

PREFACE

To many, 'Cumbria' is maybe equated with the 'Lake District' — that foreshortened perspective of rugged mountains, rippling waters and dappled woodlands, radially intersected by a valley-bottom patchwork of tightly-enclosed fields and stone-built farms. This is the land frequented by artists, writers, climbers and rambles; by those in search perhaps of a mystical experience amidst a landscape of acknowledged natural beauty. Yet such a restricted aesthetic focus is a relatively recent phenomenon, born of romanticism and steam locomotion, and reinforced by the camera, the pen and the motor-car. Otherwise it was a hard and essentially practical life — cultivating the narrow, tortuous valleys, grazing stock on the steep fells, quarrying slate, hewing lead and copper from the mines. The central massif was a remote, hidden land, with important through-routes but with relatively little to attract concentrated permanent settlement before the Scandinavians took it as their own. To those from the lofty fastnesses of fjord-riven Norway, albeit tempered by life 'west-over-sea', the fells and lakes would have had an obvious affinity — both for year-round exploitation and as a seasonal resource supplementary to the greater expanses of more kindly, cultivable land around the fringe.

For 'Cumbria' is far more than this crinkly crown. It is also the high western edge of the Pennines, the long gentle valley of the Eden, the flatness of the Solway plain merging imperceptibly with the debateable Border. It is the curvilinear coastline of the Irish Sea, a fertile agricultural crescent set behind, alongside the shipyards, power stations and coal-mines of more recent times. These were lands that had long been intensively settled, and it is to this wider area that *The Scandinavians in Cumbria* looks, to the lands embraced by the former counties of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire north of the sands, and to more distant inter-relationships with the old kingdoms of Strathclyde and Northumbria, with the English Midlands, Ireland, and western Scotland.

Certain chapters focus on the Viking period itself, on the presence and activities of mainly 'Norwegian' immigrants; others examine the earlier post-Roman period and explore later developments in the light of Romano-British, Anglian and Scandinavian influences. The authors draw upon the evidence of geology, archaeology, history, geography, vernacular architecture, place-names and dialect; they make use of documents and records, material culture and oral tradition in a multi-disciplinary bid to help unravel the story of man and his environment in Cumbria. The bulk of the material reflects recent work; but research is never complete and there are perhaps as many questions posed as are 'solved'!

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