, in the twentieth century. Nevertheless, by using historical and other evidence, it is possible to reconstruct the setting in which medieval Wartonians spent their lives. It is especially interesting to recall this now since the largest number of the ancestors of George Washington, first President of the United States of America, lived in Warton and its surrounding area.

The Washington family held land in Warton parish from about the early fourteenth century onwards. By the end of the Middle Ages, their landed estates were considerable. A member of a younger branch of the family married into the Kitsons of Warton Hall and his son, Laurence Washington (who was born in 1500), further advanced the family fortunes by marrying a rich widow. He moved from Warton to the Midlands in about 1530 and in the flurry of property speculation which followed the dissolution of the monasteries bought the manor of Sulgrave. It was his great-great-grandson, Colonel John Washington, who emigrated to Virginia in 1656, and was, in turn, the great-grandfather of the President. Meanwhile, representatives of the senior branch of the family remained in Warton until the last of them died in 1823.

It is always instructive to start looking at the history of any village from "up in the air". In an attempt to recapture something of medieval Warton, let us consider what we could see from the top of Warton Crag round about the year 1300. Certain things which now dominate the landscape would not be there: the M6 motorway, the various railway lines and the A6 (which is on the line of an early nineteenth-century turnpike road). No such straight and direct lines of communication slashed across the landscape of medieval Lancashire. Such few main roads as there were

Fig. 1



Nineteenth Century Warton: based on the 1846 Tithe Map and Award.

wandered between village and village. Probably the most surprising thing to our eyes, however, would be Warton itself.

It would look much smaller than it does at the present day but it would, nevertheless, be the largest collection of houses in the landscape. To reverse the modern situation, Warton was a town and Carnforth a small village strung along the abandoned stretch of the great north road from Lancaster to Kendal. As our eyes began to focus on the details of the landscape beneath us, we would be struck by how few present day buildings were in existence in the early years of the fourteenth century. Even the parish church received the form which it now has many years after 1300. Indeed, the only building we should really recognise is Warton's architectural 'jewel': the Old Rectory or, more correctly, the rector of Warton's manor house which, despite the loss of its roof and certain adjacent buildings, is still much as it was when newly built in the years between 1300 and 1322.

Without doubt, our biggest surprise of all would come as we looked almost due east from the crag. Nowadays, in the fields beyond Warton, between the A6 and the M6 is a giant gravel pit, flooded with water. In 1300 we would have seen a large, probably stone building, so imposing that it is hard to believe that in 1976 not a stone stands above ground and also its massive foundations have totally disappeared. This was the castle of Mourholme which must truly have dominated the whole area. From it not only Warton and its surrounding villages were ruled but lands far away, in Wyresdale, to the south. Recently, as shall be seen later, even its very existence was doubted until a strange fragment was discovered to bring this particular bit of history to life.

It is not buildings, however, which provide our principal link with medieval Warton, but the shape of the old village itself and its adjacent fields. Buildings have disappeared but the ancient boundaries of building plot, garden, croft and orchard have been much slower to change. (See Fig. 1) 'Old Warton', from the air, has an unmistakable and distinctive shape - one which appears not only elsewhere in England but also in Europe. It is that of a nucleated 'street-village', which means that most of the medieval farm-houses, cottages and craftsmen's dwelling-cum-workshops are crammed into one High Street. The old village stands out clearly at the present day since later buildings, of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, have been built of materials which contrast raucously with the traditional rendered limestone; bright red bricks and Welsh slates for example.

To investigate the pattern of medieval Warton further, the best plan would be to come down from the crag and enter Back Lane which runs

roughly parallel to the south of Main Street. Such back lanes are commonplace in nucleated villages in Lancashire. They represent ancient access paths round the backs of the crofts which stretch out at the rear of the older houses. From Warton's Back Lane, despite modern houses and outbuildings, a landscape can still be discerned which tells us a lot about the village's importance in the Middle Ages. It consists of a pattern of very long and narrow strips of land which still strikes the observer as being something out of the ordinary. More will be said about this later, but it is important to note here that these same long strips can be traced back to plots of uniform size (half a modern acre each) which were, in fact, burgage-plots; each one originally belonged to a medieval burgess. So the view from Back Lane represents, strange as it may seem, the fragmentary skeleton of a small medieval town. It is an urban landscape.

There are, then, abundant physical remains of an important past history underneath what appears to be a medium-sized early modern agricultural village. Seeing is, however, not always believing. The study of local history requires not only that we keep our eyes open but also that we be prepared not to be misled by facile first impressions. Warton now looks quiet and undistinctive. It is hard to realise that before 1500 it had experienced a rise and a decline, which processes involved some of the most momentous events of medieval English history. The threads radiate from the 'Island in the Marshes' (that is Mourholme castle) not only over the rest of England but also to Scotland and France. The very buying and selling which was carried on in Warton's market place was made possible by changes and developments which are part of the history of Western Europe. When the end of the borough of Warton came it was caused, at least in part, by an epidemic which swept over a continent. That decline came in the end has had one good result, at least as far as we are concerned. Much of its medieval shape has been preserved, which would not have been the case if Warton had remained, as it was in 1300, a place on a par with Lancaster or Preston.

2. The fields and the Peasant farmers

History is about people and how they live together. Naturally, therefore, we want to know about the people who lived in medieval Warton and worked in its fields. We must not, however, shirk the most important question which is 'how do we know?' or, to put it another way 'what evidence is there?' for what we have to say. Of course, if we ask this about the 'ordinary people' of medieval England, we might experience some disappointment. We have few life-histories of individuals below the ranks of the great aristocracy. Indeed, it is usually only in legal records that we get to know anything about the medieval peasant apart from his name,

the land he farms, the rent he pays or the services he is bound to do for his lord. He has left neither diary nor letters - few people could read or write. Historians paid almost no attention to him as an individual, except perhaps as the leader of a rebellion. So, our view from the crag in 1300 which shows a reasonably clear 'shape' is peopled by very fuzzy individuals indeed. At the most, they will be just names in documents such as estate records (e.g. rent-rolls, surveys - often called 'Extents') or taxation rolls. As we go back in time before 1300 the lack of evidence becomes even more acute and before 1086 there is nothing at all.

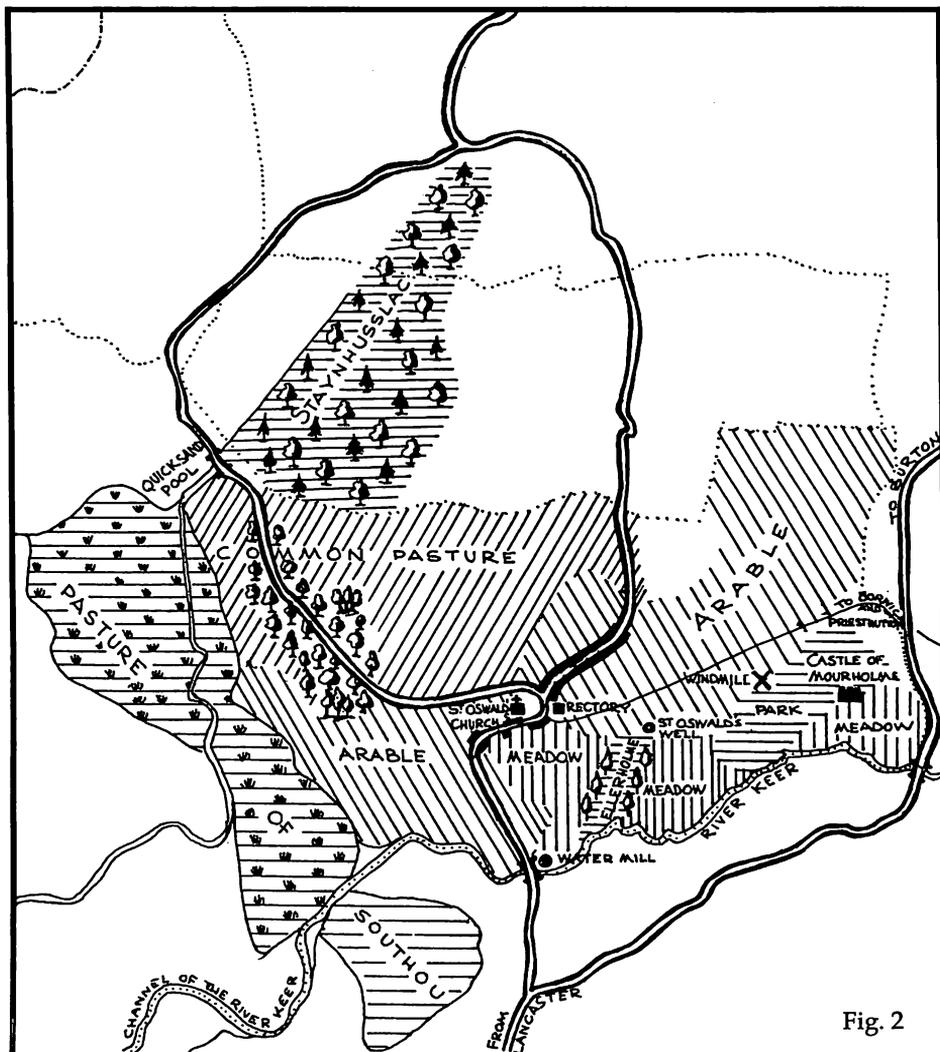
Still, we must not despair. With a certain amount of 'detective work' a lot can be discovered about the life of a medieval peasant farmer in Warton even if he and his family, as individuals, elude us. In most parts of England, the place to start would be Domesday Book, the great survey which was compiled in 1086 and normally contains detailed information about a village and the sort of people who lived in it. For the district in which Warton is situated, called Lonsdale, the entries are disappointingly brief. The county of Lancashire did not even exist until a hundred years later, and Lonsdale was much nearer to the Scottish border than it is now. All we are told of Warton is that it formed part of the estates of an Englishman called Torfin who was based at Austwick and that all his estates were within the West Riding of Yorkshire. It is not until the thirteenth century that we get any really detailed information about Warton. At some time between 1246 and 1271 the lord of Warton issued a charter elevating what was then a market town to the rank of a borough. What concerns us here is that Walter Lindsay, in his charter, specified in detail which lands were *not* to be included within the new borough. The original is in Latin, and translates as follows:-

The wood of Staynhusslac bounded by the ditch which comes from Lindeth to Warton on the west side, and as far as the wood goes towards Barraht. The wood and pasture of Ellerholm (within the ditch) with its appurtenances. The park of Mourholme by the bounds fixed on the day of making this charter. The pasture of Southou, from Southou by the sea-dyke up to Quytesandpole and to Quitsandpole from the side up to Lindeth and from Lindeth, the whole area of enclosed land up to Blackdyke, and going up Blackdyke to the crag beyond Blackwell, and so from the crag to Southou.

Some of the names in this are easily recognisable as they have survived into modern times, perhaps with a few modifications: Lindeth, Eldram (Ellerholm), Quicksand Pool, Black Dyke. Others are not so easy, and it is necessary to walk over the area with an Ordnance Survey map and try out likely candidates. Staynhusslac Wood (possibly Stonehouse-slack) has no modern equivalent. Barraht may be the modern Brow Foot and Southou may mean 'South How' (the southernmost hill). Figure

Two illustrates one possible interpretation of these boundaries.

The borough charter gives us other clues to life in medieval Warton. For example, we are told that its woods consist of hazel, beech and oak among other trees. Most important of all is the light which it sheds on the arable husbandry of the place. We are told that the main division of the arable is between that in the east and that on the west of the township. Nothing very startling, you might think. This slender piece of information does, however, provide a vital link with later documentation, a link which helps us to say far more about the cultivation of Warton's fields. To explain this we have to move half a millennium into the future, from our vantage point of 1300 to the year 1846. This was when the first really accurate plan of Warton's fields was produced, the so-called 'Tithe Map'. It gives the



names and boundaries of all the fields as they were in the mid-nineteenth century, as well as the use to which each of them was put, including the crops (if any) that were grown. What can this possibly tell us about the fields of medieval Warton? Well, if the fields in the Tithe Map which were used for arable in 1846 are shaded then it can be seen that they form two large clusters: one to the South-west of the village and the other to the North-east. Farming practices had undoubtedly changed very considerably since 1300, but the nature of the land which is cultivated much less so. The actual acres under the plough in 1846 were probably not very much different from five hundred years before. So, in Figure Two (the conjectural map) the arable has been marked in from the evidence given in 1846. What is very surprising to our eyes, of course, is the actual amount of land used in Warton for growing crops. At the present day a tour around Warton in the summer will reveal only a scattered handful of fields which have been ploughed up. The rest are used for pasture, or not at all.

Naturally we should be sceptical about interpreting the Tithe Map in the way outlined above if all we had to back it up was the bare statement in the borough charter. Luckily, a document from 1512 gives us more information. It is a 'rental' or list of the tenants of the manor of Warton, which indicates after the name of each the amount of land held and the rent payable. In most cases, the land is not measured in acres but in what was the customary holding for one tenant in this part of the world - the 'bovate' (or 'oxgang'). What this rental shows is that the majority of the Warton peasant farmers were grouped together under two headings: 'East Field' and 'West Field'. It also appears that the 'standard' bovate in Warton included holdings in both of these large fields. This provides a convincing link between the east/west division of the borough charter and the actual use of the land as we know it from 1846. Further evidence, such as field names, confirms this and allows us to take the argument one stage further. What medieval Warton had was two large open arable fields, in which the farmers had holdings consisting of unfenced strips. At one time it was thought that this system, which is common in large parts of England, was absent from the North-west. Research in the 1950s and 1960s, using the same sort of information as has been discussed above, has shown that it was commonplace in Lancashire. We can now make an imaginative leap in our understanding of farming life at the time we are dealing with. It must have been, in some sense, a 'co-operative' enterprise, in contrast with the 'individualism' of the pastoral farming of the high fells. In Warton, as each peasant's oxgang consisted of strips scattered in two large fields, many joint decisions - about what crops to plant, and when the animals could be pastured on the stubble and so on - had to be taken. It is also likely that the actual process of ploughing would entail a number of families 'clubbing together' to make a whole ox team. John Lucas, who wrote his *History of*

Warton Parish just before the middle of the eighteenth century tells us that in his time the number of oxen used to pull the plough in Warton was six. Lucas also mentions that there were still some unfenced strips left in the parish in his day, no doubt the remnant of a medieval open field. These were not in Warton itself but in Carnforth and were called Huthwaites. By that time most of the open arable in the North-west had been enclosed, a process which proceeded piece-meal from the late Middle Ages up to the early modern period. There were 'commons' left in eighteenth century Warton but they were common pasture.

The next most important thing to ask about our medieval peasants is what status they possessed. Medieval society was far from being egalitarian and social ranks were considered to be ordained by God. Another type of document throws some light upon this, called an Inquisition Post Mortem. This was an enquiry made by a royal official, called an escheator, into the amount and value of the estates of prominent landholders at their death (hence 'post mortem'). The inquiry entailed making an 'Extent' or detailed survey of the lands in question. Four reasonably complete Inquisitions, with associated Extents, survive for Warton, dated 1324, 1334, 1343 and 1347. Historically, they are very valuable indeed: they list the various properties which belonged to the lord of the manor - the demesne land, (i.e. his home farm) which comprised 320 Lancashire acres in 1347 - his meadow (101 acres) which was much more valuable than the arable - the corn mills (wind and water) and a mill for fulling cloth - the lord's dovecot and his forge. The tenants of the manor are divided into two classes: the 'free tenants' (who consisted of the burgesses and a handful of others) and the largest class, the 'tenants-at-will' who hold 'bovates' as they are called. Each bovate contained ten (Lancashire) acres, and there were sixteen bovates in the manor in 1324, but twenty in 1347. A tenant-at-will, was, basically, a peasant who held his farm 'at his lord's will' - a will which was fettered only by good faith and custom. The villeins of medieval England - the unfree - were usually 'tenants at will'. Were the Warton farmers villeins? It is a difficult question to answer. They had no security of tenure: legally they could be removed from their holdings by the lord of Warton for any reason or none. Yet the Extents make no mention at all of any onerous labour services such as were typically the lot of a villein in the heart of England, where a peasant could find himself working for his lord, unpaid, for several days a week. If such services had been customary in Warton, they would certainly have been mentioned as they were very valuable. All that seems to have been required of the Warton 'tenants-at-will' (or to give them a later name, very common in the North-west, 'customary tenants') is that they pay the rent of 6s.8d. a year for their ten acre bovate, grind their corn at the lord's mill (at Millhead) for which they paid toll, and attend the manor court every

three weeks. The Extent of 1347 suggests that the insecurity of their tenure was not to be taken too literally since they had what amounted to seven year leases. Every seven years each tenant had to pay double rent for the 'renewal' of this lease - called 'gressom' or 'knowing silver' in other parts of the region. For those who kept their noses clean, renewal was probably automatic. To eke out their ten acres, which had to provide for a whole family, they could put animals to graze on the crag and the marshes, and they could probably fish as well.

3. The Borough of Warton

At the time of the Norman Conquest and for some years afterwards, the north of England was a sparsely populated and backward region. This was exacerbated by the devastation caused by the armies of William the Conqueror when he successfully put down the revolts in Mercia and Northumbria in 1069 and 1070. We are told in Domesday Book that most of the villages in the Fylde were deserted because of this. Trade, except at a very low and local level, must have been more or less non-existent. Only one 'town' is mentioned at all in 1086 in the whole of what later became Lancashire and that was Penwortham, on the opposite bank of the Ribble to Preston. However, the years between 1086 and 1300 saw this picture radically transformed. Generations of people had been busy clearing woodland, moss and heath; the small villages gradually increased the area of their cultivated lands; herds of cattle and flocks of sheep multiplied on the hill pastures. All over England the population increased during this period, in some places by as much as 300%. An increase of this magnitude would necessarily mean an increase in trade. The farmer was basic to medieval society, but when there were so many more farmers it meant that the number of people who did not work on the land could be correspondingly increased, people such as merchants and craftsmen. Thus more goods were produced, the markets for buying and selling proliferated, and internal trade flourished. This was why, by 1350 Lancashire was covered with a network of market towns and boroughs - places which indicated the importance of trade and, which is also important, its profitability.

Consequently, in the year 1200, Gilbert FitzReinfred, Baron of Kendal and Lord of Warton obtained a charter from King John allowing a Wednesday market to be held in Warton. By that time it was coming to be recognised that the right to allow new markets to be set up belonged only to the king. By this charter Gilbert hoped that trade would be attracted to Warton and by charging tolls on those who bought and sold in the market he hoped to make substantial profits. In return it was his job, in what was a very lawless age, to provide security and protection for those doing

business in the market. It is no accident that the very same charter gave him the right to have a gallows and a pit (where the ordeals by fire and water took place) in Warton, which represented his duty to maintain public order.

It seems that, at first, the plan worked, and that trade was attracted to Warton. The village was, after all, well placed with relation to the two 'main roads' from Lancaster to Carlisle - the inland one via Kendal and the oversands route through western Cumberland. Of course Warton was right on the edge of the debatable area between England and Scotland and, indeed, when the English crown was weak this was a source of great danger. In the first half of the twelfth century, when Stephen and Matilda were fighting for the crown, the whole of Lancashire north of the Ribble had fallen into Scottish hands. From the mid-century there was a recovery, and under Henry II (who died in 1189) the English monarchy had become one of the strongest in Europe. Hence an era of relative peace was ushered in which was a direct cause of Warton's market charter.

We can assume that the market was a success because between 1246 and 1271 Gilbert's descendant, Walter Lindsay (who was, significantly, a Scots baron whose family were originally English) took the next step and, in his own charter (which has already been mentioned above), created the borough of Warton. What did this mean? Well, the establishment of the market in 1200 did not necessarily make any difference to the individual inhabitant of Warton in relation to the lord of the manor. We know that the production and sale of woollen cloth was one of the principal objects of having the market at all, yet if our medieval peasant wanted to make woollen cloth for sale, he would have to do it in what time he could spare from tilling his 'bovate' of land. Admittedly, someone who was very successful at such a business could get together enough capital to become a full-time craftsman, and sublet his holding to someone else. It cannot have been very easy for the majority of people, though. The idea of a borough was that some, at least, of the population would be freed from routine agricultural work, to devote their time to trade, industry or commerce. In Gilbert's plan, there were to be forty-four burgage-plots laid out for the Warton burgesses, each of one (Lancashire) rood in extent. It is the pattern of these standard plots which can still be seen in the area between Main Street and Back Lane. The burgesses were not to be totally divorced from agriculture since they were each to have one (Lancashire) acre of land in the open arable fields. The laying out of the burgage plots probably entailed a re-planning of medieval Warton and, in a sense, it was a very speculative venture indeed. Would there be enough for forty-four burgesses to do? Well, there may have been at first - we do not yet know. What we know is that within a hundred years, the hopes of increasing

trade and prosperity which had led to the borough being set up fell in ruins. A hundred years after that, the 'borough of Warton' was not even a memory - except to lawyers and antiquaries: it had vanished off the face of the earth.

The reasons for this are quite complex. In the fourteenth century, Lancashire suffered a series of natural and man-made disasters the result of which was that the growth of population and trade that had taken place at least up to 1300 was reversed. Most spectacular of the 'disasters' is the Black Death of 1349. In fact, at one time, it would have been given all the blame for the problems which arose in the later Middle Ages. Although it may have wiped out as much as a third of the country's population, there were other factors which have to be taken into account. For example, between 1315 and 1322, a famine of continental proportions led to widespread death and distress in Europe as a whole. At the same time, the weakness of King Edward II caused a civil war which only ended with the King's murder in 1327 but which left behind a legacy of bitterness and feuding between those who had chosen opposing sides in the conflict. Most disastrous of all, at least for the north of England, in 1314 King Edward II lost the battle of Bannockburn which, in effect, gave the Scots a licence to prey on the northern border areas. In 1316 a raid penetrated into Furness but in 1322 a much more serious one, led by Robert Bruce himself, penetrated right into the heart of Lancashire, resulting in the destruction of Preston and Lancaster. The effect on Warton comes out quite graphically in the 1324 Inquisition Post Mortem, which was compiled only two years after the raid. It says :-

There is (in the manor of Warton) an enclosed pasture called Brodenges (probably 'Broad Ings') which is worth 12d. a year, and no more because the beasts in that part have been destroyed by murrain (disease) and led away by the Scots.

Another Inquisition Post Mortem was made in the same year - not of the Lord of Warton but of Robert Washington who held half the manor of Carnforth. It states:

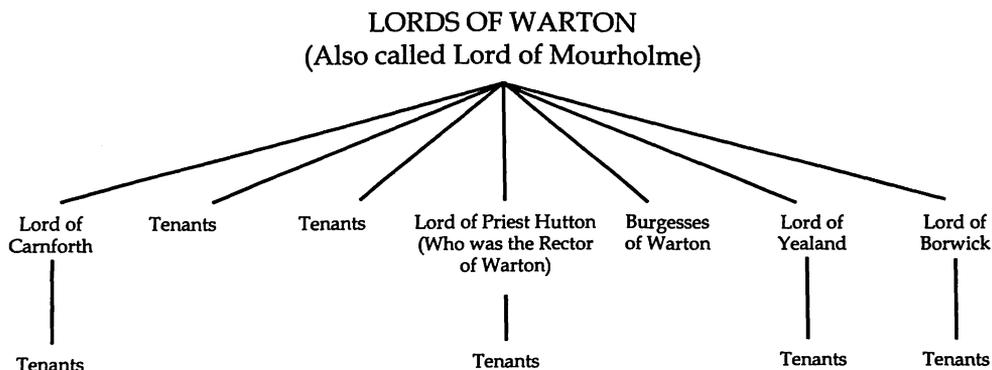
The said half of the manor of Carnforth is worth only 6d. a year in respect of houses and gardens and no more, because they were destroyed and burnt by the Scots.

Carnforth is paying the penalty here for being on the main road. This damage had long lasting effects. Seventeen years later, in 1341, the revenue from Warton church was assessed for taxation purposes. The assessors explained that its value had fallen considerably, because, they said: ---*there is land in the parish which is waste and uncultivated on account of the Scottish war which has reduced the valuation (of the living) by forty marks a year.*

Eventually England saw a revival, and from the second half of the sixteenth century, population began to rise again. Warton's great days were over, however. The borough was never revived and Warton reverted to being what it was before 1200 and what it remained until the nineteenth century - an agricultural village.

4. The Castle and its Lords

We may know very little about the medieval peasant as an individual but it is a very different matter when we consider the 'people who mattered', the lords of Warton who built and lived in Mourholme castle. From William son of Gilbert, who died in 1170 down to his descendant, Lady Philippa de Coucy who died in 1416, we know who were the lords of Warton, who they were married to and often something about their careers. Marriage and blood-relationships dominated the lives of the upper ranks of society in the Middle Ages. Marriage was the way that estates passed from one family to another, and the link between husband and wife was not usually one of sentiment. Antiquaries and genealogists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries delighted in the complications of family relationships and the confusion of subdivided estates which often resulted from the peculiarities of inheritance. However, if the general reader can grasp a few basic principles, the picture will make sense. Medieval villages, and Warton was no exception to this, were organised as 'manors'. A manor consisted of a lord and tenants who held their land from the lord. The tenants paid rent and sometimes did various services to the lord and were bound to attend the manor court which was held by the lord's steward. Warton is rather more complicated than this since some of the tenants of the lord of Warton held not bovates, or freeholds or burgage plots but subordinate manors. Thus the lord of the manor of Borwick had his own tenants, manor court and so on, but as lord of Borwick he was, in turn, a tenant of the lord of Warton and was bound to attend *his* manor court. In diagram form, it can be represented thus:



To complete the picture, the lord of Warton in his turn was a tenant of the lord of Lancaster who was a tenant of the King of England. The medieval lords of Warton, however, had other manors. A lord who held a large and important group of manors was known as a 'baron' and all his estates together were called a 'barony'. The first lord of Warton after the Conquest about whom we know anything with certainty was William son of Gilbert who has already been mentioned. He took the surname 'De Lancaster' and possessed what was called the 'Barony of Kendal' (strictly speaking 'Kendale'). The manors included in this barony are sketched in Figure Three and it can be seen that the barony covered a large part of Westmorland as well as the manor of Ulverston in Furness and Warton in Lancashire. Off the map is the large manor of Garstang which also belonged to the barony. In contemporary terms, the De Lancasters were important and wealthy people who very much dominated the whole area.

Large estates passed from generation to generation according to strict and somewhat complicated rules. If the lord or baron had sons, then all his estates would pass to the eldest son. If he left daughters and no sons, then the situation was different because all the daughters inherited an equal share of the estate - they were co-heiresses. Thus, daughters could be something of a disaster since a large estate could be quickly fragmented if it passed to a succession of co-heiresses. On the other hand a daughter who was her father's only heir could be much sought after by suitors seeking to build up their own landed estates. Thus, William de Lancaster II (the son of William son of Gilbert) died in 1184 leaving only his daughter Heloise to inherit the whole barony. She had been snapped up by a man with very great influence, the king's steward, Gilbert FitzReinfred, who thus became baron of Kendal in his wife's right. Gilbert thus owed a lot to King Henry II who had secured this valuable prize for him. In 1189, King Henry was succeeded by his son, Richard I, who gave the lordship of Lancaster to his youngest brother, John. In 1194 Count John rebelled against his brother the king. Gilbert, no doubt remembering what he owed to the crown decided to support King Richard despite the fact that John was his overlord as far as the Lancashire parts of his barony were concerned.

Nevertheless, when John in his turn became king in 1199 he and the baron of Kendal were reconciled. Gilbert was after all a 'loyalist' and John was now the 'government'. He became the king's right hand man in Lancashire: he was county sheriff 1205-16 and also sheriff of Yorkshire 1209-12. John's reign, however, turned out to be one of the most disastrous in English history. He fell out with the Pope, and England was placed under an Interdict, an incidental result of which was that the parish of Warton was unexpectedly enlarged as we shall see later. Worst of all, the king was humiliated by being defeated by the French and lost the ancestral

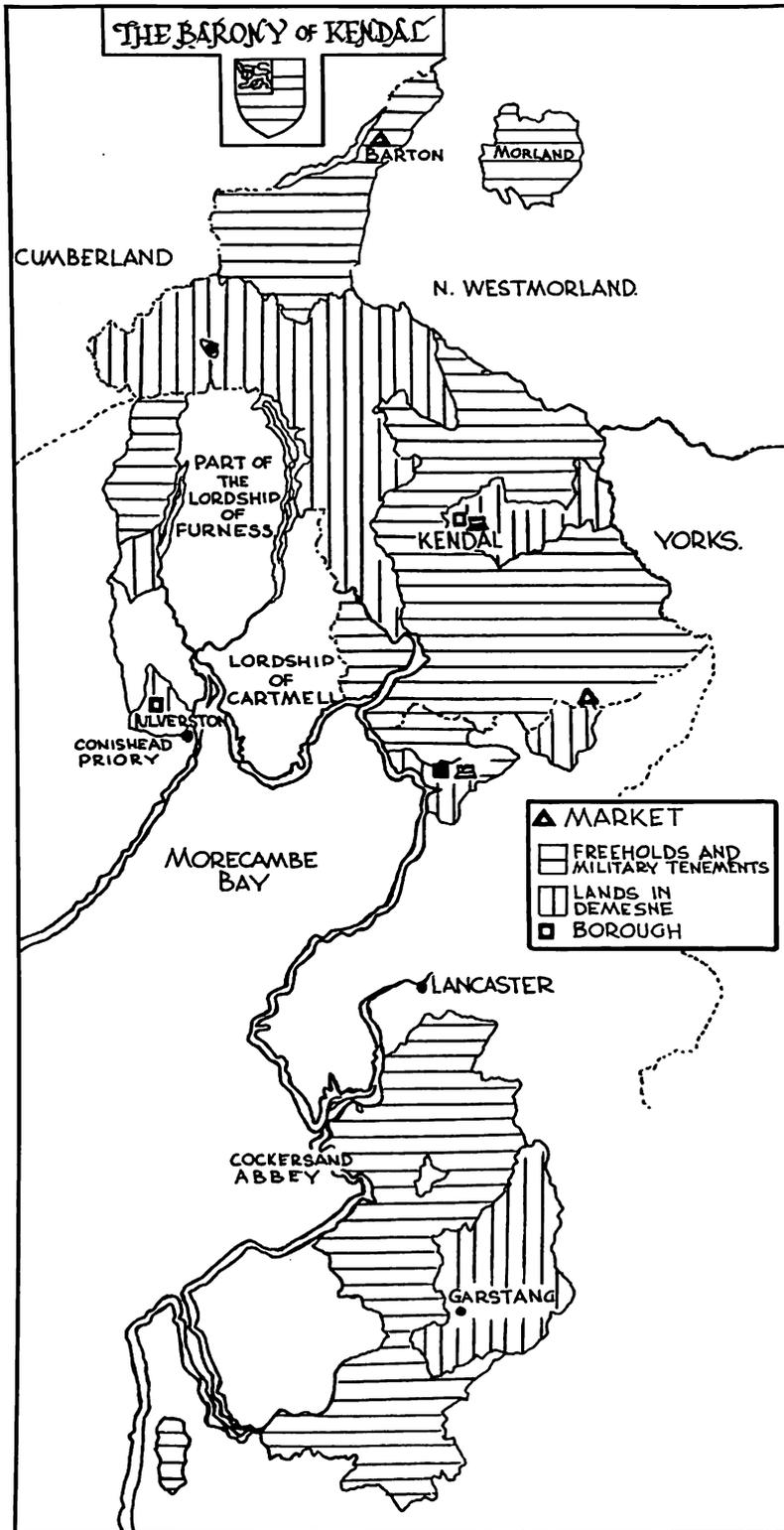


Fig. 3

duchy of Normandy in 1204. Discontent among the king's barons, especially those of the north, grew and grew especially after 1214 when John finally failed in his attempt to win Normandy back.

In the spring of 1215 this discontent flared up into open civil war and, at first, the king was defeated and forced to grant Magna Carta in June. Obviously the decision of Gilbert FitzReinfred, the 'king's man' was going to be crucial: he threw in his lot with the rebellious barons.

Magna Carta was not the end of the story. King John rallied his forces and in September 1215 renewed the civil war by attacking Rochester castle which was held by the barons, including Gilbert and Gilbert's son, William de Lancaster III. In December the king took the Castle, William de Lancaster was taken as a hostage and Gilbert forced to make peace with the king. A formal treaty between the two of them, dated January 1216, survives. It interests us because, as a guarantee of his good behaviour, Gilbert gave the king his two principal castles - of Kendal and Mourholme - which indicates the size and importance of Warton's long-vanished castle.

John's position rapidly deteriorated after this. Both the Scots and the French invaded England and in the spring of 1216, the civil war broke out yet again. It was only John's death in October which saved the throne of England for the Plantagenet dynasty. Although Gilbert FitzReinfred made his peace with John's successor, he was compelled to pay an enormous fine which saddled the barony of Kendal with a crippling burden of debt for many years afterwards. William de Lancaster III succeeded his father in 1220. He in turn died in 1246, leaving behind no children. Once again the barony passed to females but this time there were two claimants, William's sisters Heloise and Alice, and so the estates had to be divided. Heloise and her husband, Peter Bruce, were given Kendal Castle as their headquarters while Alice and her husband, William Lindsay, were given Mourholme. The Lindsays were an English family who had gone to Scotland, and become lords of Lamberton. William Lindsay was soon succeeded by his son, Walter, and it was he who granted Warton its borough charter. He was succeeded by his son, another William, in 1271 or 1272, who was killed in battle against the Welsh in 1283. It was Scottish policies which loomed large in Warton at this time since this William was married to Ada Balliol, and in 1292 her brother, John, became King of Scotland.

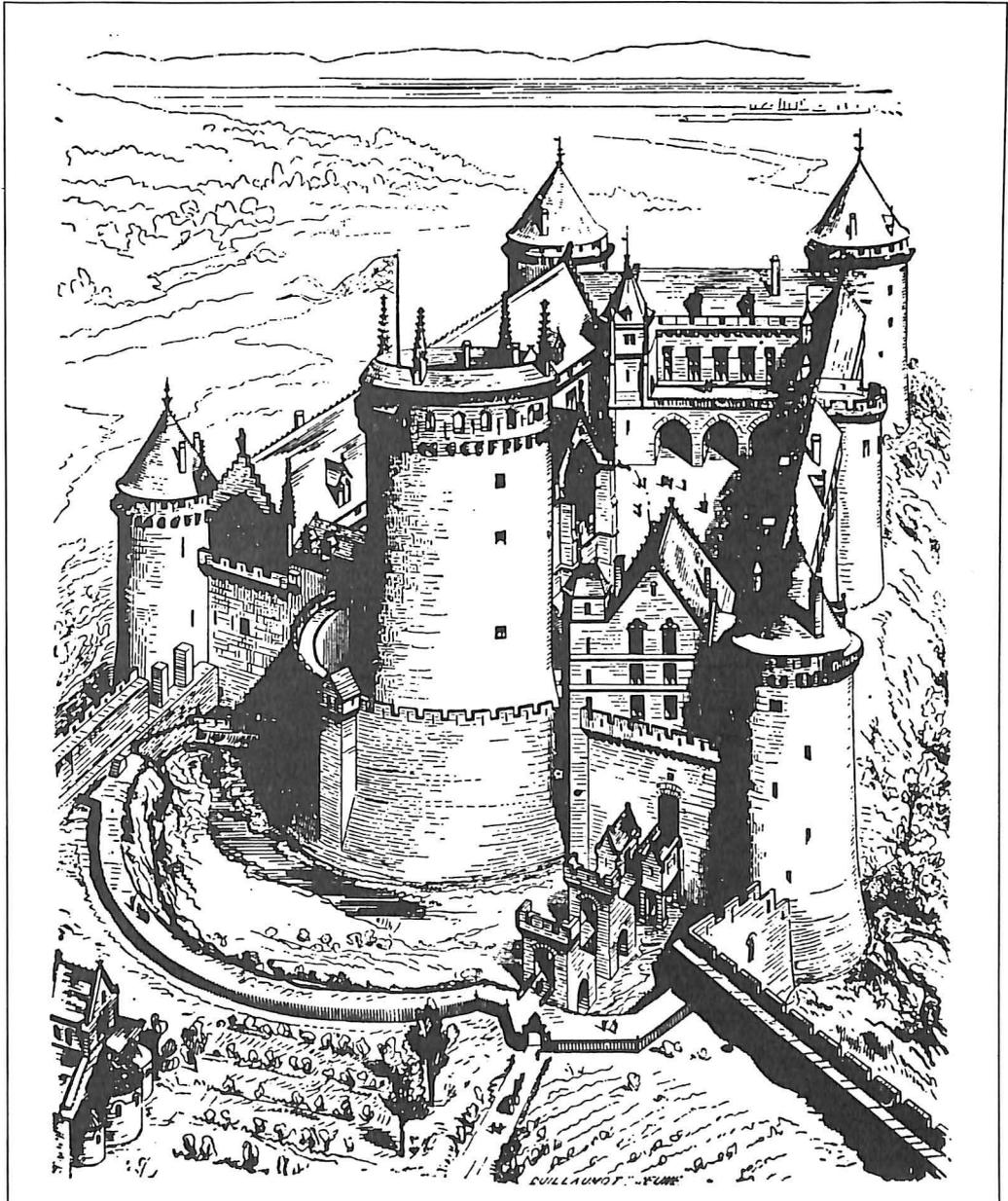
The death of the second William Lindsay caused the Barony of Kendal (or, rather, the Lindsay half of it) to shoot off at another tangent. He left behind him one daughter, Christiana, who was unmarried. What more natural than she be married to a young Frenchman who had come to the court of the King of Scotland to make his fortune? This was Ingram de

Gynes, who himself was related to the Scottish royal family. At first Ingram and Christiana were unfortunate. War broke out between the Scots and King Edward I of England, who tried to subject them to his yoke. In 1296, King John Balliol was defeated and deposed but the Scottish resistance was carried on, first by Sir William Wallace but later on by Robert Bruce of Annandale who proclaimed himself King Robert I of Scotland in 1306.

See the incredible interconnections of family relationships! Robert Bruce came from the same Yorkshire family as Peter Bruce, who had succeeded to half the Barony of Kendal in 1246. After 1306, those who held land in both England and Scotland were forced to decide to support Robert or Edward I. Ingram and Christiana opted for the English side and so lost all their Scottish lands in 1311. Fate, however, is sometimes kind because in that very same year Ingram inherited an estate in France which was so vast that it made his other properties look unimportant - the lordship de Coucy. Thus Ingram became Lord (or Sire) de Coucy and one of the twelve peers of France. The long-suffering inhabitants of Warton now had French politics to take into account!

Naturally, the English did not at first give up hope of subduing Scotland. The battle of Bannockburn was, however, a decisive English defeat and, coupled with other disasters, led to Scottish supremacy being felt in the north of England. John Balliol had left a son, Edward, who was of course Christiana's first cousin and claimed to be rightful King of Scotland. He made himself leader of those who had lost their Scottish lands and in 1332 he persuaded Edward III (who was King of England from 1327) to back him in an attempt to capture his throne. We have a very detailed description of this in the Chronicle of Lanercost Priory which tells how Edward Balliol invaded Scotland in August of 1332, defeated the Scots lords (Bruce was now dead and his son, David, was only a child) and was installed as King of Scotland at Scone abbey. Edward lost the initiative later in the year and returned to England, spending Christmas 1332 in Carlisle. Then, it goes on:

On 26 December, King Edward (i.e. Edward Balliol) left Carlisle for Westmorland where he was honourably received. He stayed with Lord Clifford and granted him Douglasdale in Scotland (which his grandfather had possessed in Edward I's time) provided that God should vouchsafe him prosperity and restoration to his kingdom. After that he stayed with his near relative, the Lady de Gynes (i.e. Christiana) at Mourholme, from whom he received gifts of money and jewels. He promised her that if he should prosper, he would give her wide lands and revenues in Scotland to which she was entitled of old by hereditary right.



The Château de Coucy, north of Soissons, Northern France, as it was in the Middle Ages.

"Formidable and grand on a hilltop in Picardy, the five-towered castle of Coucy dominated the approach to Paris from the north, but whether as guardian or as challenger of the monarchy in the capital was an open question. Thrusting up from the castle's centre, a gigantic cylinder rose to twice the height of the four corner towers. This was the donjon or citadel, the largest in Europe, the mightiest of its kind ever built in the Middle Ages or thereafter. Ninety feet in diameter, 180 feet high, capable of housing a thousand men in a siege, it dwarfed and protected the castle at its base, the clustered roofs of the town, the bell tower of the church, and the thirty turrets of the massive wall enclosing the whole complex on the hill."

Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, Penguin, 1978, p. 5.

Christiana did not, in fact, have long to live for she died in 1333, her husband, Ingram having died nine years previously. Edward Balliol did prosper at first - he could hardly fail to, since he had the wealth and might of the King of England behind him. He defeated the Scots in battle but it was clear that he was only a tool of English policy, and that policy was to subdue Scotland totally to English rule. Despite their weakness and failures, the Scottish nobility refused to give in: as they had said in the Declaration of Arbroath (dated 1320), *-----as long as a hundred of us remain alive, we will never on any conditions be subjected to the lordship of the English. For we fight not for glory, nor riches, nor honours, but for freedom alone, which no good man gives up except with his life.*

And so it was as a disappointed man that Balliol died in 1363.

His paymaster, Edward III, had long since removed his gaze from Scotland as he had more pressing interests elsewhere.

The story of the lords of Warton has, so far, been complicated and somewhat lengthy. We are now coming, however, to the final episode. Christiana Lindsay and her husband had found themselves in a situation of having to take sides and of losing, whichever side they chose. Four years after Christiana's death another conflict was brewing, which was to mean that the same unenviable choice had to be made yet again. In 1337 King Edward III claimed the crown of France and launched the bloody conflict which we know as the Hundred Years War. The Lord of Warton was the eldest son of Ingram and Christiana, known as William de Coucy I. He acted very cleverly. In the year war broke out he passed on all his English lands to his eldest son, William de Coucy II, retaining the French lands in his own hands. We know that William de Coucy I lived in France, because his mother's Inquisition Post Mortem says: *...William de Coucy is her son and next heir, and.....he crossed the sea to France sixteen years ago (i.e. in 1318). He was then twenty-five years of age, and he has stayed in France until now, as they are given to understand, but they do not know whether he is still alive or not.*

It was evidently the elder William's hope that by the time his son succeeded him, peace would be made between England and France and the two estates could therefore be reunited. What the plan did not allow for was that William de Coucy II should die only five years later, in 1342. He left no children and so his heir was his brother Ingram de Coucy. Peace had not been made with France, and so Ingram had to make the fateful choice.

Naturally he chose the French side as his French estates were by far the more wealthy, and as a result forfeited the right to have the half of the Barony of Kendal to which he was entitled by his descent. The half-barony

which, as well as Warton manor included half the manors of Kendal itself, Ulverston and Garstang was now at the crown's disposal. In 1344 the king leased it to his kinswoman, the Countess of Pembroke, for three years. Then, in 1350, Edward III gave it to Sir John Copeland as a reward for capturing Robert Bruce's son at the battle of Neville's Cross. Copeland probably held these lands until his death, which took place before 1364.

Meanwhile Ingram de Coucy (William de Coucy II's brother) had a son, also called Ingram. He fought on the French side during the Hundred Years War and when, in 1356 at the battle of Poitiers, King John of France was captured by the English, Ingram came to England as a hostage. As he was one of the greatest of the French nobility, Edward III felt it worth while to try and win him over to the English side. So, he was married to King Edward's daughter, Isabel, and created Earl of Bedford in 1366, being given extensive estates. He was almost certainly given Warton and the rest of the 'family lands', but there is no evidence for this. At first all went smoothly since the victory of 1356 was followed by a peace treaty in 1360. The peace did not last long however, and war between the two countries was renewed in 1369. What could Ingram do now? He was in a dilemma which is now a familiar one.

The chronicler of the Hundred Years War, Jean Froissart, saw the problem and summed it up as follows:

Lord de Coucy had a lot to lose when the war was renewed in 1369 for he had a very large estate in England as well in his own right as in that of his wife, who was daughter of the King of England, which estate it would be necessary for him to renounce, if he wished to serve the King of France, whose kinsman and countryman he was. He, therefore, thought it best to keep both kings guessing and to go off to foreign parts.

So, in the early 1370s he went 'adventuring', first to Italy and then, in 1375, to pursue a claim he had to the duchy of Austria. His campaign there was unsuccessful and so he had to return to France. Froissart goes on:

The Lord de Coucy, on his return into France, began to think of becoming a good and true Frenchman, for he had found the king of France very kind and attentive to his concerns. He considered it was not worth his while to risk the loss of his inheritance for so slender a reason as the war with England. He was, after all, a Frenchman by name, arms, blood and extraction.

Ingram had no sons, but two daughters. The solution to his problems meant that one was to be English, that is Philippa de Coucy who was sent with her mother back to England while the other, Mary, was to stay in France. Ingram was to live until 1397: he died in Turkey where he was on

Crusade against the Infidel. Mary succeeded to the French estates which she sold in 1400. The 'English' daughter, Philippa, had married Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who had been created Duke of Ireland in 1386. De Vere, however, treated his wife badly and finally divorced her in the early 1390s.

She was destined to be, however, the last of her line to own Warton and the rest of the half-barony. On 18 May 1399, King Richard II granted them to her, in the words of the charter, notwithstanding the foreign birth of her father, Ingram de Coucy, or his allegiance to the King of France. She died in 1409 leaving no heirs and this time the end had really come. Warton was available as a gift for the king to reward friends and relatives. The King's son, the Duke of Bedford, received it in 1435 and in 1453 it passed to his heir, Edmund Earl of Richmond. After his death his wife, Margaret Countess of Richmond held the half-barony (which henceforth received the name it has possessed up to the present day of 'Richmond Fee') and after her death it reverted in 1509 to King Henry VIII, the countess's grandson.

This account has, of necessity, been long winded and detailed. Unless the vagaries of descent are followed the involvement of a place such as Warton in the high politics of the Middle Ages cannot be understood. The marital relations of successive lords of Warton have, after all, taken us over a fair part of Western Europe and at one point we did end up in Turkey itself.

Note: The site of Mourholme Castle.

It is appropriate to note here that the site of Mourholme has only been fixed with any approach to certainty quite recently. The Warton History Group approached archaeologists in the area and asked them to investigate the land round Dock Acres farmhouse which was being used for gravel extraction. Both the documentary evidence and the Tithe Map strongly suggested that it was there that the remains would appear. Consequently, Mr. T. Clare, Mr. Andrew White and Mr. Hugo Blake made investigations as a result of which a large amount of medieval pottery was recovered at the edge of the gravel pit and is now in the possession of Lancaster Museum. Unfortunately the castle itself had disappeared (or rather, its foundations) due to the gravel workings.

5. The Church and the local community

Any description of life in medieval Warton which failed to mention the Church as an institution would be far from complete. Everyone who lived there was, by definition, an inhabitant of 'Christendom' - that is a member of the Catholic Church, whose head was the Pope. Through the

Church, therefore, Warton was linked with the whole of Western Europe and through the Church's language, Latin, part of a great civilisation. It is a mistake, however, to think that the medieval Catholic Church was the same as the Roman Catholic Church of the present day. Religion was much more a thing of everyday life: something that ordinary people accepted without consciously 'practising' it. Also, the Church had considerable powers of coercion - it was almost a spiritual police force and it had its own courts of law for offenders against faith or the moral law. Blasphemers, fornicators, adulterers, promise-breakers, heretics were 'criminals' in the eyes of the church.

From the twelfth century, England was divided into a system of parishes. So our ordinary villager would be conscious of himself as a member of a parish, under the care of a parish priest: he was bound, by law, to attend his parish church and to pay tithes for the priest and the church's support. No-one was allowed to 'opt out'. Each parish belonged to a deanery and Warton, being part of the barony of that name, belonged to the Deanery of Kendal. With other deaneries, Kendal belonged to the massive Archdeaconry of Richmond which itself, was part of the Diocese of York. Normally an archdeacon was the bishop's assistant; in our part of the world, because the diocese of York was so vast, most of the archbishop's powers of spiritual government and jurisdiction were delegated to the Archdeacon of Richmond. So it was this latter official with whom, above the level of parish priest, most people would have to deal.

The parish priest of Warton had the title of Rector, which, in theory, every parish had. As the document called 'Pope Nicholas's Taxation' which was drawn up in 1291 tells us, the Rector of Warton was very well paid indeed since he could count on receiving £366 13s. 4d. a year. Many substantial country gentlemen received far less. As with very many parishes, the lord of the manor had the right of 'advowson', that is of appointing a new rector, although his choice had to be approved by the archdeacon. This was because many parish priests had originally been the private chaplains of the lord and it was he who had given them the 'glebe land' for their support. The rector of Warton's glebe land was so extensive that it ranked as a manor of its own: the manor of Priest Hutton. So the 'Old Rectory', in Warton village, which was built probably in the early years of the fourteenth century is, in fact, the rector's manor house.

When the Barony of Kendal came to be divided between the two sisters of William de Lancaster III in 1246 (see above) the advowson of Warton and lordship of Warton went separate ways. The Lindsays, as we have seen, got the lordship but it was the Bruces who got the valuable advowson, which was regarded as a piece of property like any other. In

about 1274, however, Peter Bruce died and he was succeeded by his *four* sisters. One of them, Lucy, was married to a Yorkshire baron Marmaduke Thweng II (Lord of Kilton) and as part of their allotment they received the advowson. His son succeeded him in 1284 and in turn had four sons. The succession of the Thweng name was assured, you might think. But his eldest son, Marmaduke Thweng IV was killed at the battle of Stirling Bridge in 1297, leaving his brother, William, to succeed his father as Baron of Kilton in 1323. The next youngest brother, Robert, had taken Holy Orders - it was very common for younger sons to make their career in the church. So, in 1327, William appointed Robert as Rector of Warton, but as William died without heirs in 1341 Robert also became Baron of Kilton. He of course, as a priest, could not legally leave heirs and so when he died, in 1344, the youngest brother, Thomas, became Baron of Kilton and owner of the advowson of Warton. He proved to be the last of the line when he, in turn, died in 1374. This left matters in a very complicated situation indeed. There were now four cousins to claim quarter shares of the Thweng inheritance and all of them and their descendants had ample opportunity to quarrel and bicker over who had the right to appoint the Rector of Warton. At times this quarrel led to open violence and it became so difficult to decide that right at the end of the Middle Ages, King Henry VIII decided to solve the problem by taking over the advowson himself.

Mention has been made above of the Interdict which King John caused to be inflicted on England by his quarrel with the Pope. This punishment, which meant the suspension of all religious services throughout the country for some years, had a surprising effect on Warton parish. Before the interdict started in 1208, Warton parish included Yealand Conyers, Yealand Redmayne, Silverdale, Priest Hutton and Borwick within its boundaries. Under cover of the Interdict, the inhabitants of Carnforth took the opportunity to secede from their original parish of Bolton-le-Sands, and join themselves on to Warton.

As a document of 1320 puts it:-

Also be it known that the township of Carnforth which is now in the parish of Warton was in the parish of Bolton before the interdict in England (1208), and the men of that township partook of all the sacraments of the church in Bolton church and their bodies were buried in the churchyard of the church of Bolton. And they paid all manner of tithes both small and great to the church of Bolton. And there is still a path between Bolton and that township called, as it is believed, Bolton 'KYRKSTY' by which the men used to go from that township to the parish church of Bolton; the truth may be fully sought from the older men of the township of Bolton.

6. Conclusion

This brief survey of Warton's medieval history has been written to show the sort of study that can be undertaken by amateurs using original sources. It does not claim to be complete or totally accurate. Many more sources probably remain to be discovered, perhaps in very unlikely places. There is no such thing as a 'definitive history', especially of the Middle Ages. Most of all we should like to find out more about the ordinary people of medieval Warton - what they did for a living, how wealthy they were or even some of their names.

With any luck, this is the sort of information which will come to light in future years and help to make our picture of medieval Warton slightly less fuzzy in outline.



The quiet village of Warton in northernmost Lancashire was an important place in medieval times. It was a market town and a borough, with pretensions to rival Lancaster. Plans for expansion were overtaken by the troubles of the fourteenth century - cattle disease, plague, and raids by the Scots. Little remains of the medieval buildings, but the shape of the medieval borough is remarkably preserved in the layout of the village centre.

Paul Booth not only shows how much can be learned from this physical evidence, but with equal facility guides us through the extensive medieval documentation which tells us about the lords of Warton and their many possessions and connections by marriage, including the Balliols of Scotland and the wealthy Coucys of France. The castle of the lords of Warton, Mourholme, which once rivalled Kendal castle in size and importance, lay northeast of the village and was lost to gravel-digging in the twentieth century.

This booklet was first published by the Warton Village Society and Warton History Group in cyclostyled form in 1976. It has been in steady demand ever since, and is now reprinted in a more up-to-date format by the Mourholme Local History Society - which takes its name from the castle of the lords of Warton.