

WHEN WAS KENTMERE HALL BUILT? AN HYPOTHESIS IN THE ABSENCE OF FACTS

By Robert Courtier



A determinedly inquisitive medieval explorer would think, after five miles of difficult walking through the dense woodland between the increasingly steep sides of Kentmere, having passed the 'Broadwater' ¹, that he had come to the head of the valley. Unaware that some 50m higher, and invisible from below, there was a further long flat valley floor with some habitations and good grazing land hemmed in by the steep slopes falling from the sky-line of High Street and its supporting ridges, he would have been hugely surprised to discover a defensible-looking tower with apparently nothing to defend.

There are plenty of such imposing structures in Cumbria and the Borders, often loosely called 'Pele' Towers, but architecturally, as R.W Brunskill ² describes more accurately, 'Tower Houses', but this one – so remote, so closely overshadowed by high ground, so far away from anything to protect - cannot but pose the questions: who could have caused it to be built, when and why?

That the 'Pele' tower is a very old structure is clear today, but its history is far from as clear as there are seemingly no records of its early existence, let alone of its construction. Consequently, records of a large number of peripheral happenings centered around Kentmere in the 14th century have been used for this paper to try to find answers to the questions posed above. By looking first at the likely preceding events and then working back from later events, a narrowing of the time period for construction should appear, leading, perhaps in turn, to postulated answers concerning the who and why of it.



The lands specifically named 'Kentmere' were held to the King (who held in his name all land in England after the Conquest) by only two families over the 14th century period most likely to be of interest – the Bellewes and the Stapeltons. Both families had fairly extensive recorded histories of their wide area ownership in Yorkshire, but Kentmere does not appear in any detail within them: having received it by complex inheritance, it is mostly merely tacked on to complete the record almost as an uninvited gift, and often described merely as a 'chase' – largely wooded terrain suitable for hunting wild boar – as it almost certainly was before 1066.

There were also two other, more local, families who were active in the area in the relevant period. The Ayrays (with multiple spellings, but for this thesis this single spelling will be used unless within a quotation) who of those living in Kentmere were clearly the principal indigenous family in the beginning of the study period, and the Gilpins, who were sub-lords of Ulthwaite,

¹ *Kentmere Broadwater* is the earliest name for the large expanse of water at the southern end of the valley of Kentmere up to around 17th century. This was around 1.5m higher and consequently very much bigger in area than today. Since the days of the draining of the mere in the 19th century (no water body) and consequent flooding of excavations for diatomite, it has become known as *Kentmere Tarn*

² *Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties*, RW Brunskill 1974

which are the principal lands bounding Kentmere in the south of the valley, where the Parish is only about 200m wide between its hillsides. Access other than by foot would only have been practicable through this land on the west bank of the river Kent past its 'Broadwater', there being no credible evidence of any established access to Kentmere from the West, North or East at this time, although foot passage would always have been practicable from these directions for the intrepid.

The time before building.

There was, of course, a time before the building of the tower, when human settlement in Kentmere had begun. Whilst remains of pre-Roman or Romano-British settlements exist at High Borrans and at Millriggs to the south, from their small size they were clearly abandoned after limited development. It can be postulated that Borrans was too high, too exposed and had an inadequate water supply, and Millriggs is in a frost pocket, with an unenviable history of premature deaths possibly due to lead poisoning (the current Millriggs was re-built away from the old one, an early fulling mill). Some more minor old encampments can also be identified in the valley further north but show no sign of any long-term use. In spite of the Ordnance Survey deciding to call the track over High Street a Roman Road with little or no true evidence, there is no obvious start or finish to it, and certainly not into Kentmere.

The first settlers with continuity to modern times are believed to have been of Norse descent, with evidence suggesting this was close to the 'Broadwater' in the lower valley. Findings of a crude log boat, radiocarbon dated as around 11th century, and lost spearheads in the waters, and a possible 'shieling-farmstead' ³ in the upper valley are all evidence of this. It would seem these folk were most probably Viking migrants from Ireland who fled around the 10th century as the result of uprisings of the indigenous Irish kings, at first towards Cheshire but in 11th century increasingly on the Lancashire and Cumbrian coast. If these first folk had originally emigrated from the mountainous backgrounds of Norway then the topography of Kentmere would have appealed. It seems beyond a coincidence that another boat discovered in the Tarn in 1955 should not only be dated by radiocarbon as c1320±130 but have evidence of 'clinker' build, the style used by Viking longships but almost unknown in the countries of Great Britain at that time.

Support for this contention of settlement comes from the names recorded in the first known 'complete' record of the inhabitants in 1301 when, for reasons unknown, the unusual step was taken at an Inquest Post Mortem ⁴ (IPM) of the then Lord of the Manor, to list his tenants. Four of the 19 are named 'de Hayra'. By 1332 ⁵ this name is recorded as 'de Ayra', again dominant in numbers, but at this time valued at nearly a quarter of the value of all now 16 taxed residents of Kentmere (the reduction of numbers almost certainly due to famines and disease in the intervening period). The family name gradually morphs later through probate documents and census returns up to the present form 'Airey', which remains a common name in Cumbria today. The change from 'Hayra' to 'Ayra' strongly suggests that in the 1301 IPM the scribe thought he heard a pre-aspirated 'A' (as in haitch, not aitch). This pre-aspiration is interpreted by linguists as indicative of Old Norse pronunciation.

³ Bryant's Gill: a Viking age shieling-farmstead. Steve Dickinson 2020

⁴ Cal Inquisitions National Records C_133_102_3_006

⁵ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer p309

The name 'Hayra' itself is also suggestive of Norse origin as it is believed that it is derived from 'eyrr' (gravel spit/bank) and 'á' (river)⁶. There is such a feature associated with the pre-drained level of Kentmere Tarn (i.e. the 'Broadwater') close to the site of Kentmere Hall where the rapidly flowing river has dumped its bed load of glacial tills into the still waters of the 'Broadwater' of old, making the gravel side banks an obvious choice for an early 'camp'.

The Norman 'de' provides a further suggestion of early migrants as most uses of this style of appellation are based on already existing villages or well-known place names. The 'gravel spit of a river' in a remote valley is hardly a place name worthy of note - there are at least 5 such features around Ullswater for example. Such a specific feature is only likely to be meaningful to occupants of the Kentmere valley as a location within it. Whilst names like *de Brockebank* are similarly localized, others listed in 1301 are appended to place names further away, such as *de Hogayl*, *de Coupland*, *de Trouthale*, *de Patrickdal* and *de Grennerigge*: these are likely to have been relatively recent immigrants. The 'de Hayra' family therefore would appear to be among the earliest of settlers and are the only multi-generation group both in 1301 and 1332.

The above shows a small indigenous population growing at the turn of the 14th century, dominated by an earlier family, the 'de Ayras', later Ayrays, but with little or no worldliness recorded other than being tenants. Who then were their overlords at this time?

During the middle part of the 12th century under King Steven, Farrer⁷ suggests the lands of Cumbria and probably as far south as the Ribble, were in the hands of David of Scotland. It appears there was little, if any, clear development of the area which had, for a lengthy period, been disputed and consequently 'wasted' from time to time. The value of the whole of 'West Mairieland and Kendale', which covered a large part of old Westmoreland with Kentmere only a very small part of Kendale, was only £14-6s-3d⁸ as Noutgeld (less than Kentmere alone by the time of the 15th century). By the 13th century, however, the area surrounding the river Kent, known as Kendale, with its main township of Kendal, was beginning to be recognized: William de Lancaster III granted free access in Kendale to as many 'tofts'⁹ as desired for 6d yearly, sometime before his death in 1246. This seems very much like a bargain 'offer' to encourage settlement (as still used in much more recent times, such as to Australia).

When Peter de Brus III inherited a small part of William de Lancaster's land, situated within Kendale, he affirmed by declaration the continuation of liberties and customs of the free burgesses that William had granted, and a 'John of Kentmere' was noted as a witness. This document is undated but, as Farrer suggests, was sometime between 1247 and 1260 – a photograph of the original is printed in Farrer's Vol 1¹⁰. A John de Kentmere also appears as a witness in records of 1274. Although a John de Bellewe was by then the Lord of the Kentmere Manor, this cannot be him: the first instance noted above would have predated his knowing of Kentmere, and the second concerns his own business, so he could hardly have fulfilled the role of witness.¹¹ Rather, this John of Kentmere is taken to be a 'de Ayras' - to the wider world of this

⁶ A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names, Diana Whaley

⁷ Records of Kendale Vol 1, Introduction xi, W Farrer

⁸ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer Introductions xiii

⁹ A toft is the site for a habitation and its yard. It excludes tenanted pasture land

¹⁰ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1 p8

¹¹ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1 p133

court he was a suitable representative of the population *de Kentmere* – and very possibly the grandfather of William de Ayra of 1301.

Peter de Brus inherited the part of Kendale which included Kentmere. He was clearly a good administrator and set about a remarkable turn-around of an inherited debt of £3196 within 2 years. He showed interest in the Kentmere valley by perambulating boundaries of *Hogayl* and *Applethwayt* in 1256 and granting the manor of '*Ultventhwait*' to Richard de Gilpin¹². Ulthwaite borders Applethwaite to the west (as does Kentmere) and abuts Kentmere in the south at the valley's only easy point of access. This grant to Gilpin included fishing rights of the river Kent and the 'liberty' to erect a corn mill. Ulthwaite overlapped the two pre-existing Lordships of Staveley and Hugil, and its creation appears an obvious attempt by Peter de Brus III to develop the Kentmere valley. Here then, was a man who could have kick-started Kentmere, but his untimely death in September 1272 radically changed fortunes.

Peter de Brus' estates were then parceled out to his four sisters, apparently with some acrimony and delays. Although seemingly very much less than the others, his youngest sister, Laderine de Bellewe, did receive some lands in Yorkshire but also Kentmere. Her husband, Sir John de Bellewe, already owned land in Yorkshire at Carlton, and almost immediately after this inheritance through his wife, assigned Kentmere to his brother, Thomas¹³. John had taken arms against Henry III at Kenilworth in 1266 and was probably pretty uninterested in this new possession but by implication from records¹³ John was forced by the king (by then Ed1) to take it back in 1277¹⁴. There are no records of what happened next until John de Bellewe died in 1301 (the IPM, previously noted on p3). His wife Laderine appears to have pre-deceased him¹⁵.

The Bellewes had two daughters, Isabel (aka Sybil, with quite a few other spellings) and Joan. Isabel was married to Miles (de) Stapelton, eldest surviving member of this eminent family, with a base in the village of the same name in Yorkshire. Isabel died in about 1304, however, and as Laderine had also died by then¹⁵, Isabel's eldest child, Nicholas de Stapelton became heir. Nicholas appears to have been born around 1289, and so was underage at this time, so his inheritance returned to the king.

After the coming of age of Nicholas in 1310 Nicholas Stapleton's inheritance was resolved by an *Inquisitio ad quod damnum* in 1311¹⁶ and his estate was held to comprise the manor of Carleton, as well as Southbrun a part of Tybthorpe, and five bovates held in the manor of Tybthorpe held in bondage, a bovate in Thorparch, the manor of Esheton, and the manor of Kentmere. According to records it appears that Nicholas then demised the inheritance to his father (for life) so it only came back to him in 1314 when Sir Miles, his father, was killed at Bannockburn¹⁷. It is notable that all these lands lay in North Yorkshire, except for Esheton in Lancaster, and Kentmere. The tacked-on-last notation of Kentmere repeatedly appears in the lists of possessions, and often merely as a 'chase'. It would appear it didn't rank highly compared with Yorkshire and would be unlikely to be a part of the overall estate chosen to need 'protection' by the building of a 'Pele' tower.

¹² Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1 p317 and pp394-396 (Latin transcript)

¹³ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1, p308

¹⁴ Close Rolls Ed 1 1277 Vol 1 pp 375-380

¹⁵ Calendar of Inquisitions Ed 1 Vol 4 pp21-28 (File 102/45)

¹⁶ Transcript of Calendar of Close Rolls also ref Farrer p308

¹⁷ The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p 95

1314 was a bad time in the North with the incursions of Robert the Bruce penetrating further into Cumbria, and in 1322¹⁸ as far as Lancaster, when property as close to Kentmere as Cartmel and Helsington was burned. At this time, it appears likely that fear of being raided was increasing amongst Kentmere tenants: the Lord of the Manor would have been more concerned for his larger estates in Yorkshire as raids occurred on that side of the country too. Two local residents would seem to be contenders for taking the initiative of building some form of defence in these troubled times - the previously noted Ayray and Gilpin families.

In 1332, after a nearly 20 year 'tax holiday' for Cumbria in recognition of the deprivations caused by the raids of Robert the Bruce (though Kentmere suffered none) a Lay Tax of 1/15 was levied. The senior 'de Ayray', William, was then valued at £10, which was a quarter of the total for the valley and by far the highest individual valuation in all Kendale's 22 Parishes¹⁹. The next highest was at £4-10s, also in Kentmere, as was the third highest at 75s (another de Ayray) with only one other at 75s in the rest of all Kendale. In spite of the Kentmere total valuation being similar to, but no more than, most of the other parishes in Kendale, the value attributed to the 'Ayray family' alone was only just under half of it, suggesting a very successful family. These valuations, of course, did not include the Lords of the Manors, but appear to demonstrate a somewhat unique position amongst tenants in these times to be able to accumulate such wealth. This was almost certainly sheep. Very high 'value', as judged from later inventories, could only imply relatively large numbers of sheep. Although farming possessions often included a cow or two or a horse, and showed variation with status, they rarely match the big differences that arise from sheep numbers and the accoutrements of husbandry, from feed and wool to manure.

The Gilpin family were not hill-farmers as the Ayray appear to have been: they were from the south of Kendal around Helsington, but the grant of Ulthwaite to Richard Gilpin by Peter de Brus²⁰ appears to have changed their focus – it is not known why, and legends about killing wild boars do not fit the timing. Whatever the reason, it appears the chance to develop new lands was clearly taken up with enthusiasm, with the generations following becoming ever more involved in Kentmere. The most likely reason seems to be that Kentmere was where the money was: the bounds of Ulthwaite even today are separated by a good mile of uninhabited land from the boundaries with Hugil and Staveley, whereas it was adjacent to the big woods of Kentmere, so necessary for developing housing, and directly on the road to the upper valley.

Both the above families were beholden to their Lord, Sir Nicholas Stapleton, as he became, who was a very busy man with his knightly duties to the King against the Scottish incursions and the disarray which was developing amongst the Barons, including treasonable alliances with Scots. It is thus not surprising there is no record of his involvement in Kentmere, particularly with the ignominious end of Edward II's reign and the defeat of the Scots. With yet further property in Yorkshire, Sir Nicholas died in 1343 (after a lengthy period with no records).

Sir Nicholas' son Miles (after his grandfather), later Sir Miles Stapelton of Hathelsay, Sherriff of Yorkshire, succeeded him, albeit via a complex settlement of estates in 1338²¹. By this time

¹⁸ The Wars of the Bruces, Colm McNamee, Tuckwell press 1997

¹⁹ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, All parishes

²⁰ Records of Kendale, Vol 1 W Farrer. p317 and pp394-396 (in Latin)

²¹ The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p108

matters of war had moved to France and Miles was a key player in military service there ²². This new Lord's absence is a possible reason why a record (without date) ²³ appears to suggest the position of Bailiff for the Lord of the Manor of Kentmere was held to Sir Miles by Thomas Ayrey. This same record also suggests that a William Gilpin had married a daughter of said Thomas, and most probably it is this same *William de Gilpin* recorded as a juror at the IPM of Thomas de Thwenge in Kendal (Lord of Hoyal, and over-lord of Ulthwaite) in 1374 ²⁴, and 1376 in Helsington.²³ The Gilpins came from Helsington and there are many records of Williams and Richards in Farrer's Records of Kendale which support the contention that this William was almost certainly a primary descendant of Richard Gilpin, the original beneficiary of the grant of Ulthwaite (c1272) and of the William Gilpin who had been a tenant of Kentmere in 1301 before becoming Lord of the Manor of Ulthwaite in 1310 (a sub-lord within *Hoygal* (Hugil)).

A son of the Gilpins of Ulthwaite marrying an Ayray would have been a very significant event and would suggest a high and/or increasing level of cooperation between these two dominant families of the Kentmere/Ulthwaite valley. This period of the second half of the fourteenth century, would appear to be the earliest that there would have been a possibility of some collaboration between residents to build something of a defensive nature with the tolerance, if not active involvement, of their absentee Lord of the Manor.

Working backwards in time.

Although there appear no records associated with the building of the 'Pele' tower some evidence can be brought to bear from later events. Using dendrochronology, the timbers which support the cross wing and main accommodation building of Kentmere Hall have been dated ²⁵, as also those in Kentmere Church, with clear results. These structures are of the early 16th century and show unusually high similarity of their main roof timbers (felled 1512-1522), with both sets of results revealing ring sequencing so similar that it can reasonably be said they came not only from the same dates but the same woodland. It can also be deduced with some confidence, there being no more economic or better alternative further away, that this woodland was that which still today features majestic oaks just over a mile south from Kentmere Hall. This felling would have been for a rebuild, and, most obviously in the case of the cross wing, for an extension of the Hall. These 16th century oaks are still excellent beams now, some 500 years later, so oaks from the same patch used sometime after 1350 should not have needed replacing by 1522: some repairs to the existing building will have been necessary, but the main work in the 16th century seems to have arisen from a desire to increase the size of the dwelling due to prosperity. In particular, the arrangement of the entry into the Pele tower is thought to have been radically changed from its original form either with this, or possibly a slightly earlier, rebuild, and the original entrance to the tower at ground floor was moved to the far east end where a cross passage lies between the Hall and the Cross-wing (a nearly identical layout exists at Yanwath Hall ²⁶ just outside Penrith, possibly a slightly later construction than the tower alone at Kentmere). Curwen ²⁷ also contends the addition of crenellations post-dates the original construction.

²² The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, *Archaeological and Topographical Journal* Vol VIII pp 110- 112

²³ *History and Antiquities of the Counties of Westmorland and Cumberland*, Nicholson & Burn, p139

²⁴ *Records of Kendale* Vol 1, W Farrer, p324 and p 146

²⁵ Nottingham Tree-ring Dating Laboratory private reports for Author

²⁶ *Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties*, RW Brunskill 1974, p37.

²⁷ Some notes respecting Kentmere Hall, John Curwen, tcwaas_002_1901_vol1_0026

It is likely to have been this rebuild which gave the tower its misleading appearance: the siting of the tower has led to many a comment about its incompatibility as a seriously defensive structure due to its being overlooked rather too clearly and closely from the high ground where the Garburn Track now runs to its north. It would thus have been extremely exposed to attack by archers, who would have the benefit of being able to shoot directly down on their targets. It does not therefore appear to be a full-blooded ‘castle’ fortification, such as Edward I’s Welsh castles. In contrast to the mainly defensive appearance, the tracery in the window mullions and location of the coat of arms (its detail no longer visible or removed) shows its architecture to be expressive of wealth rather than of a primary defensive function (an obvious difference from some of the contemporary structures in the oft disputed lands nearer the Borders). The original construction most probably did not have the features of defence such as the bartisans (corner turrets) and machicolations (slots along the inside of walls) of the top storey, which Curwen²⁷ regards as additions largely decorative rather than functional. A disused roof line in the tower, still evident, also strongly supports this contention of a change, as it doesn’t fit the geometry of the raised walls and is indicative of a major re-construction of this floor.

The above reasoning suggests that the original tower was actually considerably more modest than it appears today, and the interior size of the single rooms supports this. Despite the thickness of the lowest walls and their arched floor, the rest of the structure is comprised of wall thickness no different from big bank barns, and at the top, rather less. Further, the size (around 7.5m by 9.5m) is relatively small and the stone content markedly less than the church which has walls 1.2m thick and is more than twice as long. It thus falls in the range of size which local labour would be capable of building, albeit with a suitable specialist overseer because of its height. As an aside it is to be noted that the church walls are constructed in the same military style, not as the houses and barns of the main village. This style has relatively small stones on its outer face but very big ones in the core, protected from damage by the sacrificial outer skin. In contrast, the later farm buildings, also massive, have heavy outer skins with smaller rubble cores, which on failure of the outer skin leads to ready collapse of the entire wall (except at the corners). It seems that the original tower was designed to impress and to deter with its great height compared with other habitations of the time, but also to be substantial enough to provide a positive refuge against an easy military ‘knock out’.

Such an edifice could only arise at the nexus of sufficient interest from a Lord of the Manor to grant a right to build and sufficient fear of attack amongst tenants to do the work. Raiders armed with relatively light weapons looking to ‘waste’ abodes and livelihoods would be deterred by the appearance of impregnability, especially at the end of an apparently closed valley. Burning of crops and the timber-framed and reed-thatched roofs of dwellings being the main ‘weapon’ of raiders - such as the supporters of Robert the Bruce - a high stone tower would present them with a serious difficulty ‘to waste’ as well as giving tenants a strong refuge.

The building as described could be perceived as being in the interest of both the Lord of the Manor and his tenants. The location of the tower – coming forbiddingly into view before any hint or glimpse of an upper valley full of livestock - and the nature of its quasi-military construction clearly suggest an answer as to ‘why’ it was built, but not by whom or when.

²⁷Some notes respecting Kentmere Hall, John Curwen, tcwaas_002_1901_vol1_0026

Decline of Lords of the Manor.

Sir Miles Stapleton of Haddlesay was, as mentioned above, a military man, and after the death of his father in 1343, spent much of his time engaged in the then new front of war in France²⁸ until 1347, soon after which he had two children, the eldest being Thomas. In 1353²⁹, however, he changed the course of his career and became Sheriff of Yorkshire. He was a very successful man and took such roles as attempting to secure a treaty with France and of escorting the safe conduct of the imprisoned ex-King David de Brus (captured in 1346) from Scotland to London. He remained Sherriff of Yorkshire until 1360.

One of Sir Miles' contacts was John Thoresby, Lord Chancellor of Yorkshire, who took the See of York in 1352. A key event in the Kentmere Hall saga took place in April of 1358 when the by then Archbishop Thoresby '*...granted a licence during pleasure for Sir Miles de Stapulton, knight, to have masses celebrated in an oratory within the vale of Kentmere...*'.³⁰

Although the lack of an indefinite, or definite, article in Latin poses possible doubt in translation of 'an' as opposed to 'the', oratory, the balance of probabilities is that this 'official translation' is not for a definitive pre-existing situation, but any future one, with 'during pleasure' meaning 'whenever he wanted'. It is thus taken that the 'oratory' was in fact to be the future Kentmere Church, rather than a room planned to be within the 'Pele' Tower, whether just planned or already built. Both these latter alternatives appear very unlikely in respect of a non-resident Lord of the Manor anyway, in what is actually not a spacious dwelling (at first build). At the least, however, it appears to establish that some form of community had formed in Kentmere to require Mass to be held, beyond the valley being merely a 'chase', as so often referred to in earlier IPMs, and now with an added interest of the then Lord of the Manor.

It is surmised by H.E. Chetwynd-Stapton³¹ that the Register Record connotes a situation where Sir Miles was 'living' in Kentmere, but this seems improbable, as there is no evidence subsequently that the 'Pele' tower was a residence of the Lord of the Manor – it would have been only a minor possession, and of no consequence compared with the properties in Yorkshire. It does not, however, exclude the possibility that the 'Pele' tower was to be constructed with an 'oratory' room' and that Sir Miles could have Mass said within it, but the building layout does not suggest such an 'oratory' space ever existed. Whatever the interpretation, this grant is clearly not simply the rubber stamping of a general application by the population of Kentmere, but a result of the close acquaintance of both parties required for authorization. This Lord of the Manor was also at least showing a positive interest in Kentmere, not at all previously apparent from records.

Sir Miles died in 1372, and his son Thomas the following year. The estates then became entangled in the wider family as Thomas had no heir. It must be reasoned that Kentmere would have ceased to be important to the new Stapelton lineage during this time. This is supported by the records of valuations: by 1417 Kentmere was valued at £16-6s-8d³² at the death of a Brian de Stapleton, corresponding to 24½ customary tenements, but this value

²⁸The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII pp110-112

²⁹The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p112

³⁰On-line :- archbishopsregisters.york.ac.uk/registers – Thoresby 1358 both in Latin and translation

³¹The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p113

³²Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer p311

remained unchanged 49 years³³ later on the death of another Brian (but spelled *Stapylton*) in 1466. These dates are also far too late for the original construction of the 'Pele' tower, mainly because the Wars of the Roses had potentially then replaced the skirmishes of the Borders with the capability of heavy artillery (even though the majority of encounters of this war were highly mobile and not strategic). A structure like the 'Pele' tower at the head of an insignificant valley would not appear to have had any use, even as a 'frightener'. Although a later Gilpin, a William and brother of the then resident Edwin Gilpin and a 'Captain of Horse', killed at Bosworth in 1485³⁴, who was probably an occasional resident or visitor, may have been responsible for encouraging a more defensive looking exterior with the castellated embellishments, nothing was going to avoid a slaughter from archery looking down on the tower from above: it was still only really for show.

Conclusions

From the above there is certainly a period when the 'Pele' tower is most likely to have been built - sometime during the tenure of Sir Miles of Hathelsay, 3rd Baron of Carlton, Stapelton etc. He appears the only Lord of the Manor who may have had an interest in Kentmere sufficient to have given permission to build a structure such as the 'Pele' tower at a time when the community of Kentmere was organized enough to build with his permission. After his death in 1372 and that of his son Thomas the following year, little or no manorial interest appears to have been held as their duties were dispersed to wider family members. On the basis of the rising prosperity of Kentmere, demonstrated by the increase in tenancies between 1301 and 1417, some key characteristics of the two indigenous families can be re-considered.

The de Ayrays were clearly very well settled in 1332, and it must be concluded they had what would today be called a unique selling point. Herdwick sheep seem to be the answer. It is known that Vikings brought animals with them and as Herdwicks originate from Scandanavia, there is a high probability that the early settlers had some of these sheep. Valuations in the 16th century taken from probate documents show that the most likely reason for high valuations was due to these assets. The early construction of fulling mills (one already noted in Kentmere in the 1301 IPM of John de Bellewe and later another) is also indicative of a trade in wool. The findings of turned-stone whorls³⁵ in the 'shieling' in the upper valley is also strong evidence of early use of wool for yarn, the pre-cursor to weaving, and possible trading. Herdwick sheep, as today, are well suited to free range grazing 'hefted' to the fell-sides with little or no need of enclosure – the conditions which would then have prevailed and still do in the upper Kentmere valley.

The Gilpins' rise in fortune later in Kentmere, their eventually coming to own the whole of the southwest quarter, known variously as Wray Quarter or Hall Quarter, is suggestive of a strong business sense. A probate document for Gowan Gilpin 1582³⁶, appears good evidence of accumulated wealth: as much in value is attributed in the 'Inventory' to gold and silver as it is to sheep. The debts owing to him are also very large, and unlike most inventories of that time in Kentmere, do not indicate any debts owed. The result looks like the inventory of a successful businessman, rather than the much more common inventory where debts owed and owing-to

³³Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer p311

³⁴Kentmere Hall and Beyond, Alan James Gilpin, Trafford Publishing 2006

³⁵Bryant's Gill: 'A Viking age shieling-farmstead.', Steve Dickinson 2020

³⁶LANCAT Probate documents WRW/K/R400A/16 Gowan Gilpin's Inventory 1582

are roughly the same, even if somewhat massaged to near equality to reduce tax - in Gowan Gilpin's case they are clearly not massaged.

From the above it seems clear that it was very likely that the circumstance preceding the building of a 'Pele' tower came about from the intended (arranged?) marriage of the daughter of the Bailiff of the Manor from the dominant, affluent and long-standing resident family in Kentmere to the 'up and coming' Lord of the Manor of Ulthwaite supported by the otherwise much pre-occupied, Lord of the Manor of Kentmere, all of whom would gain as the result, but not enough to promote the scheme alone.

On this premise, the period can be narrowed down, as it must have been driven by the pressure of a perceived need for such a 'statement' dwelling. That no records survive is not surprising as the building was actually just another tenancy, as evidenced later³⁷, and records of manorial administration appear not to have survived until those of many centuries later, as in most manors. Equally no full records of probate, dowries and other financial transactions amongst tenants before 1558 exist.

Whilst around 1358 might appear a time of construction in view of the need of permission to build an oratory, this would seem most likely to be for the church and not the tower. This date seems too late to be trying to secure protection, although it is only with hindsight that we know the raids dwindled away after the death of Robert the Bruce in 1329: residents of the time would remember the attacks well enough to continue to be concerned. Whilst Edward III had made peace with Scotland by then, the connection of Scots with France was by no means over, and the 'Wars of Independence' continued with Scotland siding with France after Edward declared war on France in 1337 (the start of the 100 years' war). The threat from the Scots would therefore have remained in minds, perhaps especially so to Sir Miles and his father Sir Nicholas, both having been in France on several occasions by then: strong encouragement, at least, would therefore have been expected to be available from that quarter.

The William Gilpin who married into the de Ayra family appears to have been the William who became active at the latest by 1356 and was also a witness³⁸ at the IPM of Thomas Stapelton in 1373, as was a William de Ayra. The first child of William Gilpin's marriage, another Richard as would be expected, appears to have been born around or before 1369, suggesting the marriage into the Ayra family c1368 at the latest, but quite possibly earlier. Sir Nicholas' change of profession in 1355 would have enabled a closer interest with Kentmere than any of his predecessors, and his connections with John Thoresby of York would have been useful.

Without records it must be only speculation as to what actually happened, but a possible best guess is that the original 'Pele' tower was built with the necessary support and permission of the ex-military minded Lord of the Manor, Sir Nicholas de Stapleton, and in connection with the marriage of William Ayra's daughter to William Gilpin, sometime between 1356 and 1368, and was subsequently occupied by the new Gilpin family, as tenants. Funding may well have been shared between all three stake-holders with these unusual circumstances not having survived in records.

³⁷ William Gilpin's Inquest 14 Aug 1578 Farrer Vol 1 pp332-333

³⁸ Chan. Inquests ad quod damnum National Archive ref C143

Foot notes

Page 1 ¹ *Kentmere Broadwater* is the earliest name for the large expanse of water at the southern end of the valley of Kentmere up to around 17th century. This was around 1.5m higher and consequently very much bigger in area than today. Since the days of the draining of the mere in the 19th century (no water body) and consequent flooding of excavations for diatomite, it has become known as *Kentmere Tarn*.

² Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties, RW Brunskill 1974.

Page 2 ³ Bryant's Gill: a Viking age shieling-farmstead in the English Lake District and its wider contexts. Steve Dickinson 2020

⁴ Cal Inquisitions National Records C_133_102_3_006

⁵ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer p309

Page 3 ⁶ A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names, Diana Whaley

⁷ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Introduction xi,

⁸ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Introduction xiii

⁹ A toft is the site for a habitation and its yard. It excludes tenanted pasture land

¹⁰ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1 p8

¹¹ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1 p133

Page 4 ¹² Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1 p317 and pp394-396 (Latin transcript)

¹³ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, Vol 1, p308

¹⁴ Close Rolls Ed 1 1277 Vol 1 pp 375-380

¹⁵ Calendar of Inquisitions Ed 1 Vol 4 pp21-28 (File 102/45)

¹⁶ Transcript of Calendar of Close Rolls also ref Farrer p308

¹⁷ The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p 95

Page 5 ¹⁸ The Wars of the Bruces, Colm McNamee, Tuckwell press 1997.

¹⁹ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, From all parish listings for 1332 Lay Tax assessments

²⁰ Records of Kendale, Vol 1 W Farrer. p317 and pp394-396 (in Latin)

²¹ The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p108

Page 6 ²² The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p110- 112

²³ Antiquities of the Counties of Westmorland and Cumberland, Nicholson & Burn, p139

²⁴ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer, p324 and p 146

²⁵ Nottingham Tree-ring Dating Laboratory private reports for Author

²⁶ Vernacular Architecture of the Lake Counties, RW Brunskill 1974, p37.

²⁷ Some notes respecting Kentmere Hall, John Curwen, tcwaas_002_1901_vol1_0026

Page 7 ²⁷ Some notes respecting Kentmere Hall, John Curwen, tcwaas_002_1901_vol1_0026

Page 8 ²⁸ The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p110-112

²⁹ The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p112

³⁰ On-line :- archbishopsregisters.york.ac.uk/registers – Thoresby 1358 Latin and translation

³¹ The Stapeltons of Richmondshire, Archaeological and Topographical Journal Vol VIII p113

³² Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer p311

Page 9 ³³ Records of Kendale Vol 1, W Farrer p311

³⁴ Kentmere Hall and Beyond, Alan James Gilpin, Trafford Publishing 2006

³⁵ Bryant's Gill: 'A Viking age shieling-farmstead....', Steve Dickinson 2020

³⁶ LANCAT Probate documents WRW/K/R400A/16 Gowan Gilpin's Inventory 1582

Page 10 ³⁷ William Gilpin's Inquest 14 Aug 1578 Farrer Vol 1 pp332-333

³⁸ Chancery. Inquisitions ad quod damnum. National Archive ref C143