Sosgill packhorse bridge, St John's in the Vale

10. THIRLMERE

—

Description, History and Development

10. THE THIRLMERE VALLEY

"...take a flight of not more than four or five miles eastward to the ridge of Helvellyn and you will look down upon Wytheburn and St. John's Vale..."

William Wordsworth, 'Guide to the Lakes' (1835)

"The story of Thirlmere... is, I think a watershed in the History of Conservation. For the advocates of the reservoir it was a pyrrhic victory, since it was very important in embedding the ideas of Conservation in the minds of the late Nineteenth century intelligentsia both in Britain and elsewhere, and that, in turn, is the basis of the Environmental Movement around the Globe".

Lord Inglewood in his foreword to Ian Brodie's book 'Thirlmere: and the emergence of the landscape protection movement' (2012)

10.1 DESCRIPTION

10.1.1 LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

Though relatively small in area compared to other English Lake District valleys Wythburn, (more usually known as Thirlmere) is a large-scale, steep-sided, glaciated upland valley visually dominated by a large reservoir (Thirlmere) and heavily influenced by land management policies designed to protect water quality within the catchment. The valley runs south-north from the watershed, Dunmail Raise, the physical and psychological boundary between the south and north Lake District, before reaching an abrupt end against the bulk of the Skiddaw and Blencathra massif with the town of Keswick at its foot. It has the valleys of Ullswater to the east, Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside to the south and Borrowdale and Bassenthwaite to the west and north. See Figure 10.1 for an illustrative map of the valley. Also see Figure 10.2 for an overview of the cultural landscape of the Thirlmere valley.

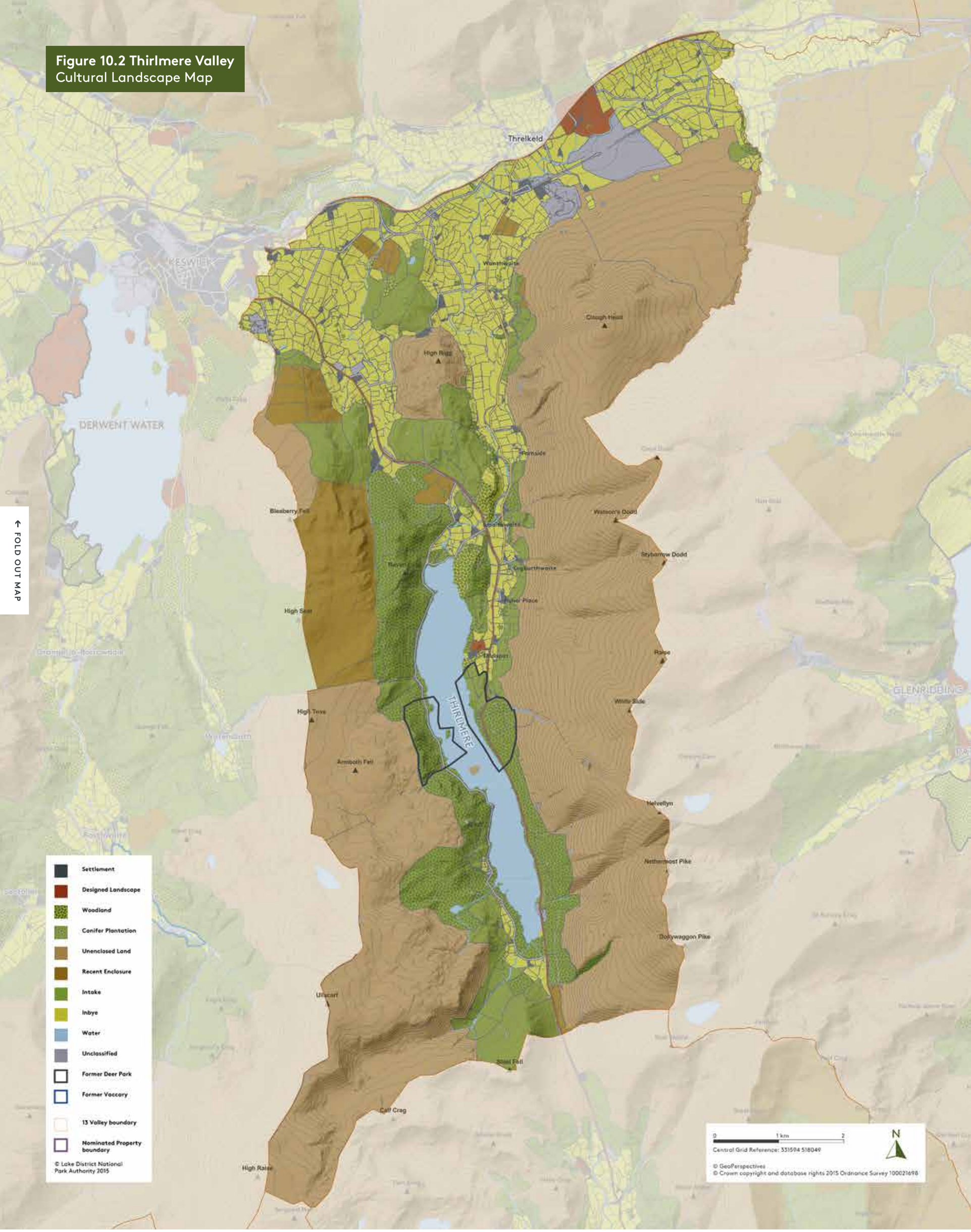
The fells on the eastern edge of the valley are particularly impressive, including the bulk of Helvellyn, the third highest mountain in the Lake District. The underlying geology

Figure 10.1 Thirlmere Valley
Illustrative Map

- Agro-pastoral landscape
- Aesthetic appreciation
- Conservation

1. Castlerigg Stone Circle (owned by National Trust)
2. Shoulthwaite Hillfort
3. Remains of shielings north of Clough Fold
4. Dalehead Hall
5. Castlerigg Hall
6. Fornside
7. Hollin Root Old House
8. Steel End Farm
9. Sosgill packhorse bridge
10. Helvellyn
11. Thirlmere

Figure 10.2 Thirlmere Valley
Cultural Landscape Map



← FOLD OUT MAP

FIGURE 10.3 The contribution of the Thirlmere Valley to the cultural landscape themes identified

THIRLMERE		
THEME	**COMPONENTS OF ATTRIBUTES**	**SIGNIFICANCE**
Continuity of traditional agro-pastoralism and local industry in a spectacular mountain landscape	Extraordinary beauty and harmony	
	Evidence of pre-medieval settlement and agriculture	
	Distinctive early field system	
	Medieval buildings (e.g. churches, pele towers and early farmhouses)	
	16th/17th century farmhouses	
	Herdwick flocks	
	Rough Fell flocks	None
	Swaledale flocks	
	Common land	CL CL CL
	Shepherds' meets/shows and traditional sports	None
	Woodland industries	None
	Mining/Quarrying	
	Water-powered industry	None
	Market towns	None
Discovery and appreciation of a rich cultural landscape	Viewing stations	None
	Villas	None
	Designed landscape	
	Early tourist infrastructure	None
	Residences and burial places of significant writers and poets	None
	Key literary associations with landscape	
	Key artistic associations with landscape	
	Key associations with climbing and the outdoor movement	None
	Opportunities for quiet enjoyment and spiritual refreshment	
Development of a model for protecting cultural landscape	Conservation movement	
	National Trust ownership (inalienable land)	
	National Trust covenanted land	None
	Other Protective Trusts and ownership including National Park Authority	

FIGURE 10.4 Aerial view of Thirlmere from the south

FIGURE 10.5 Sunlight illuminating the inbye fields in the narrow passage of St John's in the Vale. Helvellyn, the third highest mountain in the Lake District, looms on the horizon.

of the majority of the valley is the Borrowdale Volcanic Series but this changes to the Skiddaw Group of slate from St John's in the Vale. An igneous intrusion at Threlkeld comprises microgranite which was the focus of a large quarry.

Thirlmere Reservoir is a vast expanse of water framed on its east side by the imposing steep fells, crags and screes of the Helvellyn massif and on the west by the less steep but large-scale and no less imposing Armboth and Castlerigg Fells. The water has a dark and brooding quality with high, steep enclosing fells funnelling the wind to create white-horses and foam-streaks on the surface when other lakes are mirror calm. The sense of enclosure felt on the lower slopes of the valley is emphasised by dense coniferous woodland, though recent tree felling has opened up fine views across the lake from the A591 road which hugs the eastern shore. Despite obvious human intervention this is still very much a wild, upland valley with a sense of tranquillity away from the road, particularly on the western shore and fells where stunning views of the Helvellyn range can be seen to the east. Habitation is sparse south of the lake, limited to occasional hill farms around Steel End. North of the lake the twin valleys of Naddle Beck and St John's Beck contain extensive improved grazing enclosed by stone walls and more frequent farms. The dam is surprisingly well contained visually by landform and trees, but the Grade II listed, sandstone-built, straining well structure is a distinctive feature on the side of the A591. At Fisher Place and Stannah urban looking houses were built to house the Manchester Corporation workers employed on the construction project.

10.1.2 THE INHERITED LANDSCAPE'S CHARACTER

The Thirlmere Valley's history tells the story of a heavily politicised landscape preservation movement where the concepts of natural beauty versus national interest were tested perhaps for the first time at this scale. Well organised opposition to the project was represented by the Thirlmere Defence Association formed in 1877 and including visionaries such as Ruskin and Carlyle, and supported by the social reformer Octavia Hill in London and by many newspaper editors. Despite this, the needs of a fast-growing urban population in Manchester were deemed by Parliament to outweigh the modification of a

landscape of recognised great natural beauty. The dam was built and the 96 miles long aqueduct delivered its first water to the city in 1894 as it still does today.

If the damming of the valley and the enlargement of two small lakes to form a large reservoir was landscape change on a large scale, so was the afforestation of nearly 800 hectares of land to prevent erosion, protect water quality and to profit from harvested timber. It is regarded by many as the greater crime. The large blocks of non-indigenous conifers and the scar left by draw-down of the reservoir in dry periods are undoubtedly elements which detract from Thirlmere's natural beauty. However, the valley still has the drama of its soaring fellsides, a large body of water and north of the reservoir the rural charm of St John's in the Vale. It is stunning scenery and its record of the adaption of landscape to meet the needs of a changing society, and the arguments for not doing so, are fascinating and an integral part of the evolution of the Lake District.

10.1.3 FARMING TODAY – THE AGRO-PASTORAL LANDSCAPE

The early agricultural landscape of Thirlmere has been largely covered by the reservoir and forestry plantations, but remnants of the field pattern can be seen around the water's edge and in other parts of the valley, for example a possible early fragment of a field system by the car park at Helvellyn Gill. Extensive areas of valley bottom land at the northern end of Thirlmere, in St John's in the Vale and around Naddle to the northwest, are divided into the small, irregular stone-walled fields characteristic of small, ancient farms. This pattern extends southwards along the valley at Legburthwaite and there is a small area at Wythburn, at the southern end. Larger walled intakes can be seen surrounding the inbye land at Legburthwaite, running along the lower slopes below Helvellyn and also at Wythburn. Other areas of former intake have been covered by conifer plantation.

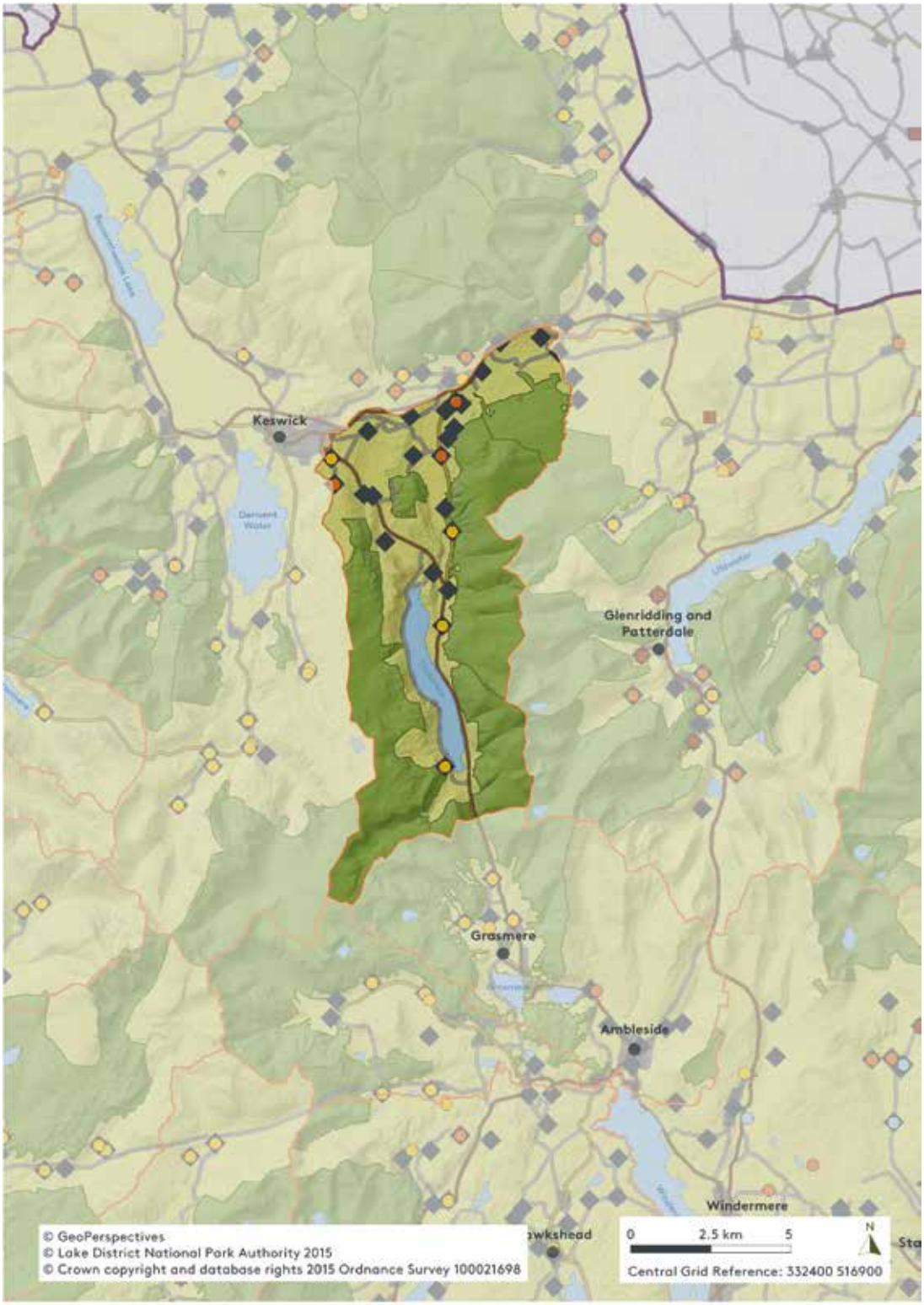
WORKING FARMS AND FLOCKS

Although the extent of agricultural land was reduced in the Thirlmere Valley, it is still the location for possibly the largest Herdwick farm in the Lake District. West Head Farm is a tenanted farm owned by United Utilities, successor to the Manchester Corporation who acquired the farm in 1870. West Head is one of the major producers of quality Herdwick tups in the country, in recent years producing in excess of 40 quality tups annually. In the first Herdwick flock book of 1920 Isaac Thompson at West Head Farm had a flock of 1,000 ewes, one of the largest at the time.

There are 22 farms with fell-going flocks in the Thirlmere Valley area . There are four Herdwick flocks and three Swaledale flocks registered with the relevant Sheep Breeders' Associations. There are no registered Rough Fell flocks and no National Trust landlord flocks in the Thirlmere Valley.

Upland grazing is provided on about 4,534 hectares of Registered Common Land in the Thirlmere Valley, around 56 per cent of the total area, and virtually all of the open fell. The areas of Common Land are Whelpside, Steel End, West Head, Armboth and Bleaberry Fells on the west and the south east sides of the valley, St John's Common

FIGURE 10.6 Shepherds' flocks and native sheep breeds in the Thirlmere Valley



on the rest of the east side of the valley, and Dodd Common, High Rigg Common and Threlkeld Common at the northern end of the valley.

CONTINUING FARMING CULTURE AND TRADITIONS

The Dockray and Matterdale Shepherds' Meet is held alternately at Dockray (Ullswater valley) and Threlkeld Cricket Club on the first Thursday after the 22 November, every year.

FARMSTEADS

A number of late 17th century farmhouses survive in the Naddle valley, St John's in the Vale, and the Glenderamackin Valley. Collectively the farmhouse dates suggest a period of rebuilding in stone from the 17th century. Many of these are listed buildings, of which there are 28 in the valley.

TABLE 10.1 Key farm buildings in the Thirlmere Valley

CASTLERIGG HALL

A good example of an early 17th century farmhouse, known as How Place in the 1640s and the ancestral home of the Wren family.

DATE 17th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 328216 522535

HOLLIN ROOT OLD HOUSE

A late 17th century or early 18th century farmhouse that is now used as a farm outbuilding.

DATE 17th – 18th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 330844 523894

STANAH

Farmhouse, now private house. Mid-17th century with 20th century alterations.

DATE 17th – 20th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 332035 519001

BRAM CRAG

A late 17th century farmhouse with later alterations.

DATE 17th – 20th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 331859 521394

FORNSIDE

Fornside and its barns date to the late 17th century which – aside from Dalehead Hall and Threlkeld Hall – is the earliest example of rebuilding of medieval farmsteads in stone.

DATE 17th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 332092 520635

THE GREEN, LEGBURTHWAITE

The Green at Legburthwaite is early 18th century, and reflects the continuing replacement of earlier buildings in stone.

DATE 18th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 331854 519663

STEEL END

Historic mapping depicts this as a pre-1770 farm.

DATE 17th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 332209 512848

WEST HEAD

17th century farmstead.

DATE 17th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Not listed
GRID REFERENCE 331850 513348

BROTTO

Brotto (late 17th century) farmhouse, now cottage.

DATE 17th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 331841 518466

6 FISHER PLACE

House of mid or late 18th century.

DATE 18th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 331818 518379

DALEHEAD HALL

Late 16th century house, modified in the 1620s and 19th century. Sold in 1879 to the Manchester Corporation. North wing added in 1980.

DATE 16th - 20th century
OWNERSHIP Private
PROTECTION Listed
GRID REFERENCE 331372 517498

10.1.4 INDUSTRY

FIGURE 10.7 View of the Thirlmere dam from Raven Crag

FIGURE 10.8 The Straining Well and Valve House for the Thirlmere Reservoir. Constructed 1885 – 1894 as a mock castle-like building intended to diminish its visual impact.

The physical aspects of the water industry dominate the main valley, most obviously the reservoir itself. The dam infrastructure is now considered to be of historic value, as it was the first English masonry gravity dam and one of only two arch dams in England (i.e. similar construction to the Hoover Dam). The dam curves across the northern end of the reservoir, 20 metres high and 264 metres long. It impounded 8,900 million gallons (40,000 million litres) of water uniting Leathes Water and Wythburn Water in 1894. The overflow channel takes the water to the discharge chamber and valve houses. On the eastern side of the reservoir, an aqueduct runs from north to south along the foot of the fellside collecting the water from the becks running off the fells before carrying it into the reservoir near Station Coppice. The straining well building on the east shore marks where the head of Wythburn Water once was; it is a mock castle-like tower with three wings and now contributes some picturesque qualities of its own. The well feeds the 96-mile underground aqueduct to Manchester, which heads south from Thirlmere through Dunmail Raise, with an average fall of 20 inches per mile (0.32 metre per kilometre). There are many other water company buildings in the valley, including houses and works buildings.

In addition to water abstraction, industrial activity in Thirlmere has also included mining and quarrying. As a consequence, numerous trials and small workings can be seen scattered throughout the valley. These include a copper mine of the Elizabethan period on the fellside of Brown Crag above Thirlspot, the small but spectacularly located lead mine below the summit of Helvellyn on Whelp Side, near Wythburn, which only

operated between 1839 and 1882, and the former copper mine at Birkside Gill. There are numerous small quarries dating from the period of dam construction together with larger examples including the slate quarries at Bell Crag on Armboth Fell and the extensive microgranite quarries at Bramcrag, Hilltop and Threlkeld on the east side of St John's in the Vale.

10.1.5 SETTLEMENTS

Settlement in Thirlmere now consists of dispersed, single farmsteads, with a small hamlet at Legburthwaite. In the past there were more substantial hamlets at The City and around Wythburn, both at the southern end of the valley, but these were inundated by the reservoir. This was also the fate of one of the most substantial houses in the valley, at Armboth.

Key vernacular buildings that have survived include Dalehead Hall, a late 16th century house once owned by the Leathes family, partly rebuilt in 1623, with late 17th and 19th century extensions. A fine packhorse bridge of the 18th century can be seen at Sosgill, in St John's in the Vale. Wythburn church, at the southern end of Thirlmere, was built in 1640 on the site of an earlier chapel.

10.1.6 VILLAS AND ORNAMENTAL LANDSCAPING

No buildings or landscapes of Picturesque influence were constructed in Thirlmere. Indeed the Bishop of Carlisle in his letter to The Times in 1877 stated that 'Thirlmere is absolutely free from villas and all that is villainous'. It is an irony that this absence of villas, due significantly to the resistance of the Leathes family to offers to sell land for villa building, was one of the factors that favoured Thirlmere as a potential reservoir over other lakes such as Ullswater.

10.2 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

10.2.1 ARCHAEOLOGY AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

The flooding of the most fertile land in the valley bottom has removed evidence of some of the earliest settlement in the valley. The surviving archaeological sites are therefore restricted to higher ground and the periphery of the valley area. The famous cairn on the top of Dunmail Raise is reputed to be the burial place of King Dunmail, the last monarch of the early medieval kingdom of Cumbria (c. 945 AD). While this is possible, as Dunmail Raise has formed a political boundary for a very long time (it was at one point the border between England and Scotland and more recently the boundary between the former counties of Cumberland and Westmorland) the cairn may be prehistoric in origin. One of the best known sites in the Lake District is Castlerigg stone circle, probably late Neolithic

FIGURE 10.9 Castlerigg stone circle, dating from the Neolithic period (4000 – 2000 BC)

in date (about 3000 BC) and set within a dramatic amphitheatre formed by the fells and highest peaks of Helvellyn, Skiddaw, Grasmoor and Blencathra. While it is not direct evidence of settlement in the valley it is likely to have been the focus of contemporary events, temporary settlement or be associated with settlement nearby. There are also good examples of Neolithic rock art at Steel End; such artwork was often located on well-known routes across the landscape. There is a Bronze Age ring cairn on Armboth Fell, looking out to Helvellyn on the other side of the valley suggesting that, like Dunmail Raise, it was designed to be seen from a distance.

Evidence for late prehistoric agriculture survives in the form of clearance cairns and an enclosed settlement at Threlkeld Knotts. Other early remains are not dated and could be prehistoric or early medieval. For example, the hillfort at Shoulthwaite has been radio carbon dated to the early medieval period, but such sites were frequently reused from an earlier period of occupation, often the late Bronze Age (2000 – 800 BC) or Iron Age (800 BC to 100 AD).

The remains of a Roman marching camp have recently been found near Castlerigg stone circle.

10.2.2 THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRENT SETTLEMENT PATTERN

There is little certain evidence in the valley of settlement of the early medieval period. The small but heavily defended hillfort at Shoulthwaite has been radiocarbon dated to the late 6th or early 7th centuries AD. Otherwise, survey of the Thirlmere estate has suggested that early medieval exploitation of the area was initially sporadic and potentially transhumant. The earliest settlements are likely to have been seasonal shielings for summer grazing on unenclosed upland pastures. The majority of the nationally-important designated archaeological sites in the valley are shieling sites, but it is not clear whether they are early medieval (400 – 1092 AD) or medieval (1092 – 1600 AD) in date. These are small, usually-single-celled, rectangular huts, but they may alternatively be shepherds huts and distinguishing the two is problematic. Shielings are found on Armboth Fell and north of Clough Fold.

White Side, Birk Side and Whelp Side probably contain the 'saetr' place-name element which is Old Norse in origin, but not definitive proof of Norse occupation in the 10th century. Similarly, other place-name evidence tends to represent natural features,

such as the Old Norse names of Brotto (previously Brattah) derived from the Norwegian 'bratt' (steep) and '-a' (river); Stanah to the north derives from the Norse 'stan' (stony) and '-a' (river).

10.2.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARMING LANDSCAPE

Some insight into medieval farming practices can be gained from the surviving field patterns, although at Thirlmere it is more useful to examine historic maps that pre-date the creation of the reservoir and the forestry plantation to obtain a fuller picture. Documentary sources are also helpful in establishing ownership of the different areas, which elsewhere in the English Lake District, tends to result in distinctively different land management practices which survive as different field patterns. For example, the lords' holdings are often separate to and strategically superior to common field and village. There is some evidence for this at Dale Head but the date of the establishment of the agricultural regime here is not certain, but could be as early as the 12th century.

The best agricultural land, now underwater, would have been colonised first. Armboth is set amongst strips which possibly indicate the location of a common open field around part of the west shore of Thirlmere. At Wythburn, these open field strips are clearer, and straddle the Frere Beck between the church and the southern tip of Thirlmere, where the farm at Water Head was located. The fields here are exclusively on the west side of the road, on flat land similar to the evidence at Armboth. Topography on the east side, on the lower slopes of Helvellyn, probably precluded such extensive arable cultivation. The names Castlerigg, Fieldside and High Fieldside (both latter containing 'saetr') perhaps record an early open field although strip fields are not so evident here.

At the north end of the valley, there are examples of open field strip fields on the lower-lying land along the Glenderamackin River. Between Guardhouse and Doddick adjacent to the present day Threlkeld Hall are some strips which appear to represent a former common field. The name Guardhouse contains the 'garth' prefix indicating the presence of a ring garth of some kind. This would have been a wall built to separate the tenanted farmland on the valley floor (inbye land) from the manorial forest or waste. The wall had a two-fold purpose: as a legal boundary between the land managed by the tenants and that belonging to the Lord of the Manor, and as a physical boundary it kept stock pastured on the fellside in summer from trampling any crops growing in the valley bottom. Threkeld was a demesne manor of the Barony of Greystoke and was first referred to as 'Trellekell' in the Pipe Rolls of 1197. A chapel at Threlkeld was first documented in 1220 in the Cartulary of Fountains Abbey. The old Threlkeld Hall, now demolished, was not recorded until the reign of Henry VII (1485-1509) and while there was probably a pele tower here "there are doubts about its actual site, the very stones having been taken away". However, collectively the strip field patterns and the confirmation of settlement from 1197 suggests that the field pattern has its origins at least in the 12th century, although the former pele tower may be a little later. To the west, at Townfield (also a good place name indicator) and Burns Farm the common fields of Threlkeld and Wescoe extend into the valley area.

The small settlements of Lowthwaite, Wanthwaite, Legburthwaite and Smaithwaite do not appear to have evolved out of a common field system, but instead they

seem to have developed as colonies. Indications of clearance are contained in these place-names ('thwaite'), and 'Legburthwaite' first appears in an Inquisition Post Mortem of 1303. These farmsteads on cleared land in St John's in the Vale probably date from a period of population growth and settlement expansion in the 13th century, extending the reach of settlement southwards, with Fornside perhaps marking a limit of permanent settlement. It is possible that Legburthwaite and Smaithwaite developed as a separate colony as settlement crept south from Keswick via Naddle.

The uplands would have been colonised at a later date, but possibly by making permanent, earlier sheiling settlements. Fornside derives its name from 'saetr', first appearing as 'Fornesate' in 1303. This is an example of former seasonal settlements being colonised as farms, in the 13th century at the latest in this case. Naddle first appears in 1292 in the 'Assize Rolls for Cumberland', and this may be of similar antiquity. Shoulthwaite first appears in the 1280 'Furness Coucher Book'.

At the south end of Thirlmere, Wythburn, first appears in c. 1280 as 'Withebotine', in the 'Furness Coucher Book' when the owner of the land was Adam de Derwentwater. There is no direct evidence that any of the land belonged to monasteries as in other valleys, but de Derwentwater granted a right of way to Furness Abbey for travelling from Borrowdale via Ashness, Castlerigg, Shoulthwaite to Dunmail Raise along with a second route via Watendlath, Harrop and Wythburn. The place-name Frere Beck may be derived from a connection with Friars and could record Wythburn's origins as a grange or vaccary settlement or some other monastic connection.

A second period of expansion can probably be extended to include the isolated farms down the east side of the valley to Thirlspot – Stanah, Stybeck, Brotto and Fisher Place; that the colonisation seems to run out of steam at Thirlspot suggests that it swept southwards from a centre further north at Threlkeld. In any case, settlement seems to have successively colonised former seasonal sites in a southerly direction from what is now the A66 trunk road. These settlements seem to have had minimal land available on the valley floor for arable, and they probably relied on the common pasture at High Rigg, Low Rigg and St John's Common to provide a surplus of livestock and animal produce for market in Keswick. The enclosure pattern – especially to the east of Dale Head and Fisher Place, appears to concentrate on the adjacent farm at Stybeck, although this picture is probably distorted by the numerous rivulets across the landscape from Helvellyn to the east.

There is also some tentative evidence for medieval deer parks in this valley. The area south of Armboth was referred to as 'Deergarth' and may have belonged to the Dale Head residents. Another area called High Park on the east side, close to Dale Head, may have been a deer park in the medieval period, but it is perhaps more likely that it was a product of 16th century reorganisation, because its name, 'Laithes Park' on 18th century maps may hark back to the Laythes family who occupied Dale Head from 1577. The enclosure wall for the Laithes Park/High Park deer park survives in part on the east side of Thirlmere.

There are few historic sources for the 16th-17th centuries in Thirlmere. Dale Head was first occupied by the Laythes family from 1577 perhaps to the existing site. Dalehead Cottage/Dalehead Hall is late 16th century and was partly rebuilt in 1623, with late 17th and early 19th century extensions. It therefore seems to relate to Laythe family

ownership. The manor of Wythburn was held by the Braithwaites of Warcop. When Thomas Braithwaite died in 1640, he held Wythburn, Armeboth, Smarthwaite and Naddle.

Clarke's map of 1787 may have captured landscape changes originating in the 16-17th centuries. It showed minor extensions to the enclosed land at Wythburn where the inbye land had been extended piecemeal into adjoining areas. Additional enclosure also appears to have taken place around the north-western shore of the lake, between Shoulthwaite and Armboth and in the north at Wanthwaite, Low Rigg and Rakefoot. However on the east side and at the north end of Thirlmere the colony farms seem not to have extended their holdings at all. Overall, intaking appears to have occurred in very small pieces around Fisher Place, and around Wythburn and the crags between Shoulthwaite and Sosgill.

10.2.4 DISCOVERY AND APPRECIATION OF A RICH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

EARLY TOURISM

The Thirlmere Valley attracted modest amounts of attention from the guide book authors of the 18th century. Some early descriptions emphasised the wildness of the place, including William Gilpin in 1772:

> "No tufted verdure graces its banks, nor hanging woods throw rich reflections its surface: but every form, which it suggests, is savage, and desolate".
>
> William Gilpin, 'Observations, relative chiefly to picturesque beauty, made in the year 1772', on several parts of England; particularly the mountains, and lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland (1786)

FIGURE 10.10 Helvellyn from the west side of Thirlmere. Inbye and intake fields can be seen on the far side of the reservoir.

Thomas West was not inspired to create a series of viewing stations in Thirlmere, but saw beyond the desolation described by Gilpin, recording that the "most picturesque point is from an eminence behind Dale Head House and that the lake was ...increased by a variety of pastoral torrents that pour their silver streams down the mountains' side and then, warbling, join the lake." (Guide to the Lakes, 1778)

West also noted in his writings other significant features in the valley including the unique, three stages, 'Celtic' Bridge at the narrow neck in the centre of the lake, the wooded Great How at the northern end of the lake and Raven Crag, opposite.

Despite this, there is no obvious record of the Thirlmere Valley being a hugely popular attraction for early tourists. It was, however, a through route for these tourists between the greater attractions in the Grasmere valley, Keswick and Borrowdale. The King's Head Hotel, at Thirlspot, is a late 17th century coaching inn which would have been used by such travellers.

Helvellyn is the third highest mountain in England and the Lake District and access to it is much easier than the higher peaks of Scafell Pike and Scafell. It has many choices of routes from all sides. Because of this, it has been and still is a hugely popular and well visited mountain for fell-walking and climbing. Building on this popularity, the Youth Hostel Association operated a hostel in Thirlmere at Legburthwaite from 1970 to 2001. Since then a new hostel has been built on the site and is operated by a private business.

10.2.5 ROMANTIC SITES, BUILDINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS

If the valley failed to attract hordes of tourists, it did capture the imagination of the Romantic poets. The Wordsworths and Coleridge often met in the valley while travelling between their respective homes in Grasmere and Keswick. The point at which they met was commemorated by a rock known as the 'Rock Of Names', upon which were carved the initials of Coleridge, William Wordsworth, his brother John and sister Dorothy, and Mary and Sarah Hutchinson. The original rock was blasted during construction of the reservoir, but pieces of it were rescued by Canon Rawnsley. They are now located outside the Wordsworth Museum in Grasmere. A bronze plaque by the reservoir in Thirlmere commemorates this stone, which was mentioned by Dorothy Wordsworth in her 'Grasmere Journal'.

A number of surviving buildings and features in the valley have direct associations with the poets and their writings. Wythburn Church was described by Wordsworth in the 'The Waggoner' as:

> "Wytheburn's modest House of prayer,
> As lowly as the lowliest dwelling"

The church, built in 1640 and restored in 1872, contains some bronze work by the Keswick School of Industrial Arts. The ruins of the Nag's Head Inn, also in Wythburn are where Keats slept in June 1818 ("many fleas were in the beds") and from here that Matthew Arnold set out in 1833 for the walk to Watendlath described in 'Resignation'

and commemorated by a stone erected by Canon Rawnsley. The Inn was mentioned by Wordsworth in his 'Guide to the Lakes' as a good starting point for the ascent of Helvellyn. To the north was the rival Cherry Tree Inn where Joseph Budworth stayed in 1792 and was given a riotous description by Wordsworth in his 'The Waggoner'. Wordsworth apparently stayed here ("spouting his poems grandly") with Scott, Lockhart and Wilson on August 23 1823.

Wordsworth mentioned Great How in 'Rural Architecture' (1800), which tells the tale of three local schoolboys who climbed:

> "to the top of Great How...
> And there they built up, without mortar or lime,
> A man on the peak of the crag."

Wordsworth was much associated with Helvellyn. One of the great portraits of the poet, by Benjamin Robert Haydon, poses him against a backdrop of the mountain, and was painted to commemorate a sonnet that Wordsworth had written to Haydon while climbing Helvellyn in 1840, at the age of seventy. Forty-one years earlier, on their walking tour of 1799, Wordsworth and Coleridge ascended Helvellyn. In his Notebook, Coleridge recorded the vista of lakes from the summit, including "Grasmere like a sullen tarn", '"uminous Cunneston lake" and "the glooming Shadow, Wynandermere with its Island". Helvellyn was relatively near to the Wordsworth's dwelling in Grasmere and they climbed it many times. Dorothy's first known ascent was made from Legburthwaite on 25 October 1801 and she recorded:

> "glorious, glorious sights. The Sea at Cartmel. The Scotch mountains beyond the sea to the right. Whiteside large, and round, and very soft, and green, behind us. Mists above and below, and close to us, with the sun amongst them. They shot down to the coves."
>
> Dorothy Wordsworth, 'Grasmere Journal' (1801)

In 'The Prelude', Wordsworth opened Book VIII, subtitled 'Love of Nature leading to Love of Mankind', with this account of Grasmere Fair as seen from the summit:

> "What sounds are those, Helvellyn, that are heard
> Up to thy summit, through the depth of air
> Ascending, as if distance had the power
> To make the sounds more audible? What crowd
> Covers, or sprinkles o'er, yon village green?
> Crowd seems it, solitary hill! to thee,
> Though but a little family of men,
> Shepherds and tillers of the ground – betimes
> Assembled with their children and their wives,
> And here and there a stranger interspersed.
> They hold a rustic fair"

William Hutchinson's fanciful account of Castle Rock in his 'Excursion to the Lakes' (1774) and Walter Scott's visits to the area in 1797 and with Wordsworth in 1805 inspired Scott to write the poem 'The Bridal of Triermain' (1805). This was a tale of how King Arthur chancing upon a deserted 'castle' which came to life, until he departed:

> "The monarch, breathless and amazed,
> Back on the fatal castle gazed –
> Nor tower nor donjon could he spy,
> Darkening against the morning sky;
> But, on the spot where once they frown'd,
> The lonely streamlet brawl'd around
> A tufted knoll, where dimly shone
> Fragments of rocks and rifted stone."

Perhaps the finest description of Thirlmere was provided by Coleridge in his Notebook entry for 23 October 1803:

> "O Thirlmere! – let me some how or other celebrate the world in thy mirror. – Conceive all possible varieties of Form, Fields, & Trees, and naked or ferny Crags – ravines, behaired with Birches – Cottages, smoking chimneys, dazzling wet places of small rock-precipices – dazzling castle windows in the reflection – all these, within a divine outline in a mirror of 3 miles distinct vision!"

10.2.6 EARLY CONSERVATION – THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL FOR PROTECTING LANDSCAPES

The Thirlmere Valley was transformed in environmental, social and economic terms in the last decade of the 19th century and into the early decades of the 20th century. This started in the 1870s with the Manchester Corporation Water Works' (MCWW) desire to build a drinking water supply reservoir in the English Lake District to increase the existing supply of clean water to the growing population and industry in Manchester. The Corporation settled on Thirlmere as the preferred valley. A Parliamentary Act was required to construct the reservoir.

> "In the mid-1870s frock-coated and silver-bearded strangers were observed picking their way around the rough landscape surrounding Thirlmere in the heart of the Lake District... Word spread that Manchester was involved, that the famous water engineer J. F. Bateman was involved. By mid-1877, the secret was out: Manchester planned to buy Thirlmere and its environs, embank the lake, and pipe its water 100 miles to the growing and thirsty city"
>
> Ritvo (2009)

The flooding of an English Lake District valley was hugely controversial at the time and precipitated the development of an organised landscape conservation movement nationally. The story of Thirlmere is a fascinating record of the recognition of the landscape as a national asset. But eventually the needs of a fast growing urban population were deemed by Parliament to outweigh the major changes to a recognised landscape of great natural beauty. The first water was delivered from the reservoir to the city of Manchester in 1894. Despite the changes, the valley still has the drama of its soaring fellsides, a large body of water, and north of the reservoir the rural charm of St John's in the Vale. It has stunning scenery and its record of the adaption of landscape to meet the needs of a changing society, and the arguments for not doing so, are fascinating and an integral part of the evolution of the English Lake District landscape. The opposition to the construction of the reservoir was focussed around the rapidly-formed Thirlmere Defence Association and attracted a national debate and audience in the press. The Parliamentary Act enabling the reservoir's construction was passed in 1879, and the process was a turning point. Prior to this decision, the aesthetics of landscape had largely been a matter for wealthy private landowners with money to spend on landscape 'improvements'. The Thirlmere debate made landscape a matter for everyone. People hundreds of miles away from Thirlmere felt that they had a share of the ownership, not of the land itself, but of the views over that land. In parallel to the landscape debate, significant concern developed over the potential threat to continuing public recreational access to the fells and lake in the valley.

This battle is a significant watershed in the history of the conservation movement and for cultural landscape protection in the UK and globally. It provoked, among other things, the formation of the National Trust, the Friends of the Lake District and the eventual designation of UK National Parks. The proposed construction of the Thirlmere reservoir in the late 19th century and the battles about whether it should be built and subsequent forest management, brought to a head the appreciation of the vulnerability of the Lake District landscape, and public access to it.

The changes to the valley started with the acquisition of the land by the Manchester Corporation Water Works and from 1890-94 the construction of the dam, new roads and buildings and the flooding of the valley took place. Before the construction of the reservoir, Thirlmere comprised two small tarns, linked by a narrow neck of water. One of the last people to document the valley before it was flooded was John Barrow who wrote:

> **"We crossed the remarkable bridges, constructed about midway across the lake. They consist of five or six broad stone piers, with continuous wooden bridges resting upon them, with a handrail on one side, and are only a few feet above water. Without this hand rail I should have been sorry to have ventured across in such a high wind as was blowing. A fine avenue leads to the bridges, which will also disappear, as it is intended to raise the level of the lake by some fifty feet"**
>
> John Barrow, Mountain Ascents in Westmorland and Cumberland (1886)

Around the lake's shores was a narrow band of enclosures with scattered farmsteads. These enclosures had to be reorganised around the new water's edge, on both shores. The Benn and Castlerigg Fells, for example, were clearly enclosed on a large scale between 1862 and 1898. Some enclosure, notably around Harrop Tarn, is clearly 20th century. Surviving 'bields' are also widespread on the historical maps; some of these are later features, either shelters, dens or traps or in the case of Otter Bield, now submerged, a natural feature.

The changes to the valley associated with the construction of the reservoir continued into the 20th century with the afforestation of large areas of the fellsides around the valley. The physical result of this battle and subsequent decisions over the valley's forestry and land management since then has resulted in the current landscape. The southern two-thirds of the Thirlmere Valley area, south of St John's in the Vale and Naddle valleys, is now a narrow steep-sided valley with the reservoir occupying the whole valley floor from side to side, flanked by predominantly coniferous forestry plantations, with no dwellings or settlements. During periods of dry weather the water level drops revealing a wide band of bare exposed rock. This landscape is distinctively different to most of the other valleys in the English Lake District.

The catchment land and reservoir infrastructure is now owned and operated by United Utilities, a private sector business, and the successor to the Manchester Corporation Water Works and North West Water Authority. United Utilities owns 4700 hectares of land in the Thirlmere Valley, the whole of the southern two-thirds of the valley. The reservoir supplies about 11 per cent of the water demand of the North West of England. Over the past ten years most of the non-native tree cover has been removed around the lakeshore opening up wider views of the water and the valley. This has been a result of battles in the late 20th century over the interpretation and implementation of the forestry aspects of the 1879 Act. Also in recent years, large-scale re-structuring of the forestry on the fellsides has been carried out. The forest has become a designated reserve for the threatened native Red Squirrel. Access and Common Land issues have continued to be a source of disagreement between the various interested parties over the past century, including establishment and management of fencing and forestry on Common Land. Again, over recent decades recreational use of the Thirlmere estate has been more actively encouraged by United Utilities, including boating on the reservoir.

Over recent years United Utilities has also been implementing its Sustainable Catchment Management Programme (SCaMP) with its farming tenants, investing in land management changes and farming infrastructure in order to improve the water quality before it enters the reservoir and water treatment system.

The National Trust has only a few small areas of freehold farmland and fell at the north western edge of the Thirlmere Valley area connected to its large Borrowdale estate. In total, the National Trust owns 149 hectares of land in the valley, of which 101 hectares is inalienable. It does not have any leased land or covenanted land in the Thirlmere Valley.

Castlerigg stone circle was one of the first monuments included in the Ancient Monuments Protection Act of 1882; it thus became one of the first scheduled ancient monuments to be created in the country and in the following year the stone circle was 'taken in to state care'. As one of the first such sites to enter into state care it occupies a small place in the history of archaeological conservation.

10.3 CONTRIBUTION TO THE ENGLISH LAKE DISTRICT'S OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

The Thirlmere Valley has important attributes for the Outstanding Universal Value themes of agro-pastoral farming and aesthetic inspiration, but it is for the theme of the early conservation movement that the valley stands out.

Although extensive areas of inbye land in the valley were lost beneath the reservoir, Thirlmere is still the location for 22 farms with fell-going flocks including West Head, which is one of the important Herdwick farms in the English Lake District. Almost all of the extensive fell grazing is Common Land and there are a number of important historic farm houses dating from the 17th century.

Significant evidence for early land use includes the Neolithic stone circle of Castlerigg (perhaps the best known archaeological site in the Lake District), along with Romano-British enclosed settlements, the burial mound at Dunmail Rise, a possible early medieval hillfort (at Shoulthwaite) and medieval shielings. The remains of large slate quarries are located at the northern end of the valley along and a disused granite quarry at Threlkeld.

In the 18th century Thirlmere attracted some attention from early visitors, particularly as it was on the route from Grasmere to Keswick. Descriptions of its views were included in Thomas West's guidebook but its scenery did not attract any major villa buildings or landscaping. However, Thirlmere had a greater significance to Romantic writers and artists and was the location for the 'rock of names' which marked a customary meeting point for the Wordsworths and Samuel Taylor Coleridge between their respective homes in Grasmere and Keswick. Thirlmere was also the inspiration for William Wordsworth's poem 'The Waggoner' and Walter Scott's poem 'The Bridal of Triermain'.

FIGURE 10.11 Thirlmere from the south

The Thirlmere Valley is one of the key locations of importance for the development of the early conservation movement in the English Lake District. Although the Manchester Corporation was successful in achieving the construction of the dam and reservoir in the valley, the protest that was mounted against this was a seminal event in the history of landscape conservation. It inspired further, successful campaigns in the Lake District against proposals which threatened the beauty of its landscape, and the key protagonists, all followers of Ruskin, were inspired to found the National Trust in order to purchase land for its protection. Although the National Trust owns very little land in the valley, the Thirlmere reservoir itself stands as testament to the fundamental struggles of the emergent conservation movement in the English Lake District.

While Thirlmere displays substantial attributes attesting to the themes of Outstanding Universal Value of agro-pastoral farming and aesthetic inspiration, the most important theme associated with this part of the English Lake District is the development of the early conservation movement.

FIGURE 10.12 Castle Rock, St John's in the Vale, Thirlmere