



The Vale of Grasmere

An aerial photograph of a large, dark blue lake in a valley. The lake is surrounded by green fields and dense forests. In the background, there are large, rugged mountains with patches of green and brown vegetation. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

# **13. GRASMERE, RYDAL, AMBLESIDE**

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Description, History and Development

# 13. THE GRASMERE, RYDAL, AND AMBLESIDE VALLEY

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“...and lastly, the Vale of Grasmere, Rydal, and Ambleside, brings you back to Winandermere, thus completing, though on the eastern side in a somewhat irregular manner, the representative figure of the wheel”.

William Wordsworth, ‘Guide to the Lakes’ (1835)

## 13.1 DESCRIPTION

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### 13.1.1 LOCATION, GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

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The Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley is located at the heart of the English Lake District. The principal settlements are the small town of Ambleside, the village of Grasmere and the hamlets of Town End (near Grasmere) and Rydal which experienced less tourist-driven expansion in the 19th and early 20th centuries facilitated by the opening of the railway to Windermere in 1847.

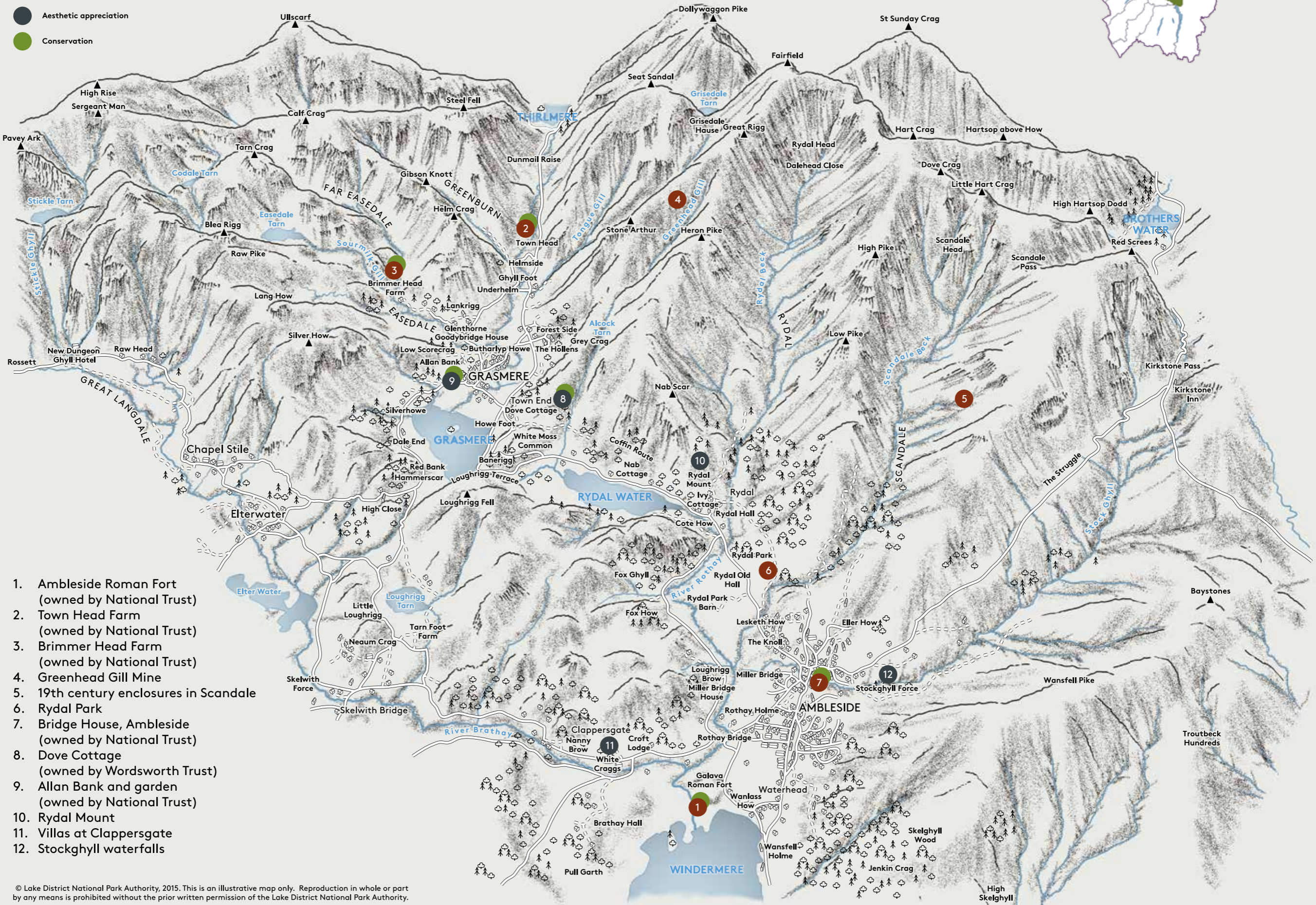
Due to its central location, this valley has good access to other parts of the Lake District. The principal historic north south route through the Lake District passes through the valley and is now designated as a trunk road, the A591. Other important links include the westwards route to Langdale and Coniston and the southern route along the east side of Windermere, to Newby Bridge. To the north east, a small road leads up to the Kirkstone Pass and over to Ullswater.

This is a classic U-shaped glacial valley. It runs generally north to south from the watershed at the pass of Dunmail Raise, which separates north and south Lakeland. Near Ambleside it meets the Langdale Valley from the west and they join the Windermere Valley which continues south to the Levens Estuary and Morecambe Bay.

The underlying Borrowdale Volcanic Group rocks of this upland valley were shaped by glacial activity in the last ice-age more than 11,000 years ago. Two relatively small lakes (Grasmere and Rydal Water) surrounded by woodland and pasture, are contained within a dramatic low fell backdrop with the tops of the craggy high fells adding occasional further drama. The soils of the valley floor are largely river-washed gravels improved over the centuries and enclosed to create inbye fields of bright green pasture which contrast with the more muted browns, greens and greys of the rougher textured intakes

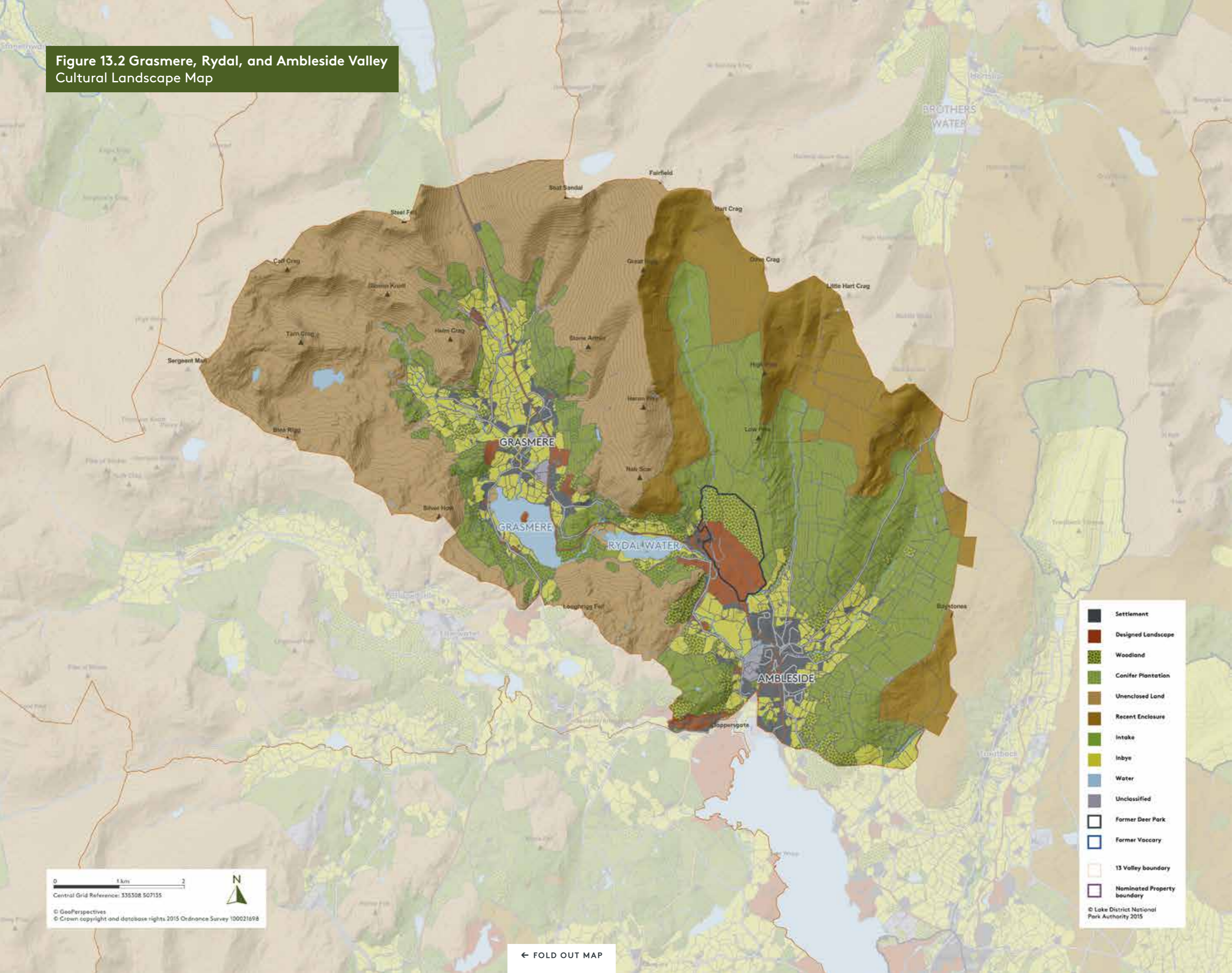
**Figure 13.1 Grasmere, Rydal, and Ambleside Valley Illustrative Map**

- Agro-pastoral landscape
- Aesthetic appreciation
- Conservation



1. Ambleside Roman Fort (owned by National Trust)
2. Town Head Farm (owned by National Trust)
3. Brimmer Head Farm (owned by National Trust)
4. Greenhead Gill Mine
5. 19th century enclosures in Scandale
6. Rydal Park
7. Bridge House, Ambleside (owned by National Trust)
8. Dove Cottage (owned by Wordsworth Trust)
9. Allan Bank and garden (owned by National Trust)
10. Rydal Mount
11. Villas at Clappersgate
12. Stockghyll waterfalls

**Figure 13.2 Grasmere, Rydal, and Ambleside Valley Cultural Landscape Map**



0 1 km 2  
 Central Grid Reference: 335308 507135  
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**■ Settlement**  
**■ Designed Landscape**  
**■ Woodland**  
**■ Conifer Plantation**  
**■ Unenclosed Land**  
**■ Recent Enclosure**  
**■ Intake**  
**■ Inbye**  
**■ Water**  
**■ Unclassified**  
**□ Former Deer Park**  
**□ Former Vaccary**  
**□ 13 Valley boundary**  
**□ Nominated Property boundary**  
 © Lake District National Park Authority 2015

← FOLD OUT MAP

FIGURE 13.3 The contribution of the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley to the cultural landscape themes identified

| GRASMERE, RYDAL, AMBLESIDE  |   |              |
|---|---|--------------|
| 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   |              |
|   | Shepherds' meets/shows and traditional sports                           |              |
|   | Woodland industries   |              |
|   | Mining/Quarrying  |              |
|   | Water-powered industry  |              |
| Market towns  |   |              |
| Discovery and appreciation of a rich cultural landscape   | Viewing stations  | None         |
|   | Villas  |              |
|   | Designed landscape  |              |
|   | Early tourist infrastructure  |              |
|   | Residences and burial places of significant writers and poets           |              |
|   | Key literary associations with landscape                                |              |
|   | Key artistic associations with landscape                                |              |
|   | Key associations with climbing and the outdoor movement                 |              |
|   | 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  |              |
|   | Other Protective Trusts and ownership including National Park Authority |              |

on the lower fell sides and open fell above. Extensive, mainly deciduous, woodland cover blurs the boundary between the valley floor and the lower slopes and lends a softness and intimacy to the landscape.

See Figure 13.1 for an illustrative map of the valley. Also see Figures 13.2 for an overview of the cultural landscape of the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley.

### 13.1.2 THE INHERITED LANDSCAPE'S CHARACTER

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Perhaps more than any other, this valley illustrates the diversity of landscape which characterises the Lake District. The rugged drama of the imposing high fells contrasts with and complements the richly-patterned and managed appearance of the pastoral landscape blended with the parkland and designed landscape of the Victorian period, which are so well represented in this valley. Large-scale, unenclosed fell is juxtaposed with intimate field systems and parkland; ancient semi-natural woodlands punctuated with exotic species of conifers; simple vernacular farmhouses rub shoulders with 'high Victorian' design. All these combine to produce a unique landscape highly-valued for its scenic qualities and sense of history.

The valley has been shaped by humanity over the millennia, with traces of human activity going back to the Neolithic period (4,000 – 2,000 BC). Vestiges of the archaeology and early history survive in the landscape. However, the inherited landscape today is largely the product of medieval and later usage. On the higher slopes and side valleys – away from the nucleated settlement centres – fields are laid out around farmsteads located over earlier, seasonal shieling sites with medieval or earlier origins. On the valley floors closest to the roads and the early villages the surviving fields represent enclosed strips carved from the medieval open fields and possibly the lords' own tenements, and it is possible to identify a small number of these early boundaries on the ground.



**FIGURE 13.4** The Vale of Grasmere from Seat Sandal, looking south. The pattern of inbye and intake fields is clearly visible along with the line of the main road route through the Lake District (the A591). The village of Grasmere and the lake can be seen in the distance.

Irregular stone-walled fields still survive from the 16th and 17th centuries with planned enclosure of the mid-19th century on the higher slopes above the valley floors. Stone farm buildings survive from the 16th century onwards, replacements of earlier wooden structures. Other continuing elements of the farming landscape include pollard ash trees of which there are good examples growing alongside the walls of the inbye land in the fields by Ghyll Foot, under Helm Crag, and on the north side of Rydal Water. The traditions and practices of traditional Lake District farming continue strongly in the Valley.

High Victorian design is prominent in the principal settlements and also throughout the Valley, particularly its southern section, where vernacular farmhouses mix with Victorian villas sited in their extensive and ornate gardens. North of Grasmere the landscape is less influenced by design and Victorian architecture and has a stronger upland agricultural character. Woodland is less important and the high fells more dominant. There is a very clear distinction in the fell grazing above the valley. The open fell grazing land in the western half of the valley is largely common land, comprising the two commons of Grasmere and Loughrigg. The fell land in the eastern half was originally demesne land which has been divided into large, stone walled enclosures.



**FIGURE 13.5** Ambleside from the southwest. In the centre of the frame the River Brathay can be seen flowing into the head of Windermere. The group of 18th century villas at Clappersgate can be seen on the left, with Brathay Hall in the foreground.

The contrast between the mountain setting and the intricate detail and softness of the valley landscape, well wooded, much influenced by design and with a strong sense of history on many levels, leads to a richness, variety and scenic beauty which has appealed to the nation for centuries. It has long been celebrated by writers, artists and poets resulting in the cultural associations, most notably with William Wordsworth, which are an integral part of this landscape.

With the exception of roadside accommodation, private villas and designed landscape, the only significant recent (20th and 21st century) development has been around the settlement cores at Grasmere and Ambleside.

### 13.1.3 FARMING TODAY – THE AGRO-PASTORAL LANDSCAPE

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#### WORKING FARMS AND FLOCKS

There are 11 farms with fell-going sheep flocks in the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley. There are five Herdwick flocks, and one Swaledale flock registered with the relevant Sheep Breeders' Associations. There are no registered Rough Fell flocks in the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley. The National Trust owns three farms with landlord flocks in Grasmere (Town Head, Brimmer Head and Underhelm along with Tarn Foot Farm which has grazing on Loughrigg Common). Town Head has a Herdwick flock and Brimmer Head has both Herdwick and Swaledale flocks. Brimmer Head is particularly significant as its sheep heafs cover the fells adjoining Langdale, Borrowdale, Grasmere and Thirlmere.

#### CONTINUING FARMING CULTURE AND TRADITIONS



**FIGURE 13.6** Traditional Cumbrian wrestling can be seen at the Grasmere and Ambleside Sports shows

Important local traditions linked to hill farming culture in the Valley include Ambleside Sports and Grasmere Sports and Show which are held in July and August each year. Grasmere Sports developed in the mid-19th century from the annual Grasmere Sheep Fair, when sporting activities were an important social activity. The origins of the Ambleside Show may be traced back even earlier to the annual fair which followed the granting of the market charter in 1650. Both events still include the traditional sports of Cumberland

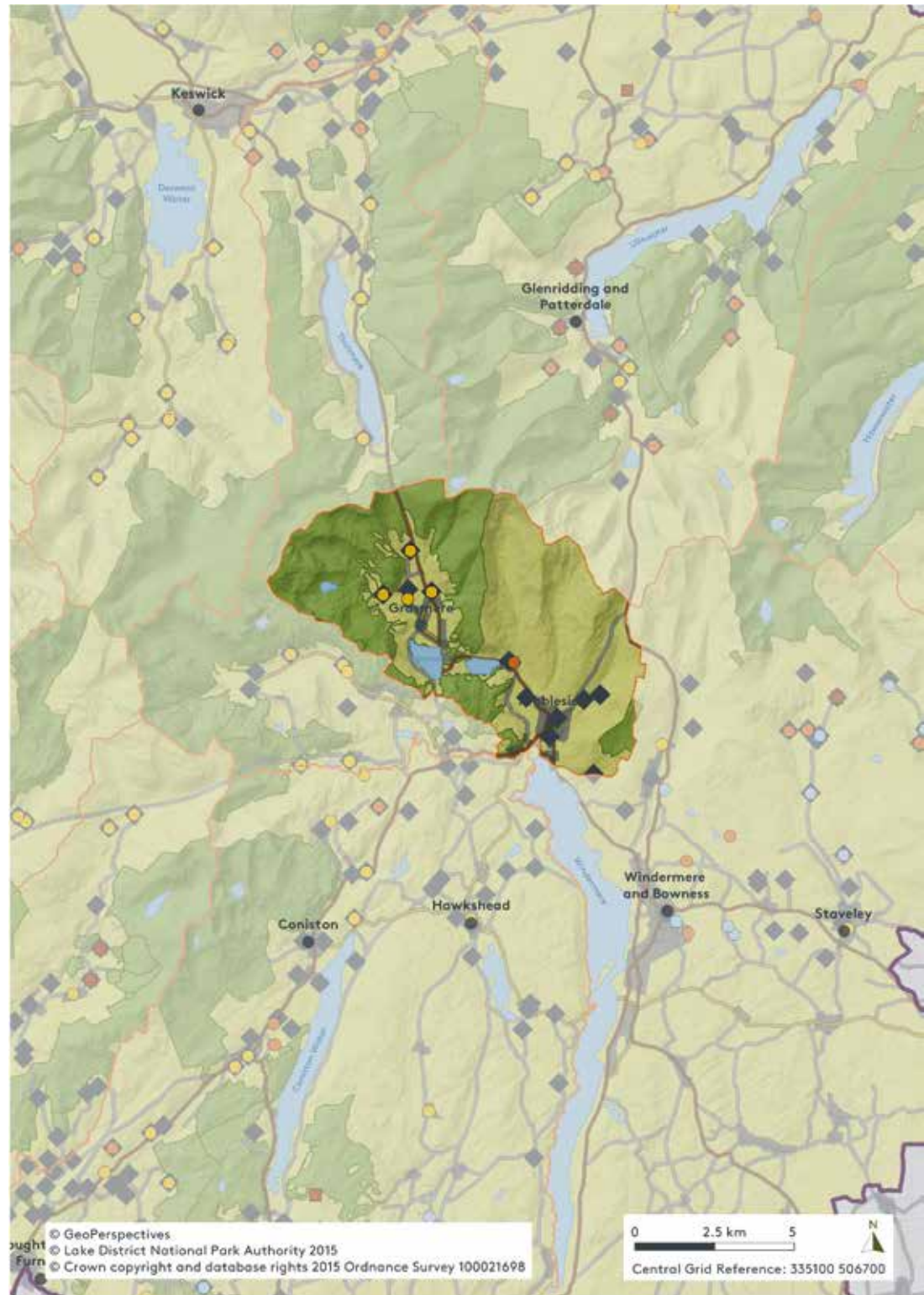
and Westmorland wrestling, hound trailing and fell running. The Rydal Sheepdog Trials, dating from 1901, are held in August in Rydal Park.

Another long-standing tradition in both Grasmere and Ambleside, rush bearing, also takes place in July. This is the continuation of the ancient custom of annually replacing the rush floor coverings of the church and is a community event including a procession with decorated bearings and rushes cut from local lakeshores.

#### FARMSTEADS

As with the stone walls, the traditional farm buildings in Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside are constructed from local stone and many date from between the 17th and 19th centuries. Key examples include:

FIGURE 13.7 Shepherds' flocks and native sheep breeds in the Grasmere, Rydal, and Ambleside Valley



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0 2.5 km 5  
 Central Grid Reference: 335100 506700

- ▭ Nominated Property boundary
- ▭ Valley boundary
- Registered Common Land
- ◆ Fell-going Flocks
- Flocks registered with Breed Associations:
- Herdwick
- Rough Fell
- Swaledale
- Multiple Breeds

Registered Common Land © Natural England 2015. Attribute data for Fell-going flocks: Lakeland Shepherds' Guide 2005.  
 Attribute data for flocks: Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association 2014, Rough Fell and Swaledale Sheep Breeders' Associations 2013.

TABLE 13.1 Key farm buildings in the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley

**BRIMMER HEAD FARM**

Late 16th century or early 17th century house comprising one long range with hay barn and shippon. Original building included firehouse with gable entry, parlour and three bedrooms. Rear wing added in the mid to late 17th century. 17th century internal wooden fittings. Other buildings include early/mid-19th century barn, dairy and bank barn of 1830-40.

**DATE** Late 16th/early 17th century with 19th century additions

**OWNERSHIP** National Trust

**PROTECTION** Listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 332452 508483

**TOWN HEAD FARM**

Farmhouse of late 17th century/early 18th century. Firehouse at eastern end, thick stone walls with roughcast, slate roof and the typical round chimneys. Fine collection of 18th century interior woodwork including a spice cupboard dated 1702. Other buildings include a 18th century five bay barn; large 19th century bank barn and simple two bay barn.

**DATE** Late 17th century/early 18th century

**OWNERSHIP** National Trust

**PROTECTION** Listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 333308 509860

**HIGH SKELGHYLL**

Two unit house of late 17th century/early 18th century. Good examples of interior wooden panelling and doors of the period. Also includes a barn built on the line of the farmhouse and a second at right angles to it.

**DATE** Late 17th century/early 18th century and 19th century

**OWNERSHIP** National Trust

**PROTECTION** Not listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 339032 502878

**LOW SCORECRAG**

Former farmhouse dating from early to mid-17th century. Divided in the 19th century into two separate cottages. Early 18th century bank barn to south of farm house.

**DATE** Early to mid-17th century, 18th century and 19th century

**OWNERSHIP** National Trust

**PROTECTION** Listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 333070 507799

**RYDAL HALL BARNS**

Group of barns to north and east of Rydal Hall.

**DATE** Late 17th century

**OWNERSHIP** Private

**PROTECTION** Listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 336632 506402

**RYDAL PARK BARN**

Earliest dated example of bank barn in the Lake District (1659).

**DATE** 17th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336627 506373

**GOODY BRIDGE HOUSE AND BARN**

Whitewashed 17th century farm house with interior staircase of the period. Adjoining barn contains medieval crucks.

**DATE** 17th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 333296 508167

### 13.1.4 INDUSTRY

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There are traces of a number of past industries in the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley, including mining and slate or stone quarrying, charcoal production and manufacture of woollen and linen cloth. The remains of a lead mine dating from the 16th century survive in Greenhead Gill. A short-lived boom in the value of iron ore led to the opening of mines at the northern end of Grasmere at Tongue Gill in the 1870s. Disused quarries for roofing slate are located on the northern slopes of Loughrigg Fell and at Baneriggs between Grasmere Lake and Rydal Water.

The abundant power available from the becks in the valley was harnessed from the medieval period until the 19th century for a number of industrial processes including corn grinding, wooden bobbin production, crushing bark for tanning, and manufacturing linen and woollen cloth. The archaeological remains of fulling mills survive at Loughrigg Terrace and at Sourmilk Gill in Easedale and surviving examples of the numerous mills in Ambleside include the wool and linen mill at Low Stock and the fulling and later corn mill just below High Stock Bridge. The remains of potash kilns survive in the valley, for example in Fox Ghyll Wood, and retting ponds, used for the initial retting or soaking of flax prior to further processing into cloth, can be seen in Rydal Park.

The aqueduct carrying water south from Thirlmere was constructed through Grasmere and Rydal and its course can be traced in the present landscape by the distinctive access gates and other minor infrastructure built by the Manchester Corporation at the end of the 19th century.

### 13.1.5 SETTLEMENTS

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The principal settlements in the valley are the town of Ambleside and Grasmere village. Important small hamlets include Town End at Grasmere, and Rydal.

## AMBLESIDE

Ambleside lies in the south east of the Valley, and is the main 'urban' settlement with a population in the region of 2,500 (in 2011). Ambleside's complex street pattern originated in the medieval period when the town developed as an industrial centre and market; that street pattern has been partially overlaid and extended in later period periods to include a network of roads, narrow lanes, and ginnels. The 17th century market place still retains its original shape, though not function, and the remains of the octagonal shaft of the market cross also survive in situ. Large-scale tourism in the late 18th and 19th centuries led to development and expansion.



**FIGURE 13.8** The Bridge House in Ambleside, owned by the National Trust

Significant early buildings in Ambleside include How Head in the medieval core of the town, dating from the late 16th or early 17th century. The building incorporates dressed stone recovered from the Roman fort at Ambleside to the south. On the western edge of the medieval centre is a remarkable survival of an early cruck barn, known as Albert Moore's Barn, dating from the 15th or 16th centuries and now used as an electrician's workshop. The barn was part of the farm linked to Ambleside Hall which lay on the east side of the Stockghyll beck.

The Bridge House on Rydal Road is one of the most iconic and famous buildings in the Lake District and a popular tourist curiosity. It was built in the late 17th century as a garden house originally to span Stockghyll and to connect the gardens of Ambleside Hall to the orchard

that lay on the other side of Stock Ghyll. A significant group of buildings of the late 17th/early 18th centuries is located at the foot of Smithy Brow, including the Golden Rule Hotel, the Old House and a number of cottages. Villas include Lesketh Howe, and are described in Table 13.2.

## GRASMERE

Grasmere is set in a valley surrounded by the lower grassy slopes of the Lakeland hills, some 5 kilometres north west of Ambleside. Old cottages, faced with pebbledash, and houses of bluish-green local slate vie for attention along the twisty streets of the village. Victorian villas sit comfortably beside hotels, galleries and shops catering to tourists.

Grasmere today has a population of about 1,000 people, though tourists swell that number extensively. Grasmere's importance in the later medieval period for the woollen industry can still be seen in the vicinity of the village, where remnants of fulling mills

(for washing and finishing woven cloth) still survive. Key early buildings in the village include the church (earliest surviving fabric 14th century) dedicated to St Oswald the 7th century king of Northumbria; and the cottage now used as the Gingerbread Shop, which served as the village school from c. 1685 to 1854. Like Ambleside, Grasmere has an annual rush-bearing ceremony which is a festival celebrating the ancient custom of changing the rushes that were placed on the church floor before the installation of a slate floor in the 19th century. The ceremony is first documented in 1680 but is much earlier.

The Rectory dates to the 18th century; and there is a 17th century house with barn at the rear, now owned by the National Trust and home to the Northern Centre for Storytelling. Church Stile, a row of 17th century cottages, is now the home of the National Trust shop, but in a past life was an inn. Further cottages, yards and former barns of the same date are clustered at the rear of the Red Lion Hotel.

## TOWN END

Before the fame that would come from Wordsworth's residence, Grasmere's Town End was a farming hamlet which had developed alongside the packhorse route running down from White Moss Common to Grasmere. This route is also known as a 'coffin route' because it was one of the routes by which the deceased were carried in their coffins from Ambleside to the parish church in Grasmere for burial in the churchyard. At the point where the corpse road and the packhorse track meet there is a large 'coffin stone' or 'resting stone' on which the coffin was set while the bearers rested.

## DOVE COTTAGE

Dove Cottage, William Wordsworth's home from 1799 to 1808, is a small, late 17th century building with 18th century additions. The interior has a surviving 17th century wooden staircase and oak panelling.

Inevitably, much of the work of William and Dorothy Wordsworth focuses on their life in Grasmere and gives a vivid picture of life at the time. Dorothy's 'Grasmere Journal' is a wonderfully vivid account of their daily life at Dove Cottage, mingling the prosaically domestic – "Mr Olliff sent the dung and Wm went to work in the garden" – with the intensely poetic:

**"Our favourite Birch tree... the sun shone upon it and it glanced in the wind like a flying sunshiny shower – it was a tree in shape with stem and branches but it was like a Spirit of water"**

As the Journal reveals, the garden at Dove Cottage was as important to the Wordsworths as the house itself. Wordsworth often composed out of doors on the terrace, pacing up and down in his "Sweet Garden-orchard, eminently fair, / The loveliest spot that man hath ever found".

Dove Cottage is now part of the Wordsworth Museum, and an internationally-important heritage site, receiving tens of thousands of visitors every year. The period when



FIGURE 13.9 Dove Cottage, Town End, Grasmere

Wordsworth lived here is regarded as his 'golden decade' when he wrote most of what is now considered as his greatest poetry.

The Wordsworth Trust, founded in 1891, looks after Dove Cottage and is also the custodian of an archive containing the most important collection of Wordsworth manuscripts anywhere in the world. Nowhere else can so much of a great writer's work be seen in the very place where it was created.

The collection of the Wordsworth Trust includes Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*, which in 2012 was included on the UK Memory of the World Register by the UK National Commission for UNESCO as a work of literature of international significance.

## OTHER TOWN END BUILDINGS

Aside from Dove Cottage and the garden, a number of buildings in the hamlet of Town End have survived from Wordsworth's time, and are now in the ownership of the Wordsworth Trust. They include Ashburner's Cottage, the home of Thomas and Peggy Ashburner. Wordsworth's poem 'Repentance' draws upon the experience of his neighbours, who were forced to sell land that they owned in order to pay off debts, much to their later regret.

Sykeside is another building that formed part of the Town End that Wordsworth would have known. It was the home of the Fisher family, John and Agnes, and John's sister Molly who was the Wordsworths' domestic help.

Rose Cottage was for a time the home of the poet Hartley Coleridge (1796-1849), eldest son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, although he was not resident in Town End when the Wordsworths lived there.

Few of the buildings in Town End are less than 150 years old and comprise farmhouses, cottages, a former smithy, byres, barns and sties typical of a traditional agricultural settlement.

## RYDAL

The hamlet of Rydal, lying at the east end of Rydal Water not far from Ambleside, comprises a small number of buildings constructed on the west side of the Rydal deer park. These include farmhouses, cottages and barns, collectively a good example of vernacular Lakeland architecture. The key building is Rydal Mount. William Wordsworth lived here from 1813 until his death in 1850; and the house is now open to the public.

Rydal Mount started life as a typical 'Statesman' farmhouse of the late 16th century but in c. 1750 the owner, John Knott, re-oriented the house so that the principal rooms gave views to the south west and Lake Windermere. The older parts of the house have typical Lake District vernacular features including construction from colour-washed local slate,

slate roof and round chimney stacks. The eastern block of the house is the earliest, with the west wing added in the 17th century, and further additions and alterations in the early to mid-18th century additions.

Another substantial farmhouse, Cote How, dating from the early 16th and 17th century is located on the south side of the A591. It has thick, buttressed and rendered slate walls, a slate roof with oval chimney stacks, a spinning gallery and a rare survival in the Lake District of exposed timber framing.

Nab Cottage, a two storey house on the northern shore of Rydal Water dating from 1702, was another residence of Hartley Coleridge (eldest son of Samuel Taylor Coleridge) who died there in 1849 and also has associations with Thomas de Quincey's wife.

Rydal has seen remarkably little change in the last 100 years or so and the village and its landscape setting are largely a legacy of the 18th and 19th centuries.

### 13.1.6 PICTURESQUE BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE

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In 1668-9, on the east side of Rydal Old Hall, Daniel le Fleming created the 'Grotto' 'around a small waterfall on Rydal Beck. There are good views of the Grotto from the contemporary bridge over the beck, including the small summer house which was constructed with a window designed to provide the best frame for a beautiful view of the falls. Sir Daniel's accounts provide a detailed account of the construction of the grotto in 1668, which he refers to variously as "the Sumer house at the Cawweel", "the grothouse" and "the grot in the Mill-Orchard". This summer house is thought to be the earliest known example of a viewing station in England, pre-dating the Picturesque Movement by nearly a century.



**FIGURE 3.10** View of the lower falls in Rydal Park, seen through the window of the purpose-built summer house. This is one of the earliest defined Picturesque views in England.



**FIGURE 13.11** 'The lower cascade, Rydal' by John Constable (1806). Pencil on paper.

Other Picturesque constructions in the garden include a single-span bridge over the Rydal Beck and a game larder. The wider grounds around the house were planted with a mixture of native and other trees such as Scots Pine and now form mature, open parkland. In 1909 the landscape gardener Thomas Mawson supplemented this Picturesque garden with a series of formal gardens to the south of the mansion. These include a rose garden and double terrace with balustrades, steps and topiary. Around the garden he added formal tree planting of exotic species including American and Japanese pines, and maples, alongside native species.

### 13.1.7 VILLAS AND ORNAMENTAL LANDSCAPING

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Below Rydal Water the landscape of the valley opens out to the south. As a result there are long views along Lake Windermere from favoured spots around Ambleside and as far north west as Rydal. Rydal Hall had long capitalised on one such location and its re-modelling in the later 18th century was clearly designed to take advantage of this view.

For this reason the earliest villas in the Valley, dating from the late 18th century, cluster in and around Ambleside and similarly make use of elevated sites offering views over Windermere. They form part of a wider Windermere group of villas extending from Clappersgate to the eastern shore of the Lake Windermere, to Bowness and beyond. In the early 20th century this group expanded with the building of a small number of villas in the Arts and Crafts style.

Builders who could not afford a lake prospect chose other sites, including the lane running parallel with the west bank of the Rothay, creating the Under Loughrigg sequence of villas, south of Grasmere.

The hamlet of Rydal began to attract genteel residents from around 1800. Rydal Mount, a prominently sited, south facing vernacular farmhouse of 16th century origin which later became Wordsworth's home, was occupied by John Knott from about this time, and its accommodation was progressively extended and refined. Knott laid out a garden to the south and west of the house which was later developed by Wordsworth following Picturesque principles advocated by Uvedale Price. The garden is on sloping ground and a series of terraces were constructed on the steepest part of the site. These give way

to further areas of differing levels of formality to achieve a transitional effect from the formal and ornamental grounds around the house to the farmed landscape beyond.

When Wordsworth took Dove Cottage at Town End as his rural retreat at the end of 1799 a small number of villas were already under construction in and around Grasmere. Other early villas or villa conversions occurred along the Red Bank road south of Grasmere, in the narrow entrance to Easedale underneath Helm Crag, and in the village of Grasmere where several modern-day hotels originated as villas.

All villas can be expected to sit within some form of garden or designed landscape. But in the Lake District not all have extensive grounds, since the surrounding landscape is easily appropriated in terms of views and setting. Some villas nevertheless have quite elaborate designed landscapes, incorporating networks of paths, buildings and other structures, prescribed viewpoints and planting of trees. Silverhowe, Grasmere, for example, was extended during the 1820s by Samuel Barber, who also laid out winding paths and built a root house with a mock-chapel, a snail mound and a 'Swiss bridge' on the slopes above the house. Wordsworth's garden at Rydal Mount, where he lived from 1813 until his death in 1850, was developed in accordance with principles he articulated in his *Guide* and attracted numerous visitors. It is the only registered villa garden in the Grasmere area, though nearby Rydal Hall, a gentry house, also has a registered garden.

Wordsworth also advised friends on garden design, as he did John Gregory Crump, the first owner of Allan Bank in 1807, though the surviving designed landscape there, with its woodland walks and tunnel, is primarily of the 1830 – 1840s. A striking landscape presence belongs to the gardens at Helmside (1850s onwards), at the north end of Grasmere Vale, where richly varied broad-leaved and coniferous tree-planting contrasts with the normally open landscape of meadows and fells.

Not all gardens of note belonged to larger villas. Eller How in Ambleside was built in 1851 and bought in 1863 by Henry Boyle, who spent massively on ponds, ferneries, a summer house and a belvedere tower atop an artificial mound, all within grounds of no more than suburban extent. Among later gardens, White Craggs at Clappersgate deserves mention. Created from 1904 by its owner Simon Hough with the aid of William Purdom, a Kew plant hunter, around a villa designed by the Arts and Crafts architect Dan Gibson, it has the distinction of being the subject of short guidebook by C. H. Hough (*A Westmorland Rock Garden, Ambleside, 1929*) which went through several printings.

**TABLE 13.2** Key villas in the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley



**ALLAN BANK, GRASMERE**

Italianate style villa built for John Gregory Crump, a Liverpool attorney. Extended in 1834. The Wordsworth family lived here from 1808 to 1813. Later owned by Canon Rawnsley.

**DATE** 19th century

**OWNERSHIP** National Trust

**PROTECTION** Listed

**GRID REFERENCE** 333341 507688

**DALE COTTAGE, GRASMERE**

Villa of 1840s. Now Dale Lodge Hotel.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 333620 507439

**FOREST SIDE, GRASMERE**

Villa by Thompson and Webster, 1853.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 334254 508072

**FOX GHYLL, UNDER LOUGHRIGG**

House in Regency style. De Quincey lived here from 1820.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336318 505115

**FOX HOWE, UNDER LOUGHRIGG**

Holiday home of Dr Thomas Arnold of Rugby School and his son Matthew Arnold, poet. Built 1832 to a design influenced by William Wordsworth.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336517 504950

**GLENTHORNE, EASEDALE**

Built in 1837 and extended 1867.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 333525 507862

**HELMSIDE, TOWN HEAD, GRASMERE**

House built in 1858.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 333071 509682

**HOWE FOOT, TOWN END, GRASMERE**

House built in 1848. Now a hotel.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 334229 506923

**IVEING COTTAGE, AMBLESIDE**

Early villa of the 1790s, noted in West's Guide, 1st edition, now a hostel.

**DATE** 18th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 337736 504007

**IVY COTTAGE, RYDAL**

Now Glen Rothay Hotel. 17th century inn extended and gentrified in gothic style in the 19th century.

**DATE** 17th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336334 506175

**LANCRIGG, EASEDALE**

Villa built c. 1840 and visited by William and Dorothy Wordsworth.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 333048 508486

**LESKETH HOW, AMBLESIDE**

Built for Dr John Davey 1844-5.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 337243 505010

**LOUGHRIGG BROW, LOUGHRIGG FELL**

Gothic style villa by Ewan Christian, built 1863.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336916 504432

**MILLER BRIDGE HOUSE, UNDER LOUGHRIGG**

Early villa with lake view, 1829.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 337041 504301

**NANNY BROW, CLAPPERSGATE**

Arts and Crafts style house by Francis Whitwell, 1902.

**DATE** 20th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336021 503533

**ROTHAY HOLME, AMBLESIDE**

Substantial villa built for Elizabeth Head, 1854.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 337370 504125

**RYDAL MOUNT, RYDAL**

17th century farm house gentrified in late 18th century by John Knott. Wordsworth's home 1813 until his death in 1850. Garden designed by Wordsworth.

**DATE** 17th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private but open to the public  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336393 506372

**SCALE HOW, AMBLESIDE**

3 bay Georgian house built for the Benson Harrisons, who owned ironworks in the Lake District. Built c. 1790 and remodelled 1824-5.

**DATE** 18th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** University of Cumbria  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 337535 504880

**SILVERHOWE, GRASMERE**

Single storey house built by William Gell, much developed in the 1820s. Steep garden with gothic grotto. Built 1797-8.

**DATE** 18th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 333178 506858

**THE HOLLENS, GRASMERE**

Three bay cottage villa of the 1790s, built for a Mr Olive and visited by William and Dorothy Wordsworth whilst in his ownership. Converted to hotel in 1849. Now the National Trust's Lake District Consultancy Hub.

**DATE** 18th – 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** National Trust  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 334302 507603

**THE KNOLL, AMBLESIDE**

Unadorned house of local stone, built for Harriet Martineau, 1845-6.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 337330 504806

**WANLASS HOW, WATERHEAD**

Now called Ambleside Park. Villa built for James Brooks 1841-2, and later remodelled.

**DATE** 19th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 337506 503400

**WHITE CRAGGS, CLAPPERSGATE**

Arts and Crafts style house by Dan Gibson c. 1900.

**DATE** 20th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Not listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336491 503556

**CROFT LODGE, CLAPPERSGATE**

Originally a white villa built for a Miss Pritchard before 1796. Substantially remodelled 1828-30.

**DATE** Late 18th century  
**OWNERSHIP** Private  
**PROTECTION** Listed  
**GRID REFERENCE** 336817 503637

## 13.2 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

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### 13.2.1 ARCHAEOLOGY AND EARLY SETTLEMENT

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There are clear indications of prehistoric activity in the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley including Neolithic (4,000 – 2,000 BC) or Early Bronze Age (2,000 – 800 BC) rock art, for example at Allan Bank. The large cairn on the summit of Dunmail Raise, the pass connecting south and north Lake District to Thirlmere, is also probably prehistoric, though it is also traditionally held to be the burial place of Dunmail, the last king of the early medieval kingdom of Cumbria (died AD 945).

However, it is likely that significant settlement and agriculture developed towards the end of the first millennium BC in the late Iron Age. The earliest demonstrable settlement is associated with the Roman fort and vicus settlement at Waterhead, Ambleside but it is not clear if this represents continuity of an earlier pattern or a new development resulting from the Roman advance into the Lake District in (100 AD).

### 13.2.2 THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRENT SETTLEMENT PATTERN

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The dedication of the church in Grasmere to the 7th century Northumbrian St Oswald hints at the existence of a settlement here at that time, though physical evidence is lacking. The village developed in the later medieval period as a centre of water-powered woollen industry and then from the late 18th century, particularly due to its Wordsworth connection, as a focal point for Lake District tourism.

There was probably a major phase of settlement and agricultural development in the 10th century, evidenced by the high number of place-names containing Old Norse. For example, the name Ambleside is thought to derive from 'hamala saetr' (Hamal's clearing) and Rydal contains the element '-dalr' ('the valley where the rye was grown').

The survival of place-names incorporating the elements 'scale' and 'saetr' indicate the locations of shieling settlements. These were part of a transhumance system in which permanent settlement and arable agriculture was established in the valley bottoms, and stock was grazed on the fells during the summer months. However, these place-names do not appear in documents until the 13th century or later, and it is likely that some names were introduced after the 10th century. The limited evidence in Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside suggests that the settlement pattern was established between the arrival of Scandinavian settlers in the 10th century and about 1250.

## AMBLESIDE

The Norse element in Ambleside's name suggests a 10th century origin for the settlement. Like Grasmere but to a greater extent, Ambleside developed as a centre



**FIGURE 13.12** Rush bearing in Ambleside in 2015

of the water-powered textile industry. From the late 18th century it was an important centre for tourism, as it is today.

As the Lake District wool industry developed from the 14th century, Ambleside grew in size and from the 16th century wool processing became Ambleside's major industry. In 1650 a Royal Charter established a wool market in the town, recognising the value of its wool trade. The importance of Ambleside for the woollen industry was due to its location on key routes through the Lake District and because of its fast-flowing streams which were harnessed to drive the fulling mills. The first record for any mill in Ambleside is for a corn mill in 1324; with a further record of a fulling mill in 1453 which worked until the early 19th century. Both of these were built high up the Stockghyll Beck, close to the picturesque Stockghyll Force waterfall. By the early 16th century, five mills were supported by the Stockghyll beck, and by the 19th century nine mills were being powered by it.

In the 18th century Ambleside was well known for the production of a cloth called 'linsey-woolsey', made up from a mix of linen and wool. Following the award of the market charter in 1650, industrial development extended to the more level ground south of Stockghyll beck, where a combined wool and flax mill was constructed in 1795. This building, which has a reconstructed water wheel, is now used as a restaurant and shop. The boom in textile industries in the north of England created a huge demand for wooden bobbins. Bobbin-making began in Ambleside when a mill known as 'Stock Force' was built in 1810 and bobbin making became another mainstay of the economy for the next 70 years.

However, despite the success of the bobbin-making, in 1825 Ambleside's wool market closed and the remaining fulling mills began to be put to other uses. For example the former fulling mill on the north side of Stockghyll beck was converted from fulling to milling of corn in 1638 and continued in use until 1930.



FIGURE 13.13 'The Old Mill' by J. M. W. Turner (1798): A view of the mills on Stock Ghyll, Ambleside

### 13.2.3 THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FARMING LANDSCAPE

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The development of the farming landscape is shown by both the physical evidence and by surviving documents. Grasmere first appears in documents in 1246 as 'Gresmere', Rydal in 1274 as 'Ridale', and Ambleside in 1324 as 'Hamelsete'. The parishes of Grasmere, Rydal and Troutbeck are each recorded as 'forest' within the parish of Kentdale, comprising demesne land within the Norman feudal pattern of land tenure. This legal re-classification may indicate the relative agricultural poverty of the valley, although it does not imply that tree cover was more extensive or that land under cultivation was reduced. Within the private forests the lord of the manor's demesne tended to be restricted to the head of a valley and tenants purchased rights to pasture, fishing, and turbary (gathering fuel notably peat) on the demesne land through their rents. The forest law which prevented local tenants from assarting (clearing forest for agriculture) restricted the spread of enclosure during the 12th and 13th century.

In the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley the surviving documentary evidence implies the existence of a limited amount of arable, inbye land in the medieval period and there are documentary references to a water-powered corn mill in Hamelsate (Ambleside) in 1334. Fifteenth century documents record an arson attack on a stockpile of corn in Rydal in 1439 and the presence of a further corn mill in 1454. The early inbye land in Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside may either have been arranged in small, communal open fields or within enclosures attached to tenant farms or the lord's holdings. The 1787 Clarke map for Grasmere shows a pattern of long strip-fields, tofts, or closes, perpendicular to the road north of Grasmere which may indicate the strips that were enclosed from open fields before 1787. The extent of the enclosed land as shown on Clarke's map may well approximate to the extent of medieval inbye land along this stretch of road north of Grasmere.

Documentary sources indicate a pattern of shared and fragmented land ownership in the medieval period. In 1274 Robert de Ros of Werk held at his death 'the farm of Gresmere' and a forest in 'Ridale'. This suggests that he was the steward in control of the farming system for the parish of Grasmere and also responsible for the administration of part of the royal forest. He also held a moiety (part) of the mill at Grasmere which indicates that some parts of the farm and forest were in shared ownership. The fragmentation of ownership is further confirmed by the granting by his widow, Margaret de Brus, of 'her part of Rydale by bounds, her part of Amelsate and Loghrygg with common of pasture within the bounds of 'Gressemer' to Roger de Lancaster the following year. Roger de Lancaster developed part of this holding in the valley of Rydal Water as a deer park.

In 1283 a post-mortem inquisition accounted for 13 acres of land and 4 acres of meadow in Grasmere held by William de Lyndesye 'in demesne', in addition to just over 133 acres of land held by his tenants, 11 acres of waste, and a free tenant with an estimated 4 acres of land. This may also reflect the pattern of stewardship where the lord of the manor occupied a larger farming unit which in this case may have comprised the land at Town Head at the head of the valley. Another example of a similar larger land holding, bounded by a sub-circular enclosure, may have existed adjacent to Rydal Old Hall as indicated on the 1787 Clarke map.

Reference to early enclosure of the common waste is included in an agreement of 1277 following a dispute over encroachments of William de Lyndesye's grazing animals into the deer park owned by Roger de Lancaster. As a result Roger de Lancaster had his manor fenced off along the boundary between Rydal and Scandale and it was further agreed that the boundary should be decided "by juries of respectable men... near the fence at Scandale Beck". This boundary may have comprised an earthen bank topped with a wooden fence. Its line survives on Nab Scar as an archaeological feature underlying the later parish boundary wall; parts can be dated to 1565 and 1581. The stone wall which enclosed the head of the valley of the Rydal Water indicates the later use of the disused deer park as demesne grazing. The southern end of the deer park, in the area around the present Rydal Hall, was developed as parkland in the second half of the 17th century and the original medieval hall at Rydal, the foundations of which can still be seen on a rocky knoll adjacent to the A591, may have developed from a hunting lodge for the deer park.

At the onset of the post-medieval period the 1574 'Richmond Fee' and 'Marquis Fee rental' and survey documents indicate a process of sub-division of the medieval tenements through the generations, until the size of the remnant parcels were impractically small. Tenants were driven away and many changes of ownership occurred during the century after 1574, followed by a process of the gradual acquisition of small adjoining holdings into one tenement. The 1574 survey documents record that tenants in the "Amylsyde" parish "claim to have annexed and adjoined to each tenement of the rent of 6s. 8d., 7 acres of arable and meadow land by divers grants of divers lords". This indicates that the enclosed land around Ambleside had been extended considerably prior to 1574. This was accompanied, as elsewhere in the Lake District, by the investment by 'statesmen farmers' in stone farm buildings, constructed on the sites of earlier buildings or shieling sites.

The farms and stone walls located in the smaller side valleys in Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside probably represent this wave of expansion and consolidation. The 1787 Clarke map of the valley thus reflects re-organisation of the former medieval fields in the 16th-18th centuries but elements of the pattern of inbye land attached to farms, strips enclosed from former communal open arable fields and perhaps larger lords' holdings at the heads of the valleys can still be detected.

The wider pattern of the 16th-18th century re-organisation of the farming landscape in Grasmere can be seen more clearly on the 1863 Ordnance Survey map, including the intakes which extended the limits of enclosed land during this period. The intakes from earlier periods are distinguishable by their more irregular outlines (clearly seen around Townhead) and there are examples of stone-walled avenues (outgangs) to connect small-holdings with newly-enclosed allotments in the 16th and 17th centuries. The field pattern in Easedale may derive from piecemeal enclosure dating from the 16th and 17th centuries along with some minor re-organisation of the medieval pattern.

The outer extent of the major upland enclosures above Rydal, Scandale and Stockghyll were built during the tenure of Sir Daniel le Fleming prior to 1700. Dalehead Close was the final phase of the 17th century intaking in this valley, although the outer reaches of Rydal Head and Scandale Head were not enclosed until 1863-1899. Newer parcels are characterised by ruthless pursuit of right angles except at the very outer limits

of enclosure. The first edition Ordnance Survey clearly shows a pattern of planned enclosure including part of the extensive and regular 'Troutbeck Hundreds' which extend into the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside valley area.

The Rydal Estate closer to Rydal Hall was sub-divided and reorganised for orchards, grazing and plantation woodland during the 18th and 19th century. Given the late date of the first edition Ordnance Survey (1863) it is possible that most, if indeed not all, of the planned enclosure in these valleys post-dates the general Enclosure Act of 1840. With no evidence for a ring garth (as seen in Langdale) yet identified in Grasmere, Rydal or Ambleside, future field survey is needed to establish a sequence and interpretation for development of the inbye and intake land, and the planned enclosure which follows.

#### **13.2.4 DISCOVERY AND APPRECIATION OF A RICH CULTURAL LANDSCAPE**

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##### **EARLY TOURISM**

The Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley was one of the key attractions for the early tourists who were attracted to the Lake District by the publication of the first guide books and later due to the influence of William Wordsworth. Easier access was also afforded by the construction of metalled roads after 1770 and the railway to Windermere in 1847. William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy took up residence in Grasmere in 1799 and it was his poetic descriptions of the area around Grasmere that did much to stimulate the growth of the village as a centre of tourism in the 19th century. When the railway reached Windermere in 1847 it placed Grasmere within reach of the cities of northern England and also stimulated the interest of wealthy industrialists and others to build residences in the area.

In 1770 a turnpike road opened linking Grasmere to Keswick to the north and Ambleside to the south. The regular coach services that now passed along this route stimulated the growth of Grasmere as a place of coaching inns where travellers could spend the night, and horses could be changed, refreshed and shod. One of the earliest surviving coaching inns is The Swan, built in 1650 and mentioned in Wordsworth's poem 'The Waggoner'. The Red Lion Hotel (parts dating from the early 18th century) is another key example from this period, and some of the outbuildings that cluster up against this building were probably used as stables and blacksmith's forges.

Similarly it was tourism rather than industry that was to drive Ambleside's economy and subsequent expansion through the 19th and 20th centuries. The turnpike road reached Ambleside in 1761 and The Salutation, The White Lion and The Royal Oak were popular coaching houses of this period which are still in use today. The opening of the Kendal to Windermere railway line in 1847 also afforded easier access to working people as well as the wealthy and educated and the subsequent development of Ambleside reflects the need for a wide variety of accommodation, including hotels, guest houses and, in the 20th century, a youth hostel.

Ambleside's rapid expansion in the mid/late 19th century doubled the size of the town. Many buildings in Market Square were rebuilt in c.1860. The Millans area was

constructed between 1880-1910. St Mary's Church, built to accommodate the increased number of worshippers, was designed by Sir George Gilbert Scott and consecrated in 1854. It is the best example in the Lake District of the High Gothic style and encapsulates the era of Victorian prosperity.

## PICTURESQUE BUILDINGS AND LANDSCAPE

Before mass tourism arrived in the Lake District, Grasmere was, in the words of the poet Thomas Gray who visited in 1769, a place of "rusticity and happy poverty", of scattered whitewashed farmhouses and slate roofed or thatched slate-stone cottages, with no intrusive brick buildings. Gray saw red brick as the symbol of the nouveau riche, and celebrated the fact that Grasmere has "not a single red tile, no gentleman's flaring house, or garden walls" ('Journal of a visit to the Lake District in 1769').

Although neither Rydal Water nor Grasmere warranted the identification of viewing stations in Thomas West's 'Guide to the Lakes' of 1778, he does include a description of Grasmere and approved the earlier description by Gray. Grasmere also provides the only illustration in the edition of 1780. Clearly Grasmere and Rydal were considered in the second half of the 18th century to have picturesque qualities, but this aesthetic had been the concern of Sir Daniel Fleming of Rydal Hall almost 100 years earlier.

The manor of Rydal came into the ownership of the le Fleming family in 1409 when Sir Thomas le Fleming married Isobel de Lancaster, who inherited the feudal lordship of the manor. Originally the family lived at Coniston Hall. In 1575 they moved to Rydal Old Hall (already described as 'old' at that date) built on a knoll in fields bordering the River Rothay and described as 'now in ruins' in 1681.



FIGURE 13.14 Rydal Hall and garden

William le Fleming moved the family from the Old Hall to the site of the present Rydal Hall in the late 16th century. In the mid-17th century, Sir Daniel le Fleming (1633–1701) transformed the estate, developing the landscape as an early Picturesque garden incorporating Rydal Beck and its natural waterfalls. He also extended and gentrified the 16th century house which he inherited, with the addition of the west wing, back staircase and other rooms. Stables and barns were built behind the hall. Further remodelling of the hall took place in the 18th century.

The park and pleasure grounds at Rydal created in the late 17th century were still much admired in the 18th and 19th centuries and were a major attraction for a succession of visiting artists and writers. They were described in Wordsworth's poem, 'An Evening Walk' and feature in paintings by Joseph Wright of Derby and John Constable.

Rydal Hall remained in the ownership of the le Fleming family until 1970, when the Diocese of Carlisle purchased the buildings to create a retreat, conference and youth centre. The gardens, which are open to the public, were restored in the mid-2000s and further restoration is underway.

## VILLAS AND ORNAMENTAL LANDSCAPING

The harmonious beauty of the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley attracted visitors from the earliest period of interest in the sublime and picturesque. This initial interest was soon followed by people of means who wished to live in the area and improve its picturesque qualities through the construction of villas and ornamental landscapes. The favoured locations for villas were those that offered views of lakes, fells and woodland which conformed as far as possible to picturesque principles.

In the 18th century Ambleside provided a weekly market for provisions, a Post Office, and other services such as coaching inns. The town also offered the attractions of picturesque vernacular buildings and one of the better-known local waterfalls, Stockghyll Force.

The hamlet of Rydal began to attract genteel residents from around 1800.

### 13.2.5 ROMANTIC SITES, BUILDINGS AND ASSOCIATIONS

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#### WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850)

##### GRASMERE AND RYDAL

Grasmere and Rydal are known internationally as the home of the Romantic poet William Wordsworth and his family, his sister Dorothy and a number of other important Romantic poets and personalities of the period who were drawn to live in the area because of Wordsworth. All the houses that Wordsworth lived in still survive along with a vast number of landscape features which appear in his poetry and the poetry of others. The landscape also survives, including the stone walls and vernacular farmhouses and buildings belonging to the local community which underpinned Wordsworth's deep appreciation of the relationship between humans and the natural world and his development of the concept of the 'economy of nature'. Most importantly,

the Wordsworth Trust maintains the Wordsworth archive at Dove Cottage which is one of the world's great literary collections.

Wordsworth's first residence was the cottage that has come to be known as Dove Cottage, but which had recently ceased functioning as an inn when he took up residence with his sister Dorothy in 1799. He then moved to Allan Bank in 1808 along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Thomas de Quincey. De Quincey stayed until 1809, when he moved to Dove Cottage and Coleridge stayed into 1810 when he moved to Keswick. Wordsworth decried Allan Bank as an ugly building and a blot on the landscape that he loved. He was also to quarrel with the landlord over the fact that the house was damp and impossible to heat because the chimneys did not work. But nevertheless he rented the house for his growing household. Allan Bank was subsequently bought by Canon Rawnsley in 1915, who two years later retired there from his living at Crosthwaite, Keswick. The Rawnsley family gifted the property to the National Trust in 1951.



**FIGURE 13.15** Allan Bank villa set within wooded grounds

From Allan Bank, Wordsworth moved in 1811 to the Rectory, in Grasmere, opposite St Oswald's Church. The Rectory was built in 1690 and enlarged in the late 19th century. It was a damp house and the Wordsworths suffered the tragic loss of two of their young children here.

Wordsworth's final move was to Rydal Mount in 1813 and he lived here until his death in 1850. The house continued to be rented by the family until 1859 when Wordsworth's widow, Mary, died. Wordsworth extended and altered the house, and landscaped the gardens which survive in the form that he left them. Wordsworth's other legacies to the village include St Mary's Church, built by Lady le Fleming in 1824, in whose siting and design he played a part, and the woodland known as Dora's Field (to the west of the church and to the south of Rydal Mount). This was purchased by Wordsworth as the site for a house that was never built and was planted by the poet himself with wild daffodils in 1847 as a memorial to his daughter Dora. It is now owned by the National Trust. Major works written at Rydal Mount included the 'Duddon Sonnets' and 'Ecclesiastical Sonnets', the '1820 Miscellaneous Poems' and the revision of 'The Prelude', published



**FIGURE 13.16** The Wordsworth family grave stone in St Oswald's churchyard, Grasmere

in 1850 after Wordsworth's death. Wordsworth entertained many eminent visitors here including the American visitors Ralph Waldo Emerson and the feminist Margaret Fuller. The house is still lived in and is displayed much as it was in Wordsworth's time. It includes embroidered work by Mary and Dorothy Wordsworth and Sarah Hutchinson and portraits of the family, including the only known portrait of Dorothy. Rydal Mount continues to attract many visitors to the village, and is open to the public

William Wordsworth is buried with his wife Mary in St Oswald's churchyard in Grasmere. Adjacent plots include those of his sister Dorothy and his children and grandchildren. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's son Hartley is also buried here.

Other properties of notable figures linked to Wordsworth include Nab Cottage, occupied by both Thomas de Quincey and Hartley Coleridge, and the group of villas at Under Loughrigg, alongside the River Rothay and overlooking the famous stepping stones. These include Fox How, the holiday home of Dr Thomas Arnold (1795 –1842), headmaster of Rugby School who was encouraged by Wordsworth to buy the land and build the house in 1833. Thomas Arnold was the father of Matthew Arnold, the poet and critic, who inherited the house and spent many holidays there.

Fox Ghyll, further along the Under Loughrigg road, was the home of Thomas de Quincey from 1820 to 1825, during which time he wrote 'Confessions of an English Opium-Eater'. The next house, Loughrigg Holme, was the residence of Wordsworth's daughter Dora following her marriage to Edward Quillinan in 1841 and visitors here included Harriet Martineau and Charlotte Bronte in 1850. The house at Stepping Stones belonged to Wordsworth's son William and then his grandson Gordon, who arranged and edited Wordsworth's manuscripts there.

### GRASMERE VALE

Much of Wordsworth's poetry celebrates the landscape and the people of the Vale of Grasmere, most notably the poem known as 'Home at Grasmere'. The poem begins with Wordsworth recalling his first visit as a schoolboy, looking down on the vale from Hammerscar:

"And with a sudden influx overcome  
At sight of this seclusion, I forgot  
My haste – for hasty had my footsteps been,  
As boyish my pursuits – (and sighing said),  
"What happy fortune were it here to live!"

Later in the poem, having reflected on of the achievement of his dream, Wordsworth strives to encapsulate the unique qualities of the place:

"Tis (but I cannot name it), 'tis the sense  
 Of majesty and beauty and repose,  
 A blended holiness of earth and sky,  
 Something that makes this individual Spot,  
 This small abiding-place of many men,  
 A termination and a last retreat,  
 A Centre, come from wheresoe'er you will,  
 A Whole without dependence or defect,  
 Made for itself and happy in itself,  
 Perfect Contentment, Unity entire."

While at Dove Cottage, Wordsworth wrote a number of 'poems on the naming of places', about locations in Grasmere that held special significance for him and his family. They include John's Grove (Lady Wood), off Wishing Gate Lane, which overlooks Grasmere Lake. The Grove, named after for Wordsworth's beloved brother, a sailor, is the subject of Wordsworth's 1802 poem 'When, to the attractions of the busy world'. Another example is Stone Arthur, subject of the poem "There is an Eminence", which is named for the poet (at the suggestion of his sister).

Greenhead Gill, east of Grasmere Village, is central to one of Wordsworth's greatest poems, 'Michael', about a Grasmere shepherd and his relationship with his family, and with his land.

"If from the public way you turn your steps  
 Up the tumultuous brook of Green-head Gill,  
 You will suppose that with an upright path  
 Your feet must struggle; in such bold ascent  
 The pastoral Mountains front you, face to face.  
 But, courage! For beside that boisterous Brook  
 The mountains have all opened out themselves,  
 And made a hidden valley of their own."

In a letter to Charles James Fox of January 1801, Wordsworth cites Michael as an example of the 'statesmen' farmer, for whom "Their little tract of land serves as a kind of permanent rallying point for their domestic feelings". He laments that this class of men is rapidly disappearing.

The poem was composed towards the end of 1800, and it is interesting to read Dorothy's 'Grasmere Journal' entry for 11 October 1800, recording a walk with William up Greenhead Gill in search of a sheepfold, which she describes as "built nearly in the form of a heart unequally divided." At the beginning of 'Michael', Wordsworth describes "a straggling heap of unhewn stones", which can be seen in the same place today (although it is not clear whether they are actually the remains of a sheepfold).

The Swan Inn, located on the main road at the north end of Grasmere village, is mentioned by Wordsworth in 'Benjamin the Waggoner' ("Who does not know the famous Swan?") as one of the inns that tempts the protagonist, Benjamin, as he makes his way from Grasmere to Keswick. Also mentioned is "the Dove and Olive-Bough" from which Dove Cottage derives its name (although it was never named thus in Wordsworth's day).



FIGURE 13.17 The Swan Hotel (formerly the Swan Inn), Grasmere

## RYDAL

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a frequent guest of the Wordsworths at Dove Cottage (and later at Allan Bank). His 'Notebook' records many walks around Rydal, and also contains an amusing account of passing by Rydal Hall with Wordsworth in November 1799, and being accosted by "Sir Fleming's servant" who reproaches them for having passed before the front of the house. As Coleridge acidly observes: "by our Trespass of Feet with the Trespass on the Eye by his damned White washing!"

The Lower Falls at Rydal, much favoured by artists in search of the picturesque, feature in Wordsworth's 1793 poem 'An Evening Walk':

"Sole light admitted here, a small cascade,  
 Illumes with sparkling foam the twilight shade.  
 Beyond, along the visto of the brook,  
 Where antique roots its bustling path o'erlook,  
 The eye reposes on a secret bridge  
 Half grey, half shagg'd with ivy to its ridge"

Wordsworth lived at Rydal Mount for 37 years until his death in 1850. A number of his later poems feature the landscape around the house, for example 'Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendour and Beauty'.

**“No sound is uttered, – but a deep  
And solemn harmony pervades  
The hollow vale from steep to steep,  
And penetrates the glades”.**

Wordsworth designed the garden at Rydal Mount, and it features in a number of his poems, including ‘This lawn, a carpet all alive’ and ‘The Contrast’. The latter, addressed to the poet’s daughter Dora, celebrates the summer house between the terraces – “This moss-lined shed, green, soft, and dry”.

## **OTHER ARTISTS AND NOTABLE RESIDENTS**

Wordsworth’s presence in Grasmere and Rydal attracted other poets and admirers to live and work in the area both within his own lifetime and later. These included close friends and colleagues such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, his son Hartley, and Thomas de Quincey along with others such as the headmaster of Rugby School, Dr Thomas Arnold, and his son Matthew, the poet.

Harriet Martineau, often described as the first female sociologist and also a respected novelist and author of ‘A Complete Guide to the English Lakes’ (1855), built a house in Ambleside (the Knoll) and was resident from 1845 until her death in 1876. Wordsworth was a friend and advised on the design of the garden around the Knoll.

Artists continued to be drawn to the valley in the 20th century, including the landscape painter Alfred Heaton Cooper, whose original wooden log studio, imported from Norway, can be seen by the road at the south end of Ambleside. The Heaton Cooper family continue to paint in the Lake District and also run the Heaton Cooper Gallery in Grasmere. The German artist Kurt Schwitters also resided briefly in Ambleside in the 1940s and is buried in Ambleside churchyard.

### **13.2.6 EARLY CONSERVATION – THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MODEL FOR PROTECTING LANDSCAPES**

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The importance of the early conservation movement in the Lake District for the landscape of the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley lies in what was not built and the resulting preservation of much of the traditional farming character and later formal landscape features.

The earliest and perhaps the most severe threat to the peaceful tranquillity of Grasmere and Rydal were the various proposals in the 19th century to build a railway from Kendal to Grasmere. In 1844 a branch line railway from Kendal to Windermere was proposed and vigorously opposed by William Wordsworth. This included publication of a ‘Sonnet on the projected Kendal and Windermere railway’ which started:

**“Is then no nook of England ground secure  
from rash assault?...”**

Wordsworth argued that there was no industrial or agricultural requirement for a railway and that the working class, who would be likely to come on holiday to the area in large numbers, would not have the capacity to appreciate the “beauty” and “character of seclusion and retirement” that the Lakes District offered. He concluded with the plea “Let then the beauty be undisfigured and the retirement unviolated”.

Wordsworth’s arguments did not initially find much favour, including with other Lake District residents such as Harriet Martineau, but became more widely influential in the later 19th century when the value of scenic landscape was increasingly appreciated. In the event the Kendal to Windermere railway, completed in 1847, reached only as far as the hamlet of Birthwaite (which subsequently developed into the town of Windermere).

The proposal for the extension of the Kendal – Windermere line to Ambleside (and on to Keswick) was resurrected in 1876 and on this occasion the opposition was led by Robert Somervell (a local manufacturer) with support from the more famous John Ruskin. Ruskin wrote a preface to a campaign pamphlet entitled ‘A protest against the Extension of Railways in the Lake District’ (1876) which consciously followed the arguments of Wordsworth’s earlier sonnets and letters on the same subject. As with Wordsworth, these arguments tended towards an exclusivity of the Lake District landscape for persons of taste and encountered both opposition and support, but in the end the scheme was dropped due for economic reasons. Other proposals were made for an extension of line in 1886 and for an electric tram route to Ambleside in 1899 (by the British Electric Traction Company), on this occasion opposed by Rawnsley, but these were also opposed and not implemented.

This early organised opposition to development in the Lake District that was deemed to be detrimental to the landscape and traditional way of life formed a crucial part of the wider movement that would be galvanised to oppose the Thirlmere reservoir and to form both the Lake District Preservation Society and eventually the National Trust (founded in 1895). It was at the Swan Inn in Grasmere that local landowners gathered in 1877 to form the Thirlmere Defence Association.

Although the Thirlmere Reservoir was built in 1890 and the aqueduct taking water to the City of Manchester was constructed through the vales of Grasmere and Rydal, the impact of the aqueduct on the landscape has been minimal. Its passage through the valley can be traced by access gates and other relatively minor infrastructure which are constructed in a uniform style (of stone and wrought iron).

In the later 19th century intense interest in the literary achievements of William Wordsworth and his importance for the Lake District led to moves to preserve the physical evidence of his legacy in Grasmere. In 1890 the founder of the Wordsworth Trust, the clergyman Stopford Brooke, wrote:

**“There is no place, ...which has so many thoughts and memories as this belonging to our poetry; none at least in which they are so closely bound up with the poet and the poems... In every part of this little place [Wordsworth] has walked with his sister and wife or talked with Coleridge. And it is almost untouched. Why should we not try and**

**secure it... for the eternal possession of those who love  
English poetry all over the world."**

The Wordsworth Trust bought Dove Cottage in 1890 for £650 and it has been open to the public since 1891, currently receiving around 70,000 visitors each year. The Trust subsequently acquired an internationally important collection of manuscripts and works of art relating to Wordsworth and his contemporaries.

The National Trust also took an early interest in Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside, due in part to the association with Wordsworth. Its first acquisition was the Roman fort at Ambleside. In 1911, on a chance visit to Borrans Field, W. F. Rawnsley, educationalist, writer and brother of Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, discovered that a local building company, Pattinsons of Windermere, was preparing to cover the 20 acre Roman site with boarding houses. With his colleague Gordon Wordsworth, Rawnsley managed to stop the digging of foundations and the Ambleside Committee headed by Dr Hugh Redmayne and Gordon Wordsworth was formed to raise funds to purchase the site. Professor W. G. Collingwood, the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, the Manchester Guardian and many local people rallied to the cause, and by the 20th May 1913, £4,000 was raised and the site was given into the care of the National Trust.

Another early acquisition was the iconic Bridge House in Ambleside, bought by local subscribers and given to the Trust in 1928. In 1935 Gordon Wordsworth, the poet's grandson, gave Dora's Field, Rydal, to the National Trust and Allan Bank, one of the Wordsworth family's residences, was bequeathed to the Trust after the death of Canon Rawnsley's second wife, in 1951.

In the early 20th century the National Trust acquired a series of other small properties in Grasmere and Ambleside, including the Roman fort at Galava and the surrounding Borrans field in 1913; the small open space of Moss Parrock in the middle of the village (given to the Trust in 1934); the low hill of Butharlyp Howe, on the edge of Grasmere (purchased in 1939); and White Moss Intake on the edge of Rydal Water (donated in 1925). The largest of its properties, bought in 1943, was the land behind Dove Cottage, stretching from Grey Crag to Alcock Tarn.

From the mid-20th century the National Trust started to acquire, by lease and purchase, more extensive areas of Grasmere, including an extension to the Alcock Tarn property via a gift in 1975. One of the key developments was the purchase of a series of key farms and protective covenants in the vale, comprising Dale End Farm in 1971 (covenant only); Underhelm, acquired under National Land Fund procedures in 1974; Brimmer Head in 1973; and Townhead at the head of Grasmere vale, purchased in 1981 with bequests and a donation. The National Trust's Lake District office is now at The Hollens in Grasmere. In 2015 the National Trust purchased the island in Grasmere lake. The National Trust owns 789 hectares of land in the valley, of which 715 hectares are inalienable. It also has an additional seven hectares of covenanted land but no leased land.

The beneficial effects of monitoring and pressure from the Friends of the Lake District from the 1930s and the Lake District National Park Authority from 1951 can also be seen in the preservation of the harmonious beauty of the Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside

valley. This has been achieved despite the huge tourist pressure on this very popular part of the Lake District.

More recent conservation actions which have assisted in preserving the scenic beauty of the valley have included the undergrounding of the electricity supply in Grasmere in the 1920s (championed by the Friends of the Lake District) and the prevention of major road schemes including dualling of the A591 trunk road and a bypass around Ambleside (led by the Lake District National Park Authority and the Friends of the Lake District). The National Park Authority has also achieved a ban on heavy goods vehicles on the A591 from the 1970s and has maintained the tranquillity of the valley through the adoption of bylaws banning motor boats on small lakes including Rydal and Grasmere.

### 13.3 CONTRIBUTION TO THE ENGLISH LAKE DISTRICT'S OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

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The Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley is at the centre of the English Lake District and contains many attributes of the three key themes of its proposed Outstanding Universal Value. These are summarised in Figure 13.3 and mapped out on Figure 13.1.

There is clear surviving evidence of the continuing traditional agro-pastoral system including field walls, the evidence of successive phases of enclosure, and many surviving farmhouses dating from the 16th century onwards. The farms continue to practice agro-pastoral farming with hefted flocks of Herdwick sheep and continuing use of fell pastures and common land.

There is good evidence of past phases of use, going back to the prehistoric period, within this continuing tradition. Relict elements include evidence of industry based on woodland and stone quarries and the use of water power. The market town of Ambleside and other settlements established in the medieval periods flourish and still serve their surrounding communities as well as adapting to new functions such as tourism.

This valley has extensive evidence of the discovery and appreciation of the Lake District as a rich cultural landscape. There are examples such as Rydal Hall and its landscape demonstrating the adaptation of the landscape to meet picturesque sensibilities. The numerous villas exemplify the attraction of this part of the Lake District to those with an interest in the Lake District's romantic qualities. Prime among these are the successive homes of William Wordsworth and his writings on his response to this landscape.

The Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside valley has also inspired numerous landscape painters including J. M. W. Turner, Joseph Wright of Derby, Edward Lear and Francis Towne.

The Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley also has strong evidence of the development of the conservation movement in the Lake District. The absence of any railway from Windermere to Grasmere demonstrates the success of the opposition to its construction in 1846 and again in 1876, 1886 and 1889. The first campaign involved Wordsworth and

the second John Ruskin. The National Trust, a key component of the Lake District model for protecting cultural landscape, has acquired considerable property to preserve it in perpetuity.

The Grasmere, Rydal and Ambleside Valley functions as an authentic agro-pastoral landscape intertwined with surviving villas and designed landscapes, substantial artistic activities and ongoing management by the conservation bodies including the National Trust and Lake District National Park Authority. It contains many examples of all the attributes that have been identified for the Lake District relating to traditional agriculture and industry, settlement, artistic inspiration, villas and designed landscape and the success of the early conservation movement.



**FIGURE 13.18** Reflections on Rydal Water



FIGURE 13.19 Aerial view of the vale of Grasmere from the south. Thirlmere is visible in the distance.



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