

Land, population and famine in the English uplands: a Westmorland case study, c.1370–1650*

by Jonathan Healey

Abstract

There is much we still do not know about the relationship between land, population and famine in early modern England. In his classic work on *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England*, Andrew Appleby presented a broadly Malthusian picture in which population growth in the upland north-west was accompanied by the subdivision of peasant holdings and the expansion of cultivation at the margins of sustainability. This article questions the uniformity of this picture. Evidence from the Barony of Kendal in Westmorland suggests that tenant numbers had peaked by about 1560, while manor courts successfully controlled enclosure and the subdivision of holdings. Indeed, evidence from the early seventeenth century suggests that, rather than forming a famine-prone mass, customary tenants in the area enjoyed at least some prosperity. At the same time, however, the period from the late sixteenth to the early seventeenth century saw the development of a large population of subtenants, and it was this group that suffered most from famine in 1623.

In 1623, parts of England were struck by a major famine. Most of the country seems to have been afflicted with dearth, but widespread starvation was generally confined to the upland north and west, while there is also clear evidence for famine in both Ireland and Scotland.¹ Even in the lowland east of England the situation could be desperate: a Lincolnshire landlord reported how one of his neighbours had been so hungry he stole a sheep, ‘tore a leg out, and did eat it raw’. ‘Dog’s flesh’, he wrote, was ‘a dainty dish and found upon search in many houses’.²

* This article has benefited greatly from readings by Professor Richard Hoyle and Dr. Martin Ingram. A shorter version was presented at the 2010 Stenton Symposium at the University of Reading, and I would like to thank the participants for their very helpful comments.

¹ E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The population history of England, 1541–1871: a reconstruction* (1981), pp. 666, 675–81; M. Drake, ‘An elementary exercise in parish register demography’, *EcHR* 14 (1962); A. B. Appleby, ‘Disease or famine? Mortality in Cumberland and Westmorland, 1580–1640’, *EcHR* 26 (1973), pp. 403–32; C. D. Rogers, *The Lancashire population crisis of 1623* (1975); A. B. Appleby, *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England* (1978), pp. 121–7, 145–54; Peter Laslett, *The world we have lost: further explored* (1982), p. 130; John Walter and R. S. Schofield, ‘Famine, disease, and crisis mortality in early modern society’, in John Walter

and R. S. Schofield (eds), *Famine, disease and the social order* (1989), pp. 1–73, esp. p. 34; Richard W. Hoyle, ‘Famine as agricultural catastrophe: the crisis of 1622–4 in east Lancashire’, *EcHR* 63 (2010), pp. 974–1002.

² He may well have been exaggerating, but there are plenty of examples, throughout human history, of victims of famine eating extremely unwholesome foods: when compared to tree bark, tulip bulbs, or even cannibalism, dogs’ flesh is a relatively palatable dish. On ‘famine foods’ more generally see Cormac Ó Gráda, *Famine: a short history* (2009), pp. 73–8.

Those who were not living off dog meat would eat horse flesh, even that 'as hath lain long in a deke for hounds'.³ But for all these colourful reports of eastern woe, the disaster was noticeably worse in the highland north-west: in Lancashire it has been calculated that famine killed about 5 per cent of the population; in parts of Cumberland and the north-east, poor men, women and children starved to death in the streets.⁴

The famine of 1623 is one of the pivotal moments in English economic history, not in itself, but for what came afterwards. And what came afterwards, surprisingly, was nothing. Dearth returned every decade or so: in 1629–31, in 1637–38, then again in 1647–50, 1657–61, 1674–75, and during the exceptionally hard 1690s.⁵ But dearth of corn never again resulted in such widespread mortality.⁶ True, there were spikes in the death rate, most notably in 1727–30 when recurrent outbreaks of disease coincided with two bad harvests and, true, there were reports of famine in Cumberland and Westmorland in the late 1640s, not – so far as can be told – corroborated in the parish registers.⁷ But 1623 was the real watershed: it was England's last real famine.

We owe much of our knowledge of the catastrophe of 1623, the famine that preceded it in 1597, and the crisis of 1587–88 (which saw famine probably combined with a typhus epidemic), to the research of Andrew Appleby in the 1970s.⁸ Focusing on the rugged counties of Cumberland and Westmorland, Appleby not only argued powerfully that the two mortality crises were indeed ultimately caused by hunger, but also explained why they were so severe in his region, and gave a plausible explanation of why famine disappeared thereafter. Population growth at the margins of subsistence, coupled with a specialization in pasture farming and

³ Joan Thirsk and J. P. Cooper (eds), *Seventeenth-century economic documents* (1972), p. 24.

⁴ Rogers, *Lancashire population crisis*, p. 10; Appleby, *Famine*, p. 126; Laslett, *World we have lost: further explored*, p. 130; the registers of St Oswald's Durham show a major spike in burials in 1623, including a large number of unnamed and presumably unknown people dying outdoors, a sure sign of social catastrophe: A. W. Headlam (ed.), *The parish register of St Oswald's Durham, 1538 to 1751* (Durham, 1891), pp. 66–8.

⁵ Based on the price data in Peter Bowden, 'Statistical appendix', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The agrarian history of England and Wales*, V (ii) (1985), pp. 827–902.

⁶ Walter and Schofield, 'Famine, disease and crisis mortality', pp. 34–7, 41–57.

⁷ On 1727–30, see for example: J. A. Johnston, 'The impact of the epidemics of 1727–30 in south-west Worcestershire', *Medical Hist.*, 15 (1971), pp. 278–92; A. Gooder, 'The population crisis of 1727–30 in Warwickshire', *Midland Hist.*, 1 (1972), 1–22; Wrigley and Schofield, *Population History*, pp. 652–3, 667, 681–4; Jonathan Healey, 'Socially selective mortality during the population crisis of 1727–30: evidence from Lancashire', *Local Population Stud.* 81 (2008), pp. 58–74. It has recently been suggested that 1727–30 and 1740–42 represent England's last subsistence crises, but the evidence for this is not convincing; I hope to write on this in the

near future: Ó Gráda, *Famine*, pp. 38, 274; Bruce Campbell, 'Four famines and a pestilence: harvest, price, and wage variations in England, 13th to 19th centuries', in Britt Liljewall, Iréne A. Flygare, Ulrich Lange, Lars Ljunggren, and Johan Söderberg (eds), *Agrarhistoria på många sätt; 28 studier om människan och jorden. Festschrift till Janken Myrdal på hans 60-årsdag* (Stockholm, 2009), pp. 25–7. On the 1640s see Steve Hindle, 'Dearth and the English Revolution: the harvest crisis of 1647–50', in Steve Hindle and Jane Humphries (eds), *Feeding the masses: plenty, want and the distribution of food and drink in historical perspective* (ECHR, supplement, 2008), pp. 64–98.

⁸ In particular: Appleby, *Famine*. Contemporary sources from the region also refer to an outbreak of plague in 1597, with reports of 2,500 deaths in Kendal alone, as well as some 2,260 in Penrith, in Carlisle, 1,196 and in Richmond 2,200. It may be worth reopening the case of the 1590s to investigate the specifics contributions of famine, plague and other epidemics to the crisis. William Parson and William White, *History, directory and gazetteer, of the counties of Cumberland and Westmorland, with that part of the Lake District in Lancashire, forming the lordships of Furness and Cartmel* (1829), p. 638; James Stockdale, *Annales Caermoelesens or annals of Cartmel* (1872), p. 567.

insecure access to grain from other, more productively arable regions, meant that when poor harvests struck in the 1590s and in 1622, many of the region's peasants had no access to food and, tragically, died from outright starvation or of complications arising from malnutrition. After this, however, famine was averted as the local economy developed, thanks to improving markets for cattle, growing industry and increasing trade.⁹

Central to this argument was Appleby's depiction of the demographic and economic changes in the region leading up to the Elizabethan and early Stuart crises.¹⁰ Appleby showed that the sixteenth century had seen gradual population growth in the north-west, as elsewhere. This, given the poor quality of the soil, inevitably led to over-population with, as Appleby saw it, an impoverished peasantry, teetering on the brink of hunger even in reasonably bountiful years. The problem was not, it seems, related to change in the relationship between landlords and tenants: the region's great estates were only partially successful in raising entry fines in line with inflation, and increases tended to have been effected well into the seventeenth century, in many cases post-dating the 1623 famine.¹¹ But this growth, partly thanks to the migratory flows that resulted in the filling-up of weakly manorialized marginal areas with large areas of common land, led to the atomization of holdings, rendering self-sufficient agriculture increasingly difficult. Appleby's picture of change in the north-west is summarized by John Walter and Roger Schofield: 'population growth, promoted in places by partible inheritance and the enclosure of minute holdings out of the waste, created a large, but marginal, smallholding sector'.¹² The region suffered, it appears, from a surfeit of peasants.

Appleby's canvas was broad: he was surveying the economic and demographic characteristics of a whole region, encompassing the historic counties of Cumberland and Westmorland, and he was clearly attuned to local variation within this region. Yet for something so influential, indeed for something so *important* as an explanation of England's last famine, remarkably little work has been done to test Appleby's picture of rural change leading up to the tragedies of 1587–88, 1597 and 1623. This will be the aim here, but the perspective will be more microscopic in nature. Whilst Appleby was attempting to describe the broad sweep of agrarian change over two counties, the focus here will be on just two manors (albeit fairly large ones): Grasmere and Windermere, or – more properly – seven of their constituent manorial jurisdictions, referred to here as townships or 'graveships' (Table 1).¹³ These were part of the Barony of Kendal, an ancient feudal unit that covered the whole southern part of Westmorland, specifically part of its Richmond and Marquess Fees, which, by the 1570s, had both fallen to the crown.¹⁴

⁹ This argument in many ways anticipated the concept of 'exchange entitlements' introduced by Amartya Sen in *Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and deprivation* (1982).

¹⁰ Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 17–94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 67–83.

¹² Walter and Schofield, 'Famine, disease and crisis mortality', p. 22. The picture is a broadly Malthusian one, and is analogous to the classic depiction of the fourteenth century presented by Postan: e.g. M. M. Postan, *The medieval economy and society: an economic history of Britain in the middle ages* (1972), pp. 15–40.

¹³ In this article the larger units will be referred to as 'manors', the smaller ones as 'townships'; in the case of Grasmere I will refer to the manor as 'Grasmere' or 'Grasmere manor', the township as 'Grasmere township'. There were three 'manorial' jurisdictions which had become separated from the head manors of Grasmere and Windermere: Rydal, Little Langdale and Baisbrown. These are not considered here.

¹⁴ For the history of the barony, Joseph Nicolson and Richard Burn, *The history and antiquities of the counties of Westmorland and Cumberland* (2 vols., 1777), I, pp. 29–63.

TABLE 1. Manors and townships under study.

<i>Manor</i>	<i>Township</i>	<i>Estimated Population, 1674</i> <i>(multiplier: 4.3 to 4.75)</i>
Grasmere	Grasmere	270–300
	Loughrigg ^a	–
	Great Langdale ^a	–
Windermere	Ambleside	220–250
	Troutbeck	280–310
	Applethwaite	330–360
	Undermillbeck	430–470

Notes:

^a Great Langdale and Loughrigg graveships were not coterminous with civil townships, and thus population figures cannot be satisfactorily abstracted for them. Great Langdale probably accounted for around two thirds of the 310–50 people in Langdale civil township (around 210–30); Loughrigg may have accounted for around half of the 240–70 population of Rydal and Loughrigg (around 120–30).

Source: Colin Phillips, Catherine Ferguson and Andrew Wareham (eds), *Westmorland Hearth Tax: Michaelmas 1670 and surveys 1674–5*, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Extra Ser., 19 (2008), pp. 291, 295.

The townships were mountainous by the standards of the British Isles. The nearest major town, the economic and political hub of the south Westmorland region, was Kendal, some 10–20 miles away. The microscopic perspective adopted here allows us to test Appleby's depiction of social structural change in this poor and isolated region; it will consider the degree to which the period saw the increasing marginality of the customary tenantry, which Appleby argued was a critical precondition for famine. The article will then introduce important new evidence, which allows us to recreate a more detailed picture of the structure of landholding in the crisis-prone uplands and which has major implications for our understanding of the relationship between social structure and early modern famine.

I

To modern eyes, Cumbria is almost synonymous with the Lake District: sweeping mountains, deep blue waters, whitewashed cottages, and poetry. But to the early modern historian, England's rugged north-west is most familiar as a rain-sodden, impoverished, isolated, and famine-prone borderland. It was a world apart from the lush pastures and golden cornfields of southern England.¹⁵ The weather was amongst England's most inclement and much of the land, even the improved land, was stony, glacial till. Indeed, most of the surface area of the townships under study was given over to vast tracts of steep, craggy fell (Table 2).¹⁶ Commons were clearly of considerable economic importance, and Angus Winchester has shown how

¹⁵ Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 17–18; Eric Kerridge, *The agricultural revolution* (1968), p. 161.

¹⁶ TNA, TITH 2/261–3.

TABLE 2. Pre-nineteenth century Common Fell in Grasmere and Windermere.

	<i>Total Acreage</i>	<i>Common Fell (including large stinted pastures)</i>	<i>% Common Fell</i>
Grasmere	6900	5000	72.5
Rydal and Loughrigg	5201	2500	48.1
Langdale (Great and Little)	7702	5000	64.9
Ambleside	2790	800	28.7
Troutbeck	4700	2000	42.6
Applethwaite	5320	2595	48.8
Undermillbeck	2335	1031	44.2
Total	34948	18926	54.2

Source: TNA, TITH 2/261–3.

they were carefully managed by the region's manorial courts.¹⁷ But they nonetheless comprised exceptionally poor-quality land: when asked in 1622 to describe the barrenness and unprofitability of the fells in his home valley of Longsleddale, 36-year-old Robert Gilpin duly reported that the land was 'very mountaynous & full of foule greate rocks & craggs so that their sheepe & cattell are in greate danger to breake their necks, and that he hath seene & knowne that both horses & sheepe have broken their necks there'.¹⁸ Modern recreational sensibilities would no doubt have mystified Gilpin, and he could equally well have been talking of any of extensive common fells of Cumberland or Westmorland: Troutbeck Park, at the head of the Troutbeck valley, for example, was described by local men in 1607 as 'a steep mountainus rocke place good for litill or nothings at all'.¹⁹ Squeezing profit out of the fells was tough work.

Pasture farming was the key economic activity, and one of the most enduring images of the region is that of a broadly egalitarian social structure, with very few large landowners, and a persistent class of small, owner-occupier peasant graziers whose descendents would be lauded as such by romantic writers from the late eighteenth century.²⁰ In a well-known passage of his 1810 guide to the region William Wordsworth referred to the rural society of the Lakes as a 'mountain republic': a 'pure commonwealth', free of the interference of nobles, and where 'the plough of each man was confined to the maintenance of his own family, or to the occasional accommodation of his neighbour'.²¹ Certainly holdings in severalty were small: a few acres of 'inbye' land in the valley (and sometimes, as in Great Langdale, within a still surviving earthen bank called the 'ring-garth') usually formed the core of the holding, with corresponding

¹⁷ Angus J. L. Winchester, *The harvest of the hills: rural life in northern England and the Scottish Borders, 1400–1700* (2000).

¹⁸ TNA, E 134/19Jas1/HIL8, Deposition of Robert Gilpin of Longsleddale, 1622.

¹⁹ TNA, E 178/4690, Survey of Troutbeck Park, 1607.

²⁰ Angus J. L. Winchester, 'Wordsworth's "Pure

Commonwealth"? Yeoman dynasties in the English Lake District', *Armitt Library J.* 1 (1998), pp. 87–8; Jonathan Healey, 'Agrarian social structure in the central Lake District, c.1574–1830: the fall of the "Mountain Republic"?', *Northern History* 44 (2007), pp. 73–5.

²¹ William Wordsworth, *The illustrated Wordsworth's guide to the Lakes*, ed. Peter Bicknell (1985), pp. 110–11.

common rights on the fell and in the small, unsophisticated open fields which still existed up to the eighteenth century.²² The toughness of the terrain ensured that grain would never be the dominant component of local farming, but oats and barley were clearly important crops in our period nonetheless.²³ It may be that in normal years enough was grown locally to feed much of the region's population: using a sample of 225 yeoman probate inventories, Marshall calculated that two-thirds of Lakeland yeomen cultivated between four and eight acres of grain in the late seventeenth century.²⁴ That this was in a period usually seen as one of greater regional specialization, which in the north-west meant specialization away from grain, makes such a statistic especially important.²⁵ Before agricultural price conditions changed post-1650 in favour of the products of pasture farming, it is likely that grain production was even more widespread.²⁶ Unfortunately it is impossible to gauge the amount of arable production in the two study manors at present, but data do exist for the small, valley hamlet of Legburnthwaite, just six miles north of Grasmere over the county border in Cumberland. A survey of the inbye holdings of nine tenants survives for 1588 and, of a total of 84½ (presumably customary) acres, just under 34 acres (40 per cent) were arable: the mean arable acreage per tenant being 3¾ acres: probably, in other words, around six statute acres.²⁷

There is patchy but consistent evidence, then, of a significant amount of arable cultivation in the Lakeland valleys in the early modern period. This should not, however, detract from the economic importance of the common fell, and Winchester has shown that this was used not just for rough grazing, but also for the collection of various materials 'for hearth and home', notably bracken and peat.²⁸ Grazing rights were technically restricted to those holding customary tenements, with tenants in our manors paying a nominal rent *en masse* for their 'agistment' of livestock on the fell, although it is possible that some rights, particularly the less valuable ones, were available to the landless in some circumstances.²⁹

By the early sixteenth century, the majority of land was held by a customary border tenure known as 'tenant right'; there were few freeholders.³⁰ Tenant right was in practice little different to copyhold of inheritance, save that tenants owed a fine, or 'gressum', on the death of their lord, and that they were obligated to turn out, armed, to defend the border from any Scottish incursion. The development of tenant right in the peculiar agrarian conditions of the sixteenth century varied from manor to manor, but in the crown manors of the Barony of Kendal, rents and fines had evidently become fixed by the late sixteenth century. Indeed, so far had customary rents lagged behind prices in 1604, that a surveyor calculated that, although

²² Winchester, *Harvest*, pp. 52–102.

²³ Appleby, *Famine*, p. 43.

²⁴ J. D. Marshall, 'The domestic economy of the Lakeland yeoman, 1660–1749', *Trans. Historical Society of Cumberland and Westmorland*, Sec. Ser. [hereafter CW²] 73 (1973), pp. 201–2.

²⁵ Anne Kussmaul, *A general view of the rural economy of England, 1538–1840* (1990); Keith Wrightson, *Earthly necessities: economic lives in early modern Britain* (2000), pp. 231–2.

²⁶ Wrightson, *Earthly necessities*, pp. 229–31.

²⁷ TNA, ADM 76/84, no. 59.

²⁸ Winchester, *Harvest*, pp. 123–45.

²⁹ Angus J. L. Winchester, 'Common land in upland Britain: tragic unsustainability or utopian community resource?', in Franz Bosbach, Jens Ivo Engels and Fiona Watson (eds), *Umwelt und Geschichte in Deutschland und Grossbritannien – Environment and history in Britain and Germany* (Munich, 2006), pp. 65–6.

³⁰ Nicolson and Burn, *History and antiquities*, II, pp. 51–9; R. W. Hoyle, 'An ancient and laudable custom: the definition and development of tenant right in north-west England in the sixteenth Century', *Past and Present* 116 (1987), pp. 24–55.

the crown manors in the Richmond and Marquess Fees of the Barony were together worth nearly £2,665 a year, they were only drawing in rents of just under £496.³¹ The only attempt to change this came in the reign of James I, but the crown was only able to entice its tenants to compound, in 1619, for the sum of £2,700, roughly the value of one year's improved rent, in return for security of tenure and fixed entry fines.³² In general, Appleby was sceptical that tenurial changes could have had much impact on tenants' vulnerability: though entry fines rose on some manors, any increase was probably not out of proportion to inflation in general.³³ In any case, the relative security of tenure on the crown lands in the Barony discounts this as an explanation for famine in our manors, though in 1623 the recent composition with the crown would have dented tenant wealth a little.³⁴

Finally, it is worth noting that – in the late sixteenth century and perhaps for much of the early seventeenth – the Kendal region was the seat of a textile industry of some importance. The cloths produced were low-quality 'old draperies', and the industry cannot have been particularly lucrative, but the local products were sufficiently famous to be mentioned in *The First Part of Henry IV*, when Falstaff claimed to Prince Henry (in act 2 scene 4) that he had been assailed at night-time by 'three misbegotten knaves in Kendal green'. Indeed, the dark colour of the cloth must have been familiar enough to Shakespeare's London audience for them to understand Henry's riposte, that Sir John could not have seen the men in Kendal green, 'when it was so dark thou could'st not see thy hand'.³⁵ A minimum of 18 fulling mills have been detected operating in Grasmere parish in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, suggesting a significant workforce, even if not all of them were operating simultaneously; but the industry was probably in decline by the seventeenth century, and the economic hegemony of farming, which was to last up to the rise of tourism in the area in modern times, was largely unchallenged.³⁶ That said, a crown survey of the Barony taken in 1604 recorded the belief that – along with the low rents – the textile industry had allowed most of the tenants to grow notably wealthy and invest heavily in new houses.³⁷ And, as late as 1660–89, Marshall found spinning wheels in about a third of yeomen probate inventories in the upland parts of Kendal Deanery.³⁸

³¹ TNA, CRES 40/19A, no. 6, pp. 24–6.

³² Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 67–83; R. W. Hoyle, "'Shearing the hog': the reform of the estates, c.1598–1640", in Hoyle (ed.), *The estates of the English crown, 1558–1640* (1992), pp. 249–52; Joe Scott, 'The Kendal tenant right dispute, 1619–26', *CW*² 98 (1998), pp. 169–82.

³³ A. B. Appleby, 'Agrarian capitalism or seigneurial reaction: the northwest of England, 1500–1700', *American Historical Rev.* 80 (1975), pp. 574–94.

³⁴ Cf. J. T. Swain, *Industry before the industrial revolution: north-east Lancashire, c. 1500–1640* (1986), p. 25.

³⁵ William Shakespeare, *The first part of King Henry the Fourth*, ed. P. H. Dawson (1968), p. 85.

³⁶ Mary L. Armitt, 'Fullers and freeholders of the

parish of Grasmere', *CW*² 8 (1908), p. 155; C. D. Phillips, 'Town and country: economic change in Kendal, c.1550–1700', in P. Clark (ed.), *The transformation of English provincial towns* (1984), pp. 102, 110–17; F. W. Garnett, *Westmorland agriculture, 1800–1900* (1912); C. M. L. Bouch and G. P. Jones, *A short social and economic history of the Lake Counties* (1961); G. Elliot, 'The decline of the woollen trade in Cumberland, Westmorland and Northumberland in the late sixteenth century', *CW*² 61 (1961), p. 112; J. D. Marshall and John K. Walton, *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the mid-twentieth century: a study in regional change* (1981).

³⁷ TNA, CRES 40/19A, no. 6, p. 26.

³⁸ Marshall, 'Domestic economy', p. 195.

II

One of the clearest aspects of social change in the region to emerge from Appleby's work is the increase in population. Based on an analysis of parish registers, as well as diocesan population listings from 1563 and 1603, Protestation Returns from 1641/2, Hearth Tax and Compton Census data from the 1670s, and an informal census of Cumberland by Thomas Denton in 1687–88, Appleby produced plausible estimates of population change from the time of Elizabeth to that of James II. To summarize, he calculated that the population of Cumberland and Westmorland together rose from just over 43,000 in 1563 to around 62,000 in 1603, an increase of some 43 per cent; it then dropped by 9 per cent to the early 1640s, when it stood at around 56,400. Most importantly, he showed, this time using 37 parish registers, that there were major population crises in 1587–88, 1597 and 1623.³⁹ Of these, that of 1587–88 Appleby ascribed to disease (probably typhus) exacerbated by famine; the latter two were, he argued, more squarely the consequence of mass starvation.

Unfortunately, neither the 1603 ecclesiastical census of the diocese of Carlisle nor the 1641/2 Protestation Returns cover our study area. The 1563 diocesan returns give a total of 518 households for the parishes of Grasmere and Windermere combined, a population of around 2500 (using a 4.75 multiplier).⁴⁰ The 1674 Hearth Tax returns give a total of 483 households (total population around 2,300 using the same multiplier).⁴¹ These, then, suggest either that the population of Grasmere and Windermere was stagnant, in contrast to much of England and, indeed, the north-west as a whole, or that any gains made after 1563 were lost later. It is worth noting that relative stagnation is also evident in a similar comparison between diocesan and hearth tax returns for both the Barony of Kendal (which apparently grew by 7.8 per cent between 1563 and 1674/5) and Lancashire's Furness district (which grew just 3.2 per cent).⁴² In fact, this is not uncharacteristic of Westmorland in general. Appleby's figures for the diocese of Carlisle suggest that, while the number of households in the Cumberland part of the diocese increased by some 46.8 per cent from 1563 to 1641/2, in Westmorland (effectively north Westmorland) the population remained roughly constant. In fact, this is doubly striking, given the possibility that the 1563 figures might have been unusually low, either for reasons of spotty collection, as argued by Nigel Goose, or because the recent influenza crisis had caused a massive drop in the population, as recently claimed by John Moore.⁴³

³⁹ Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 95–154.

⁴⁰ The parishes and manors of Grasmere and Windermere were roughly contiguous, though in both cases the parish was slightly larger. Alan Dyer and D. M. Paliser (eds), *The diocesan population returns for 1563 and 1603* (Records of Social and Economic History, New Ser., 31, 2005), pp. 91–2.

⁴¹ Note that the Hearth Tax figures are 65 households greater than those used by Appleby. My figures are based on the 1674 returns, which are more comprehensive than the earlier ones used by Appleby: Colin Phillips, Catherine Ferguson and Andrew Wareham (eds), *Westmorland Hearth Tax: Michaelmas 1670 and surveys*

1674–5, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Extra Ser., 19 (2008), pp. 291, 295.

⁴² Colin Phillips, 'Westmorland about 1670', in Phillips, Ferguson and Wareham (eds), *Westmorland Hearth Tax*, pp. 11–13.

⁴³ John S. Moore, "'Jack Fisher's 'flu': a visitation revisited', *EcHR* 46 (1993), pp. 280–307; Nigel Goose, 'The Bishops' Census of 1563: a re-examination of its reliability', *Local Population Stud.* 56 (1996), pp. 43–53. See too Heather Falvey, 'Searching for the population in an early-modern forest', *Local Population Stud.* 81 (2008), pp. 37–57.

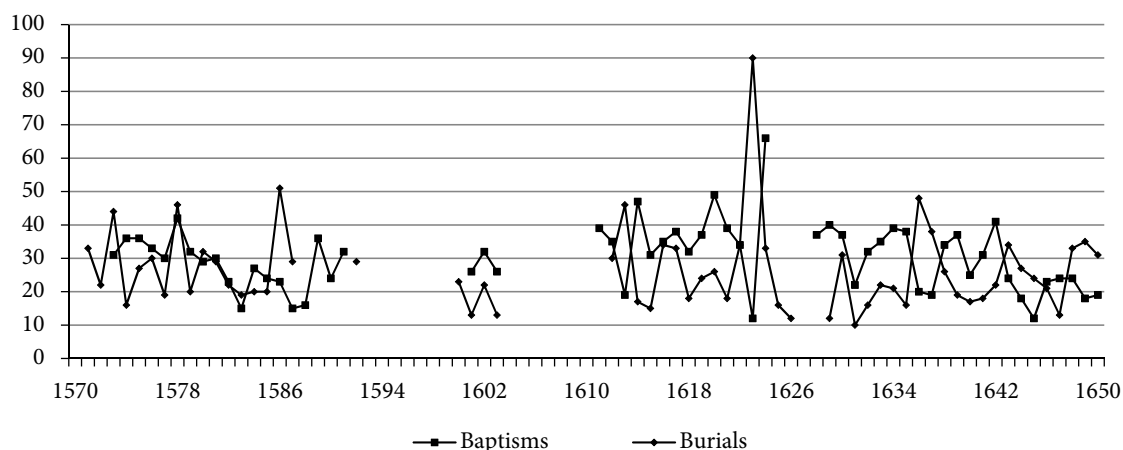


FIGURE 1. Baptisms and Burials in Grasmere Parish, 1570–1650

Source: Cumbria RO (K), WPR 91/1/1/1, Grasmere Parish Register, 1570–1687.

Parish registers complicate things further. Three sets of registers cover our study area: the parish register for St Oswald's, Grasmere, covers the graveships of Langdale, Loughrigg and Grasmere, as well the jurisdictions of Rydal, Little Langdale, and Baisbrown not included in this study. The register for St Oswald's survives from the 1570s, though with significant gaps from 1588 to 1610 (Figure 1).⁴⁴ It shows the severity of the 1623 famine, with burials that year well over three times higher than the mean for the previous ten years. It also shows a clear surplus of baptisms over burials, despite the population losses of 1623, at least from the turn of the century. In fact, the mean surplus of baptisms over burials in Grasmere lay at just 0.2 per annum up to 1600, but reached the much higher 5.5 per annum from then to 1650.⁴⁵ This does not suggest stagnation.

Natural growth was apparently even higher in the chapelry of Troutbeck, covering the manors of Troutbeck and Applethwaite.⁴⁶ The register survives, again with some gaps, from 1580 (Figure 2). Allowing for these gaps, there was a surplus of 535 baptisms between 1580 and 1626, despite three major spikes in mortality in 1587, 1597, and 1623. This is suspiciously high, and it may be that for some reason residents were being buried at the mother church of Windermere rather than the newer chapel of Troutbeck. Unfortunately Windermere registers only commence in 1613, and are fragmentary at best until mid-century.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, it seems unlikely, given the magnitude of the surplus, that the Troutbeck register conceals stagnation or decline. The vast nearby parish of Kendal tells a rather different story: data are a little patchy, though the crises of the 1590s and 1620s come out very clearly, but there is notably

⁴⁴ Cumbria RO (Kendal Branch) [hereafter CRO (K)], WPR 91/1/1/1, Grasmere Parish Register, 1570–1687.

⁴⁵ This pattern of stagnation in the sixteenth century followed by rapid expansion in the early seventeenth is similar to that found in Hawkshead (Lancashire) on the other side of Lake Windermere: Jonathan Healey, 'Marginality and misfortune: poverty and social welfare

in Lancashire, c.1630–1760' (unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2008), pp. 186–8.

⁴⁶ CRO (K), WPR 62/1/1/1–2, Troutbeck Chapelry Register, 1579–1629, 1633–61.

⁴⁷ CRO (K), WPR 61/1/1/1, Windermere Parish Register, 1613–28.

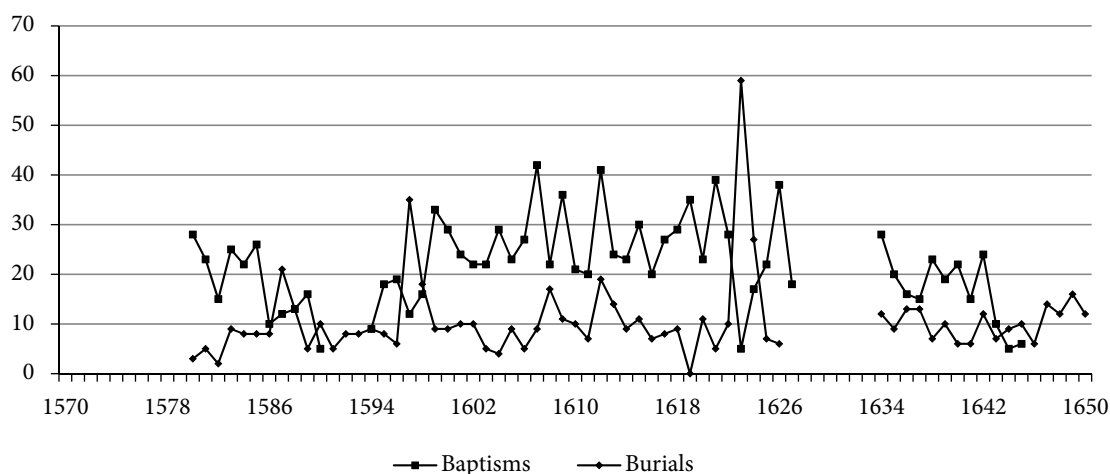


FIGURE 2. Baptisms and Burials in Troutbeck Chapelry, 1570–1650

Source: Cumbria RO (K), WPR 62/1/1/1–2, Troutbeck Chapelry Register, 1579–1629, 1633–61.

little evidence for natural demographic growth (Table 3; Figure 3).⁴⁸ The mean number of baptisms per month was actually *below* the number of burials for the period 1570–1631. Even if we exclude crisis years, it is only in the early seventeenth century that the parish shows natural increase, and this was wiped out by the famine of 1623.

There is still, however, the discrepancy between the parish register figures for Grasmere and Troutbeck and the census-type listings for Grasmere and Windermere parishes. The hearth tax populations are probably too low: according to C. B. Phillips, they ‘undoubtedly’ excluded the poor, and this probably has major implications for the reliability of the returns as global population figures.⁴⁹ Poor accounts from 1637 record 81 recipients of relief in the two parishes: if there were a comparable number of paupers in 1674, and if each of these represented a household, then this would increase the 1674 household total to 564, which is actually an 8.9 per cent increase on the 1563 figure.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, even slow growth contradicts one of the standard characteristics we expect of ‘forest-type’ local economies in rural England, namely that their large tracts of loosely regulated waste attracted poor migrants from elsewhere. Instead, the combined picture from the diocesan returns, hearth tax, and extant parish registers leaves little room for in-migration: if anything the parishes were likely to have been net *exporters* of people.⁵¹ Surname analysis reinforces this point. Of some 397 customary tenants with identifiable surnames in 1604, 306 (77.1 per cent) of them had names that are recorded in Grasmere or Windermere before 1450; and of the remainder, 16 had locative surnames that link them to places within the two manors. This leaves just 75 tenants with names that appear to have been new arrivals since the mid-fifteenth century: a mere 18.9 per cent.⁵² Compared

⁴⁸ Henry Brierley and R. N. Birley (eds), *The registers of Kendal, Westmorland* (1921–52).

⁴⁹ Phillips, ‘Westmorland’, p. 12.

⁵⁰ TNA, SP 16/338/7, nos 9 and 40.

⁵¹ For north-south migration see: A. L. Beier,

Masterless men: the vagrancy problem in England, 1560–1640 (1985), pp. 32–7.

⁵² W. Farrer and John F. Curwen (eds), *Records relating to the Barony of Kendale* (4 vols, 1924), II, pp. 1–80; TNA, SC 2/207/121–2, SC 2/207/111.

TABLE 3. Mean monthly baptismal and burial totals, Kendal parish, 1570–1631.

	Totals		Excluding 1587, 1597–98 and 1623	
	Baptisms	Burials	Baptisms	Burials
1570–1587	16.7	17.6	16.8	16.9
1591–1600	17.5	27.5	18.9	21.3
1607–1531	18.7	19.0	19.0	17.2

Source: Henry Brierley and R. N. Birley (eds), *The registers of Kendal, Westmorland* (1921–52).

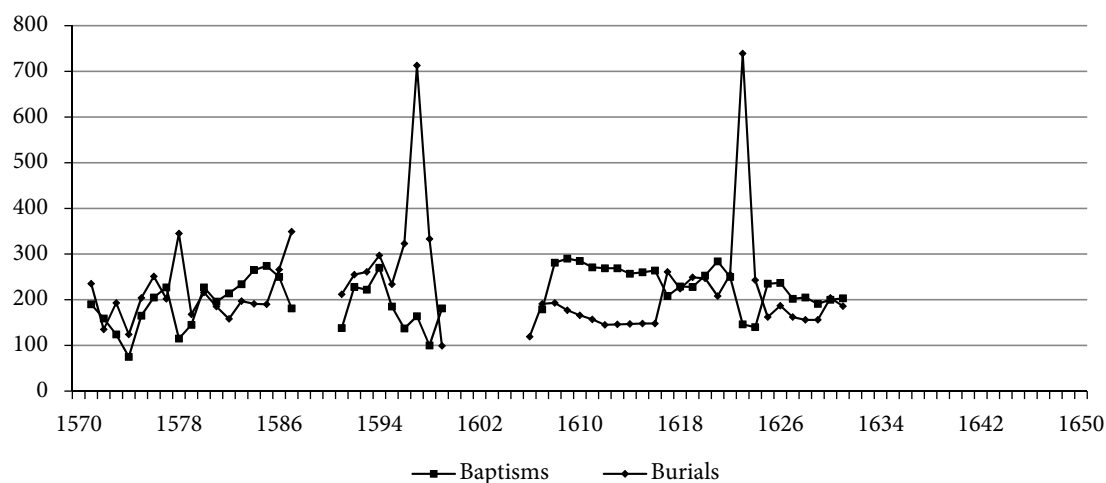


FIGURE 3. Baptisms and burials in Kendal Parish, 1570–1631.

Source: Henry Brierley and R. N. Birley (eds), *The registers of Kendal, Westmorland* (1921–52).

to some lowland southern manors, in which an almost complete turnover of surnames can be found within a century or so, this is a very low rate of change.⁵³ We must acknowledge, then, that in Grasmere and Windermere parishes, the evidence for population growth is more complex than might be expected.

III

Alongside the growth in total population, one of the central planks in Appleby's argument was the idea that, as population expanded, holdings became subdivided so that eventually the Cumbrian peasantry was teetering on the brink of starvation even in good times. Of families who held an average of an acre of arable and six of pasture in the 'Debateable Lands' on the Scottish Borders, Appleby felt that it was 'difficult to see how these people could have

⁵³ Peter Spufford, 'Population movement in seventeenth-century England', *Local Population Stud.* 4 (1970), pp. 46–7; Peter Laslett and John Harrison, 'Clayworth and Cogenhoe', in H. E. Bell and R. L. Ollard, *Historical essays 1600–1750, presented to David Ogg* (1963), pp. 174, 177.

survived, without stealing from their neighbours'.⁵⁴ This was not the case in all communities, in lowland Holm Cultram (Cumberland), for example, the number of tenants remained stable, but, having perused the 1574 rentals for the Barony of Kendal, Appleby believed that the picture of dangerous expansion held for the south Westmorland fells. Our next task is to test this in more detail in our seven townships.⁵⁵

Certainly there had been a very considerable expansion in the numbers of customary landholders since the late fourteenth century. Rentals exist from the late 1300s, from 1574, 1619, 1665, and then at fairly regular intervals into the late eighteenth century (Tables 4 to 7). In addition, there is a list of tenants from 1560, as well as lists of payments for 'greenhew', i.e. the right to collect wood in the township, from 1442, 1443, 1560, 1596, 1597 and 1604 and the 1610s.⁵⁶ If we use the 'minimum' figures in Table 4, which assume that *all* identical names in the documents can be conflated (the maximum figures assume the opposite: that identical entries represent distinct individuals), then the increase in the number of tenants was general from the late medieval period to the third quarter of the sixteenth century, with the partial exception of Applethwaite. Totalled figures, which assume that no tenant held land in more than one township, suggest an increase from 247 tenants in the late 1300s to 405 by 1574.⁵⁷ For reasons that are not clear, the biggest growth came in Langdale, Troutbeck, and Undermillbeck. Indeed, in Applethwaite, there were already 54 tenants as early as 1283, which suggests that township had 'filled up' very early, whereas in Ambleside (11 tenants in 1324 and 1334), Troutbeck (8 in 1283, 11 in both 1324 and 1334), and Loughrigg (9 tenants in 1324) there is evidence for substantial growth in the fourteenth century.⁵⁸ The total rent paid in each township also increased, though evidently not as fast as the numbers of tenants, so that in most townships the mean customary rent paid per tenant decreased. In Ambleside, Troutbeck and Langdale the decrease was so pronounced that tenants in 1574 were paying around half as much customary rent as their predecessors in the late fourteenth century had. But this was not universal, in Grasmere and Applethwaite there was a much smaller decrease, and in the small township of Loughrigg, and the much larger one of Undermillbeck, the mean rent paid per tenant actually *increased*. It is unlikely that the expansion of the total rental represented an increase in rents per acre: any increase in the burden of rents before about 1500 would be hard to reconcile with the low pressure demographic regime of late-medieval England. Rather, the

⁵⁴ Appleby, *Famine*, p. 52.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 57–8.

⁵⁶ The principal rentals used here are as follows: 1300s: Farrer and Curwen, *Records*, II, pp. 1–84; 1574: TNA, E 178/3130; 1619 and 1665: TNA, LR 13/5/1–2; 1738: TNA, SC 12/33/1–2. There is also a Commonwealth survey from 1650, but this does not distinguish between types of tenure, and so has been excluded from this study, TNA SC 12/31/16–17; for further rentals see: Healey, 'Agrarian social structure', p. 79, n. 34. In addition to the rentals, I have used lists of tenants from 1560 in Farrer and Curwen, *Records*, II, pp. 11, 25–6, 35–6, 48–50, 76–9, and lists of greenhew payments from 1441–43, 1596 and 1597: TNA, SC 2/207/121–2, LR 11/3/68, and 1604: TNA,

SC 2/207/111. The 1560 list of tenants does not appear to make much effort to distinguish between tenants of the same name: no tenant is recorded as 'junior' or 'senior', for example. Thus, the real figure for number of tenants in 1560 is likely to be higher within the margin of error than in other years.

⁵⁷ This is certainly an incorrect assumption, but the number of landowners with tenements in more than one township is likely to have been small, and counter-balanced by a small number of inevitable incorrect linkages between identical names within townships.

⁵⁸ Farrer and Curwen, *Records*, II, pp. 1–3, 20–2, 30–1, 40–1, 58–61.

TABLE 4. Customary tenants in manors of Grasmere and Windermere, c.1400–1738.

Manor of Grasmere										Manor of Windermere											
Grasmere			Loughrigg			Langdale			Ambleside			Troutbeck			Applethwaite			Undermillbeck			
Max.	Min.	Rent (s.)	Max.	Min.	Rent (s.)	Max.	Min.	Rent (s.)	Max.	Min.	Rent (s.)	Max.	Min.	Rent (s.)	Max.	Min.	Rent (s.)	Max.	Min.	Rent (s.)	
1370–94	63	56	236	19	19	33	27	26	138	28	25	516	24	22	462	65	54	381	46	45	100
1441–43	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	25	25	–	21	21	–	71	70	–	–	–	–
1560				21	18					63	50	–	61	54	–	72	64	–	108	90	–
1574	94	76	276	26	24	57	59	53	151	56	47	501	56	54	465	65	61	396	106	90	230
1596 ^a				19	18					46	40		54	52	–	67	62	–	93	81	
1604	97	75	–	21	21	–	55	46	–	51	47	–	56	49	–	79	67	–	106	95	–
1619	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	43	43	494	68	48	478	75	65	394	86	69	211
1665	86	74	266	20	20	52	62	49	146	43	38	493	53	40	483	63	60	392	78	66	219
1738	71	54	267	23	23	52	54	31	140	37	34	491	59	55	479	55	50	391	76	68	214

Note: ^a Data for Loughrigg actually for 1597.

Source: W. Farrer and John F. Curwen (eds), *Records relating to the Barony of Kendale* (4 vols, 1924), II, pp. 1–80; TNA, SC 2/207/121–2; LR 11/3/68; SC 2/207/111; E 178/3130; LR 13/5/1–2; SC 12/33/1–2.

TABLE 5. Customary rents per tenant (s.)

<i>Manor</i>	<i>Township</i>	<i>c. 1400</i>	<i>1574</i>	<i>1619</i>	<i>1665</i>	<i>1738</i>
Grasmere	Grasmere	4.2	3.6	–	3.6	4.9
	Loughrigg	1.7	2.4	–	2.6	2.3
	Great Langdale	5.3	2.8	–	3.0	4.5
Windermere	Ambleside	20.7	10.7	11.5	13.0	14.4
	Troutbeck	21.0	8.6	10.0	12.1	8.7
	Applethwaite	7.1	6.5	6.1	6.5	7.8
	Undermillbeck	2.2	2.6	3.1	3.3	3.2

Source: as Table 4.

TABLE 6. Combined tenant numbers, c.1400–1738.

	<i>1375–1394</i>	<i>1441</i>	<i>1560</i>	<i>1574</i>	<i>1596</i>	<i>1604</i>	<i>1619</i>	<i>1665</i>	<i>1738</i>
Grasmere manor	101	–	–	153	–	142	–	143	108
Windermere	146	–	258	252	235	258	225	204	207
Windermere without Undermillbeck	101	116	168	162	154	163	156	138	139
Combined	247	–	–	405	–	400	–	347	315

Source: as Table 4.

TABLE 7. Percentage changes, c.1400–1665.

	<i>Fourteenth century</i>	<i>1574</i>	<i>1604</i>	<i>1665</i>
Grasmere	101	153	142	143
		+51.5%	–7.2%	+0.7%
Windermere	146	252	258	204
		+72.6%	+2.6%	–20.9%
Combined	247	405	400	347
		+64.0%	–1.2%	–13.3%

Source: as Table 4.

increase in rent almost certainly reflected a process of intaking, by which parcels of the waste land were gradually enclosed and added to the inbye.

The broad picture of development from the late fourteenth century to 1574, then, is for a significant increase in the number of customary tenants, and a slower increase in the total amount of rent paid in each manor. Up to this point, this is in support of Appleby's depiction of increasing peasant marginality and land hunger: there was apparently significantly less

land per tenant: a 37 per cent drop in the amount of rent paid per tenant in Windermere, and a 22 per cent drop in Grasmere. However, this growth in the number of tenants, and thus the apparent diminution of holding sizes, ceased sometime around 1574 and evidence from 1560 suggests that it was already substantially complete by then. According to the method of calculation deployed here, there was a drop in the number of tenants from 405 in 1574 to 400 in 1604, and evidence from surviving lists of greenhew payments suggest that this was in fact a recovery from a low point in 1596–97. This is notwithstanding Appleby's evidence that 1603 marked an early modern pinnacle in the region's population.⁵⁹ Rentals also survive from 1619 for Windermere, and we can compare these to the full rentals for 1665. These suggest that the tenant body failed to grow beyond its apparent ceiling in 1574: the subdivision of holdings had stopped, and in the seventeenth century the numbers of tenants began to decline.⁶⁰

This picture can be illuminated further by analysis of the rental structure of Windermere manor from 1574 onwards. For Grasmere, with the 1619 rentals missing, such comparisons are of less use. If the story of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is one of increasing atomization of customary holdings, then this might be manifested in a proliferation of marginal tenants paying small rents, although the relatively constant tenant numbers in Table 4 suggest that this is mathematically unlikely. Unfortunately, there is no way of ascertaining the precise relationship between rental values and actual acreages, or whether this varied between townships, so there is an element of subjectivity in the choice of category headings. In addition, we have to assume that identical names refer to the same individual, which may not be the case. In Table 8, two grouping types have been used: for Ambleside and Troutbeck, which were both within the baronial forest of Kendal, the smallest category has been taken as covering tenancies up to and including 5s. 11¾d., so as to reflect the fact that initially there were very few tenants paying less than the standard 6s. 8d. for an 'ancient tenement'. In the non-forest townships (Undermillbeck and Applethwaite), where there were initially a large number of small tenants paying just 1s. 3d., the lowest category covers rents up to and including 1s. 11¾d. The picture, however, is fairly clear, and fits nicely with the total tenant numbers: *there is no evidence of the proliferation of small tenancies up to 1619*. In Undermillbeck, the clearest trend was the apparent disappearance of a class of small customary cottagers, paying a few pence rent each. In neither Ambleside nor Troutbeck is there any evidence of a significant population of small tenants developing between 1574 and 1619.

The chronology of change to customary landholding thus does not gel neatly with the chronology of famines as identified by Appleby: the peak in the number of tenants was reached perhaps a generation before the first identified mortality crisis of 1587–88, and following that, as the number of tenants declined, the famines got worse. But this does not necessarily undermine Appleby's fundamental point that by Elizabeth's reign the peasantry of the north-west had become hopelessly marginal. It may be that the customary tenantry, *circa* 1560–1630 remained in a state of vulnerable stasis: hit by recurrent famines but remaining ultimately stable. Indeed, painting a picture of the desperate marginality of the region's peasantry, Appleby analysed the customary holding acreages of four townships in the 1574 survey. He highlighted Grasmere in particular, where the vast majority of tenants apparently held five statute acres

⁵⁹ Appleby, *Famine*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ Healey, 'Agrarian social structure', pp. 81–3.

TABLE 8. Rental structures, Windermere Manor, 1574–1738.

	1574		1619		1665		1738	
	Number	% of rent	Number	% of rent	Number	% of rent	Number	% of rent
Ambleside								
18s.+	5	31	7	41.6	7	48	7	58.1
12s.–17.99s.	8	21.8	9	25	7	19.6	6	20
6s.–11.99s.	30	43.8	21	28.7	21	29.7	10	16.7
0s.–5.99s.	4	3.4	6	4.7	3	3	11	11
Troutbeck								
18s.+	2	10.8	4	25.1	7	44.3	6	26.5
12s.–17.99s.	7	20.1	10	28.6	4	12.9	7	20.9
6s.–11.99s.	44	68.2	31	43.9	28	42.1	20	35.1
0s.–5.99s.	1	1	3	2.3	1	0.7	22	17.1
Applethwaite								
10s.+	–	–	7	30.5	10	43	11	47.4
5s.–9.99s.	–	–	24	41.9	18	32.6	21	38.8
2s.–4.99s.	–	–	28	25.6	24	21.9	14	13.1
0–1.99s.	–	–	6	2	8	2.5	4	0.8
Undermillbeck								
10s.+	0	0	1	5.8	2	17.1	1	12
5s.–9.99s.	13	39.2	11	34	10	31.8	11	36.3
2s.–4.99s.	27	38.4	25	41	20	32.1	23	32.5
0–1.99s.	50	22.4	32	19.2	34	19	33	19.3

Source: as Table 4.

of land or less.⁶¹ In this he was following the analysis of William Farrer and John Curwen, who transcribed and published the 1574 rentals in the first quarter of the last century, and G. P. Jones, writing in the early 1960s about the decline of the Lakeland yeomanry.⁶² All of these scholars, Farrer and Curwen, Jones, and Appleby, assumed that the acreage figures in the 1574 rental could be equated, broadly speaking, with farm sizes. Indeed, describing Grasmere and quoting Farrer, Appleby thought that “‘The wretched parcels left after generations of sub-division’ were too small to provide a living’ to the ‘inhabitants’ of the manor.”⁶³ Indeed, it is not unfair to suggest that these acreages gleaned from the 1574 survey formed a critical plank to Appleby’s depiction of the marginality of the Cumbrian tenant.

Unfortunately, this is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, at most these acreages refer to

⁶¹ Appleby, *Famine*, p. 56.

⁶² G. P. Jones, “The decline of the yeomanry in the Lake Counties”, *CW*² 62 (1962), p. 203.

⁶³ Farrer and Curwen, *Records*, II, 14n; Appleby here conflates the terms ‘inhabitants’ and ‘tenants’.

inbye land, i.e. the relatively fertile land in the valley within the ring-garth; they thus take no account of the vast areas of summer pasture on the fell which, though of poor quality, were so extensive as to be critical to the pasture-farming economy of our manors.⁶⁴ Secondly, the acreages presented in the 1574 rental do not even seem to represent realistic assessments of inbye land.⁶⁵ In Grasmere, where figures are not unduly distorted by the existence of large areas of freehold land, a tithe survey of 1838 records some 1,900 statute acres of enclosed land. If we exclude the woodland from this, and make a very generous allowance for 300 acres of freehold land (the main freehold tenement was at Banerigg, recorded as 14 acres in a 1581 deposition), then this leaves us with about 1,400 acres of enclosed land to account for.⁶⁶ Yet the acreages recorded in 1574 total just 280 customary acres, representing hardly more than 450–500 statute acres by Appleby's calculation. If the 1574 figure is accurate, then, around 1,000 statute acres *at least*, would have to have been enclosed between then and the 1830s. Two pieces of evidence argue against this. Firstly, there is the evidence of silence: I have found no evidence of much enclosure after 1600.⁶⁷ Secondly, a survey of enclosures in the township since the death of Edward VI, made in 1600, records just 67 (customary?) acres being taken in, many of which were described as extremely marginal.⁶⁸ The survey can thus be taken as evidence that intaking had, in Grasmere, reached the margins of profitability by 1600. But the more fundamental point is that the acreage figures from the 1574 survey are obviously unrealistic, and it is very likely that the same is true of the other six townships, where such calculations are more difficult. In Applethwaite, for example, the 1574 rental gives a total of just under 400 customary acres, yet the 'ancient enclosed lands' in the nineteenth-century tithe survey covered some 2,725 acres: again the 1574 acreage seems unrealistic. In fact, some of the most reliable evidence we have for acreages in the region comes from a *breviate* (summary) of a survey of the Barony compiled for the crown estate in 1604, which tells us that 525 customary tenants across the whole Richmond Fee held a total of 12,600 acres of land (excluding encroachments and waste), or a mean of 24 acres⁶⁹ per tenant. This may partly represent larger acreages in lowland townships: a preliminary analysis of the full survey (Appleby used the published extracts, which only represent 7 out of 20 surveyed townships) shows larger acreages in lowland townships. But the mean acreage per tenement in the Richmond Fee in the 1574 survey is just 6.2 acres, or just over a quarter of the size suggested by the 1604 survey: thus it may be that we have to multiply recorded acreages not by 1.6 as Appleby did, but by a factor of closer to four. This suggests strongly that the customary tenants of the area had considerably more land than Appleby thought. Estimated tenement sizes calculated by multiplying raw acreages by four are presented in Table 9: these suggest an average tenement size (excluding commons) of 18.4 acres in 1574, considerably higher than the 7.4 acres reached by using Appleby's multiplier.

⁶⁴ Winchester, *Harvest*, pp. 78–102.

⁶⁵ A point noted in relation to the thirteenth century, Angus J. L. Winchester, *Landscape and society in medieval Cumbria* (1987), p. 64.

⁶⁶ E 134/23Eliz/East7.

⁶⁷ It would appear that in Satterthwaite (Lancashire) in High Furness the pre-parliamentary enclosure landscape was largely complete by the early seventeenth

century: Kevin Baverstock and Suzanne Tiplady, 'Gated trackways between common land and in-bye land within Satterthwaite parish', *CW*³ 9 (2009), p. 94.

⁶⁸ TNA, E 178/2381.

⁶⁹ It is unclear whether customary or statute acres are being used: if customary then the average tenement size in statute acres would be considerably greater.

TABLE 9. Estimated mean holding sizes, 1574.

	<i>No. of observations</i>	<i>Mean acreage (Raw)</i>	<i>Mean acreage (estimated real)</i>
Grasmere	72	3.9	15.6
Loughrigg	35	3.2	12.8
Langdale	35	2.2	8.8
Applethwaite	48	6.5	26.0
Undermillbeck	55	5.9	23.6

Source: TNA, E 178/3130.

Two of these figures are a little misleading: data only exist for the half of Great Langdale in the Richmond Fee, thus 8.8 acres will be an underestimate since tenants often held land in both fees; in Undermillbeck the smaller cottages did not have recorded acreages, thus while 23.6 acres is probably a realistic measure of the tenement sizes of the established peasantry, it is on the high side for the community as a whole. Nonetheless, these recalculations suggest a more prosperous tenantry than Appleby's dismal picture suggests.⁷⁰ Indeed, the 1604 survey was quite explicit in highlighting, not the poverty of the region's peasantry, but the *wealth* of its customary tenantry:

the tenanntes for the moste parte are verie riche by reason of theire greate trade of clothinge and manie of them have verie faire houses builte upon the premisses, and they will give one to another for the tenante righte 100 yeres fine and much more, and in some particular thinge as for a farme of xxxs. rente was given £600 for the tenante righte thereof.⁷¹

Of course, the surveyor, who was sizing the Barony up for 'improvement' after the dissolution of the Border in 1603, may well have been exaggerating as a bargaining counter against tenants reluctant to admit to their own wealth, but we can compare the 1604 breviat for the Barony to another survey compiled the same year by the same surveyors, John Goodwin and John

⁷⁰ It is worth bearing in mind also that there may have been a tradition in Westmorland of adjusting the size of acres to reflect the capacity of the land, in which case 'acreages' do not necessarily represent land area as such. For historians of social structure this is not such a problem, as the potential wealth-creating capacity of the land is of more interest than its size. However, it also seems likely that professional crown surveyors would have used a more standardized measure. Robert. S. Dille, 'The customary acre: an indeterminate measure', *AgHR* 23 (1975), p. 176. In an earlier article on Grasmere, I argued that the 1574 acreages referred to recent enclosures. This remains possible: in the survey, each landholding was recorded as a tenement 'and' a number of acres, suggesting that

the acreages were additional to the tenement. In Grasmere, moreover, the mean rent per recorded acre, at 11.6*d.*, is suspiciously close to the 12*d.* stipulated in a 1530s agreement discussed below, whereas we know the rent per acre of all inbye lands was 6*d.* in the thirteenth century, although it appears to have risen to about 9*d.* by the late fourteenth. However, I am no longer convinced, as – given the strong correlation across the 1574 survey between recorded acreage and rent – this would suggest a fairly consistent process of enclosure across the Barony, which seems unlikely given the variation in landscapes, particularly between the townships in the heart of the Lakeland fells and the more 'lowland' ones. Healey, 'Agrarian social structure', pp. 79–80.

⁷¹ TNA, CRES 40/19A, no. 6, pp. 24–6.

Johnson, this time for the Borderlands of Northumberland. The large manor of Harbottle, they felt, could be let at 4*d.* per acre, which was a common rent for newly enclosed lands in the middle Tyne and Coquetdale.⁷² The local tenants felt even this was 'ridiculous', but it is considerably lower than the rents the same surveyors felt could be charged for customary land in Kendale. Here they found 12,600 acres of customary land in the Richmond Fee, worth a total of £1,200, or 22.9*d.* per acre, and 6,000 acres in the Marquess Fee worth £1,000, or 40*d.* per acre. The importance of this is that it counteracts the suspicion that the surveyors were exaggerating the region's wealth in preparation for the sale of fee farms to the tenants; even if this was likely to be the case, they still rated south Westmorland as considerably wealthier than the uplands of Northumberland. Hardly surprising, given the relative shelter the former area had enjoyed from Scottish raids, courtesy of Dunmail Raise and Shap Fell, but another important qualification to Appleby's pessimistic picture.

IV

If the increase in the number of tenants in our seven townships had halted by the mid-sixteenth century, and if their marginality was not as pronounced as Appleby supposed, then what of the history of enclosure in the area? The picture presented in *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England* is of gradual intaking, that is, small-scale enclosures of portions of the waste, in response to population growth in the sixteenth century, with piecemeal squatting, often by migrants, playing a major role in expanding the enclosed area.⁷³ The main evidence we have for sixteenth-century enclosure comes from Grasmere, where new intakes followed an agreement between the customary tenants and the lord's steward around 1531.⁷⁴ Customary tenants were allowed to enclose an acre of the common for every 12*d.* they paid in rent. At this point, according to a 66-year-old husbandman in a 1581 suit in the Court of Exchequer:

the groundes weare messured and sence from tyme to tyme inclosed as the tennantes weare able to doo and make the same, and ... the same ware laid to theire tenementes and fermeholdes of the Quenes Majesties tennantes of Gressemer, by the consent of theire officers for the tyme beinge, and so haithe contynewed frome tyme to tyme by the lyke consent of the said officers ...⁷⁵

Crucially, the tenants paid no rents for their new closes. They were taken out of the common fell for which they already, collectively, paid 'forest silver', an ancient payment for agistment in the medieval Forest of Kendal.⁷⁶ The upshot of this, then, is that the tenants of Grasmere had the right to enclose some 230 to 280 customary acres (based on a total customary rental of 236*s.* in the fourteenth century and 276*s.* in 1574) after about 1530, without having to pay additional rent for them. Some of this was probably recorded in the 1600 list of post-1553 enclosures, mentioned above, but it seems likely that much more had taken place in the previous 20 years.

⁷² Watts and Watts, *From Border to Middle Shire*, p. 165.

⁷³ Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 34–6, 59–62.

⁷⁴ Winchester, *Harvest*, p. 69.

⁷⁵ TNA, E 134/23Eliz/East3, Deposition of Thomas Richardson of Grasmere, 1581.

⁷⁶ Winchester, *Landscape*, p. 84.

This agreement is indicative of the relatively tight regulation of enclosure in the region by the customary tenantry, with agreements generally rationing intaking by the amount of land a tenant already held.⁷⁷ Another case from our manors is Troutbeck, where a mid-sixteenth-century agreement allowed tenants to enclose 2½ acres in Old Park for every five ‘cattlegates’ they already held (each cattlegate referred to a stint in the common).⁷⁸ By 1592, according to an estimate by an octogenarian Undermillbeck cooper, some 100 acres had been enclosed.⁷⁹ Whether similar agreements were made in the other townships is unclear. Certainly, surveys of enclosures in 1600 exist not just for Grasmere, but also for Undermillbeck and Great Langdale, where enclosures took place with the assent of the steward and ‘proporcionable’ to existing tenements.⁸⁰ Customary tenants can also be found acting to prevent enclosures by freeholders. In Grasmere, when, around 1555, the tenants of the freeholds at Banerigg attempted to encroach on the common fell at Basthwaite Green, their enclosure was pulled down by the customary tenants, though it was ‘sence by frendshippe continewid’, perhaps a legal manoeuvre designed to allow the enclosure while ensuring it did not establish a precedent.⁸¹ Six years later, when another Banerigg freeholder enclosed a small parcel of fell at Knabb Yeat, it was presented at the manor court and pulled down by Williams Hird and Hawkrigg, again both customary tenants. In the Exchequer suit from which this evidence comes, the customary tenants of Grasmere pointed out that their common fell had been rented to them from the barons of Kendal for £6 16s. 4d., referring to the ancient ‘Forest Silver’ they paid to graze their cattle. Since the intakes were made out of that land, the customary tenants were able to argue that encroachments should be restricted to those who paid Forest Silver: themselves, in other words. Enclosure, essentially, was a continuation of commoning by other means.

The control of encroachments in evidence here cuts against the idea that an area with vast commons was a magnet for poor migrants. This does seem to have been the case in forest areas in the Midlands and South, and the evidence is also strong in Yorkshire’s Forest of Bowland.⁸² Appleby supposed it was also the case in Cumbria: ‘a squatter’, he thought, ‘could carve a few square yards of land out of the common pasture, throw up a rude cottage, and try to scratch a living out of the inhospitable soil’. This was one of the main reasons for the growth in the number of tenants; and, moreover, ‘[t]he established tenants rarely objected to the loss of pasture; the upland commons were vast, largely unsuitable for cultivation, and the chances slender that enough land would be converted to private use to seriously reduce the herds and flocks pastured there’.⁸³ In fact, the evidence from this corner of the Lake District

⁷⁷ Winchester, *Harvest*, pp. 68–72; Baverstock and Tiplady, ‘Gated trackways’, p. 94.

⁷⁸ Winchester, *Harvest*, p. 69; TNA, E 134/32Eliz/Hil4; Margaret A. Parsons, ‘Pasture farming in Troutbeck, Westmorland, 1550–1750, *CW*² 93 (1993), pp. 115–30.

⁷⁹ TNA, E 134/34Eliz/East13, deposition of William Matson of Undermillbeck, 1592.

⁸⁰ TNA, E 178/2381. There were 68 enclosures, most of less than an acre in Undermillbeck, and around 61 in Langdale, the return being badly faded and in parts illegible.

⁸¹ TNA, E 134/23Eliz/East7, Deposition of Thomas

Richardson of Grasmere, 1581; E 178/2381.

⁸² Victor Skipp, *Crisis and development: an ecological study of the Forest of Arden, 1570–1674* (1978), pp. 41–2; J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian history of England and Wales*, IV (1967), pp. 10–11, 13, 409; John Porter, ‘A forest in transition: Bowland, 1500–1650’, *Trans. of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 125 (1974), 45–8; John Porter, ‘Waste land reclamation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the case of south-eastern Bowland, 1550–1630’, *Trans. of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* 127 (1977), p. 9.

⁸³ Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 36–7.

suggests that enclosure was relatively closely controlled, and it was not a driving force behind the development of a marginalized peasantry.⁸⁴

A desire to prevent poor incomers from becoming customary tenants is also detectable in the regulation of the land market, which appears to have become more intense in the sixteenth century. Appleby evoked a picture, influenced by reports from the Borders, in which partible inheritance drove a widespread atomization of holdings, leaving tenants desperately poor.⁸⁵ In response to this, many manors in the region acted to prevent tenants dividing their lands, and a parliamentary statute was set down in 1581 to a similar purpose.⁸⁶ Appleby noted this in the case of Crosthwaite and Lyth in 1579 and Furness in 1586, and he considered that, by 1650, partible inheritance had disappeared from the crown estates.⁸⁷ To this we can add similar evidence, from both of our manors, that restrictions were placed on the land market to prevent subdivision. In the Richmond Fee portions of Grasmere manor held by the crown (i.e. Loughrigg, half of Langdale, and half of Grasmere township), a bylaw was set down in around 1580, by the steward of the Richmond Fee, Sir Thomas Boynton, 'for the tyme being with the consent of the tenantes', to the effect that no 'ancient tenement' might be subdivided; that, if one had been, a tenant of any portion could not sell unless he first offered his share to the tenants of the remaining parts; and that no land could be alienated to 'straingers or forroners being not the Quenes tenant'. This, in fact, was a use of a bylaw to reinforce an existing custom rather than to create a new one. According to John Benson, a 60-year-old Elterwater (Lancashire) yeoman, the ancient custom of the Richmond Fee was that 'no tenannte should parcell or devyde his tenemente albeit', he continued, 'before the tennantes motion to Sir Thomas Boynton there were dyverse tenementes devyded and solde'. The reason, it was deposed in a 1588 suit, was that subdivision was creating an impoverished tenantry unfit for armed service on the borders.⁸⁸ The chronology suggested by Benson, and supported by other deponents, is doubly interesting because it *almost* fits with that of the rental data quoted above: there was significant subdivision, but this was deliberately halted in or around the 1570s. In Windermere the evidence is a little more sketchy, but we know that the manor court ordered, probably in the reign of Henry VIII, that 'no tenandry apperteynyng this lordshippe nor within this same shall be devydid nor partid', while there was already a bylaw in force from the mid-fifteenth century against 'taverning'.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ See Winchester, *Harvest*, pp. 68–71.

⁸⁵ Appleby, *Famine*, pp. 50–3.

⁸⁶ 23 Eliz. c. 1; Watts and Watts, *From Border to Middle Shire*, pp. 30–1.

⁸⁷ Appleby, *Famine*, p. 53.

⁸⁸ E 134/30Eliz/East3, Deposition of Leonard Benson of Ambleside, 1588; cf. TNA, DL 44/398; Thomas West, *The antiquities of Furness* (1774), p. 226.

⁸⁹ CRO (K), WD/TE, Book XI, fol. 23r. The precise date is difficult to ascertain from this document, it existing in a compilation of customs from 1478 to 1630. It appears to be retrospective and is placed three items down from an order dated to the reign of Henry VIII. The antiquarian S. H. Scott was certain that the bylaw dated to Henry's reign: S. H. Scott, *A*

Westmorland village: the story of the old homesteads and 'statesman' families of Troutbeck by Windermere (1904), pp. 255–6. For the fifteenth-century jury charge: Winchester, *Harvest*, pp. 152–9. The orders printed here are undated, surviving only in a manuscript of the mid-sixteenth century (and not later than 1576), and are attached to a Jury Charge which Winchester suggests dates from before the 1440s. It is possible, nonetheless, that the orders themselves are in some kind of chronological order, beginning in 1477. If this is the case, then the order about dividing should be dated to 1497 or later. The original manuscript can be found in the Lonsdale Archive: Cumbria RO (Carlisle) [hereafter CRO (C)], D/Lons/L5/2/11/291.

Intentionally or not, such regulation would have restricted access to customary landholdings. Restricting enclosure to existing tenants would have had the same effect. The stagnation in the number of tenants in the seven townships suggests that such restrictions were successful. The upshot of this would have been that any growth in population, rather than being absorbed by enclosure or subdivision, must have led to an increase in levels of subtenancy. Unfortunately, subtenancy is usually very hard to recover as landlords normally did not have a direct interest in recording it, though it was clearly widespread in rural England.⁹⁰ Appleby found evidence of a significant number of undertenants on lowland manors, but his discussion was largely confined to the lowlands.⁹¹ In Grasmere and Windermere, the most direct evidence comes from occasions on which customary tenants were fined by manor courts for keeping a 'byfire' on their tenement: literally an illegal fire (*igne illicit*) but in reality a regional term meaning a subtenant.⁹² It appears that byfires were distinguished from those who rented whole tenements: in nearby Crosthwaite and Lyth a 1579 agreement specifically allowed tenants to sublet their *whole* tenements 'to whome he thinketh good', yet the manor court continued to fine the takers of byfires right through our period.⁹³ That said, theoretically a byfire could refer to anyone from an inmate to an undertenant of a large portion of a tenement. Data exist in the form of loose estreat rolls that were lodged with the crown estate and now survive in the National Archives; they cover over a quarter of the years between 1560 and 1650 and are particularly good from 1596 onwards.⁹⁴ The courts of Grasmere manor fined the keepers of byfires occasionally: less frequently than did those of Windermere. In Grasmere township it was rare for more than two byfires to be reported a year, similarly in Loughrigg, and in Langdale only one was fined in all the years under study. This seems unrealistic: a comparison between the Hearth Tax return of 1674 and a rental of that year shows that in Grasmere township around half of Hearth Tax payers were not customary tenants, suggesting widespread subtenancy. What appears to have happened in Grasmere was that courts exercised a degree of discretion: when they were amerced, keepers of byfires were fined variable amounts. In Windermere, in contrast, the courts seem to have been much more assiduous in fining those who sublet, with a standard charge of 12*d.* per offence being applied throughout.⁹⁵ Thus the Windermere court rolls provide a very important new set of evidence for the social structure of a famine-prone upland manor, right at the time of Appleby's subsistence crises. The numbers amerced in Windermere are presented in Figures 4 and 5. Two points stand out. Firstly, the number of byfires was high, and regularly high, something which appears to stand in contrast to what little we know about the fifteenth century: the court roll for Ambleside, Troutbeck and Applethwaite that survives from 1443 records just three presentments for byfires.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ E.g. Eric Kerridge, *Agrarian problems in the sixteenth century and after* (1969), pp. 48–53; R. W. Hoyle and H. R. French, *The character of English rural society: Earls Colne, 1550–1750* (2007), pp. 251–92.

⁹¹ Appleby, *Famine*, p. 63.

⁹² Winchester, *Harvest*, p. 39.

⁹³ Farrer and Curwen, *Records*, II, pp. 104–5. There were 22 such fines in 1596 and 20 in 1597, for example: TNA, LR 11/3/68.

⁹⁴ The 1560 figures are from Farrer and Curwen, *Records*, II, pp. 50–1, 79; TNA, LR 3/76/898; LR 11/3/61–2, 64–5; LR 11/4/74–8; LR 11/58/834; LR 11/79/908c; SC 2/207/100, 102–3, 107–8, 111, 114–15, 117, 120.

⁹⁵ In a very small number of cases offenders were fined 6*d.*, though why this should be is unclear.

⁹⁶ TNA, SC 2/207/122; Mary L. Armitt, *Rydal* (1916), p. 106n.

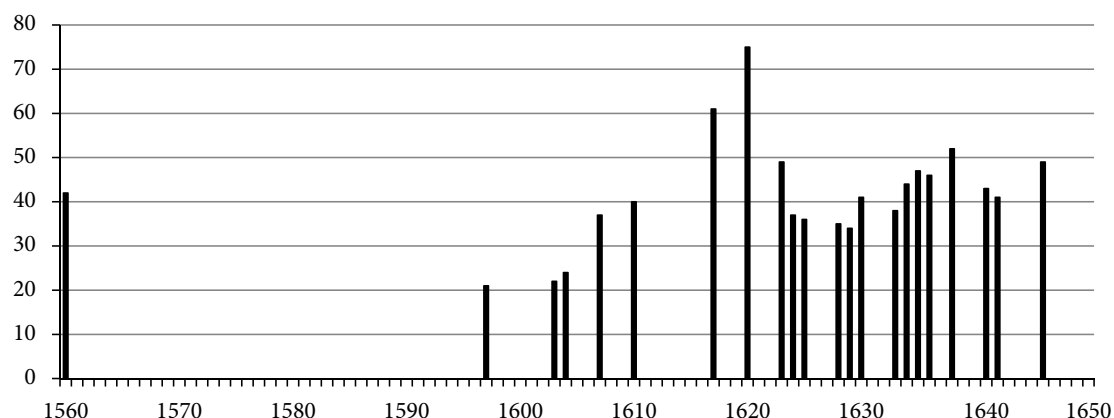


FIGURE 4. Amercements for keeping byfires, Windermere Manor, 1550-1650.

Source: W. Farrer and John F. Curwen (eds), *Records relating to the Barony of Kendale* (4 vols., 1924), pp. 50-1, 79; The National Archives, Land Revenue, LR 3/76/898; LR 11/3/61-2, 64-5; LR 11/4/74-8; LR 11/58/834; LR 11/79/908c; SC 2/207/100, 102-3, 107-8, 111, 114-15, 117, 120.

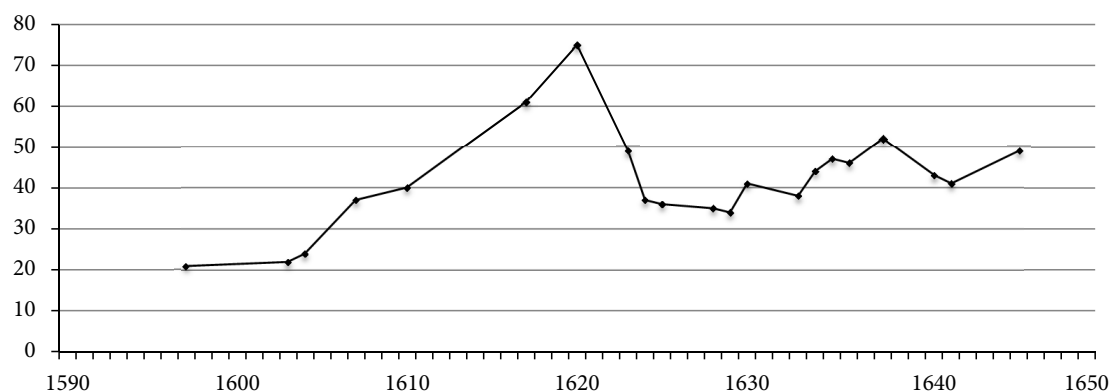


FIGURE 5. Amercements for keeping byfires, Windermere Manor, 1597-1650.

Source: as Figure 4.

It is impossible to know who these byfires were, or how they made a living, but it seems likely that at least a proportion of them were engaged in textile production. We also, unfortunately, cannot know how many of them rented land as well as housing. Secondly, their numbers were highest just before the 1623 famine, and they suffered a major drop during and afterwards. The figures speak for themselves: there were a total of 75 amerancements for keeping byfires in 1620, but by 1624 this figure had halved to just 37 (Figures 4 and 5). What these figures appear to be telling us is that by about 1620 the population of Windermere had filled up with individuals and households who could not get onto the customary property ladder and so were forced to rent land, houses, or perhaps even rooms from established tenants. Such undertenants would have suffered from rising market rents as the region's population grew faster than its housing

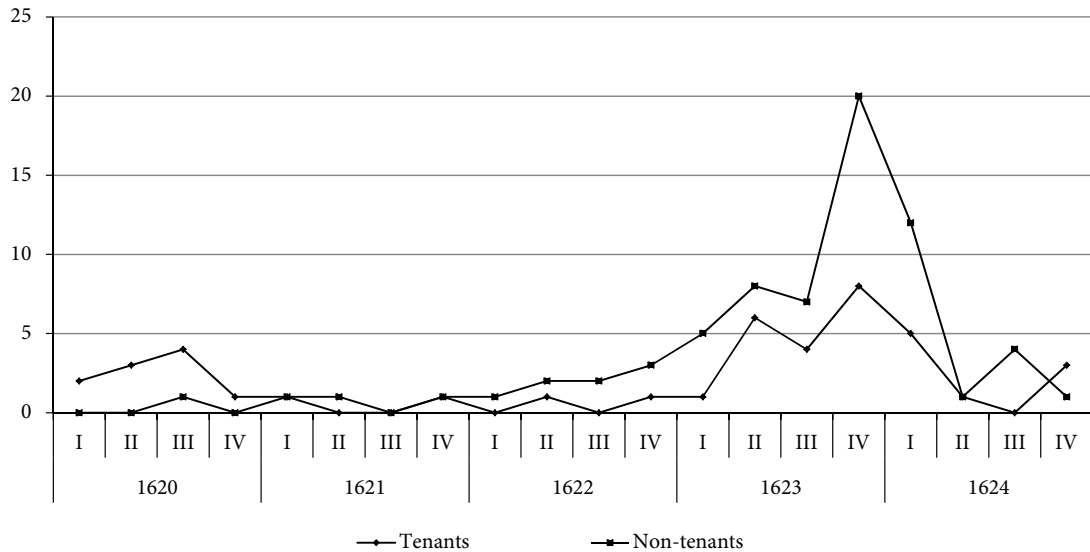


FIGURE 6. Burials in Troutbeck Chapelry, 1620–24.

Source: as Figure 2.

stock.⁹⁷ As fines remained fixed at 12*d.*, customary tenants stood to benefit from these rising prices, while their own rents remained fixed: indeed, the growth of the subtenant population in the area may have resulted from some degree of collusion between landlords and customary tenants, with byfire fines allowing stewards to cream off some income from what was an increasingly profitable practice of the customary tenants. The most important point, however, for our purposes, is that there was a concealed population peak, but it was of poor subtenants rather than customary landholders.

There is another piece of evidence that hints at the reason for such a dramatic drop in the number of byfires in the wake of the 1623 famine. It is possible to compare burials in Troutbeck chapelry during the 1623 famine with the 1619 rentals for Troutbeck and Applethwaite (Figure 6). Of 113 burials from 1619 to 1624, only 43 (38.1 per cent) can be linked to customary tenants and their families. Moreover, the proportion of burials linkable to 1619 customary tenants seems to have dropped during the famine itself; a third of burials during the crisis months were of customary tenants and their immediate family members, compared with 48.6 per cent in the non-famine months. By contrast, the proportion of burials accounted for by the families of non-tenants (including single women and itinerants) rose from 31.4 per cent to 43.6 per cent during the famine. Numbers are small, but the findings are tantalizing: perhaps the famine hit subtenants harder than it did customary ones. The byfire fines in Windermere thus provide striking evidence that the impact of the 1623 famine was differentiated between two types of inhabitant: the less severely hit customary landholder, and a previously unknown class of (probably poor) subtenants.

⁹⁷ This is analogous to what Jane Whittle finds was happening in sixteenth-century Norfolk: Jane Whittle, 'Lords and tenants in Kett's rebellion, 1549', *Past and Present* 207 (2010), pp. 40–1.

V

Clearly the relationship between land, population and famine in our study manors was complicated to a degree that can only really come out through localized study. Appleby's picture of population growth, increasing subdivision of holdings and land-hunger among the region's peasantry leading to a Malthusian-type crisis⁹⁸ in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries needs modifying for the seven townships under study here. In particular, it seems that (1) there is a discrepancy in our parishes between the natural growth shown in the parish registers and the apparent stagnation suggested by population surveys; (2) whatever the broad trends in population, the number of customary tenants, which had grown between 1400 and 1560, was stagnant or falling thereafter; (3) moreover, their access to land was much greater than supposed by Appleby; (4) the restricted nature of the land market also probably helped create and maintain a substantial population of subtenants: restricted access to land meant that any population growth after 1560 would have been more likely to cause a growth in the number of subtenants rather than customary ones. After 1623 the numbers of subtenants fell dramatically: many presumably left the area in search of succour elsewhere, or they died. Presumably subtenants were particularly vulnerable to short-term crises in the price of food, to long-term deindustrialization, and to crises in the textile industries.

The purpose here has not been to explain why parts of northern England suffered famine between the 1580s and 1620s, but to test Appleby's depiction of the social and agrarian structure in the north-western uplands. What has emerged is a rather different type of community to that described in *Famine in Tudor and Stuart England*. Appleby's uplands were roughly analogous to the great forest parishes of England: lightly controlled, increasingly populated by poor migrants squatting on small intakes carved out of the waste. In the seven townships described here, the land was much more carefully restricted. The amount of land available was restricted, and so part of the population growth was absorbed by an increase in the number of subtenants. The existence of such a society in the heart of Appleby's north-west raises crucial questions as to whether existing historiography has sufficiently untangled the complex relationship between famine and the social structure of early modern England. In any case, as Appleby pointed out, 'famine can only be understood properly when it is solidly placed in its social and economic context'.⁹⁹ There is much to do before we know just what that social and economic context was.

⁹⁸ Appleby himself characterizes the overpopulation of the region as 'Malthusian': Appleby, 'Agrarian capitalism', p. 579.

⁹⁹ Appleby, *Famine*, p. 4.