Thomas Denton's *Perambulation*: two counties, three kingdoms, and four nations history?

Introduction

Thomas Denton's *Perambulation of Cumberland, 1687–1688, including Descriptions of Westmorland, the Isle of Man and Ireland*[1] has been subject to little modern scrutiny. Previously in possession of the Lowther family of Westmorland, the 189-page manuscript is now in the custody of the Carlisle Archive Centre. To historians of Cumbria, its parish-by-parish documentation of land rights has proved of enduring value. Accompanying this, however, are wide ranging historical narratives and polemics that present further insights.

This essay argues for the text's significance for studying regional and national identities. The *Perambulation* integrates and excludes English and non-English denizens in a manner reminiscent of our understanding of the 'British' problem in early modern England. The work considers England's national constituents – county communities, social classes, and ethnic groups – in multifarious ways, while applying different appreciations to the surrounding nations or kingdoms of Scotland, Ireland, and the Isle of Man. This article will explore these features in Denton's text and point to a wider framework for analysing comparable works.

Before perusing the *Perambulation*, it is worth surveying the historiographical landscape. Modern historical research about Britain usually takes the 'British Isles' and its composite nations as units of study. The perspective of a 'New British History' still dominates.[2] This approach developed from J.G.A. Pocock's 'plea' to eschew 'Anglocentric' historiography and examine the interaction between the Isles' national communities.[3] Many have overtly

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[1] A.J.L. Winchester and M. Wane eds., T. Denton, *A Perambulation of Cumberland 1687–1688, including Descriptions of Westmorland, the Isle of Man and Ireland* (Woodbridge, 2003) (hereafter, *Perambulation*).

[2] Ian McBride, 'J.G.A. Pocock and the Politics of British History', in *Four Nations Approaches to Modern 'British' History: A (Dis)United Kingdom?*, ed. N. Lloyd-Jones and M.M. Scull (London, 2018), p. 34.

[3] J.G.A. Pocock, 'British History: A Plea for a New Subject', *Journal of Modern History* 47 (Dec., 1975).

criticised Pocockian approaches, whether for neglecting 'individual nations',[4] nation-building relative to state-building,[5] and a genuine 'three kingdoms' or 'four nations' history more generally. Perhaps particular historians have committed these oversights, but rarely with the intention of reinstituting the old English history. Pocock's original project certainly supported the study of interactive national units. A British/archipelagic approach has been more critically qualified by focuses upon transnational, European, and imperial contexts,[6] yet avowed 'British' historians did not remain closed to these.[7]

What British scholars have more consistently resisted is a descent to localities, despite gestures of openness.[8] Pocock advocated a multiregional approach, comprising study of 'lowland and highland zones'.[9] This has remained less acknowledged, despite much historical research remaining focused on smaller units as exceptions from or exemplars of the national picture of 'England', 'Britain', etc. Recent histories have convincingly advocated the inclusion of regional subject-matters in early modern history, from minority ethnic groups to county networks.[10] We might even rehabilitate older studies of 'county communities', the explanatory purchase of which was undermined, but never refuted, by newer approaches. Diverse conceptions of regional communities and their histories are evident among local

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[4] Lloyd-Jones and Scull, 'A New Plea for an Old Subject? Four Nations History for the Modern Period', in their eds., *Four Nations*, p. 25.
[5] S.G. Ellis, 'Tudor Northumberland: British History in an English County', in *Kingdoms United? Great Britain and Ireland since 1500: Integration and Diversity*, ed. S.J. Connolly (Dublin, 1999), p. 29.
[6] See, for examples, D. Armitage, *Greater Britain, 1516–1776: Essays in Atlantic History* (Aldershot, 2004); C. Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999); J. Ohlmeyer and A. MacIness eds., *The Stuart Kingdoms in the Seventeenth Century: Awkward Neighbours* (Dublin, 2002).
[7] J. Morrill, 'Introduction', in B. Bradshaw and Morrill eds., *The British Problem, c.1534–1707* (London, 1996), pp. 17–18; J. Scott, *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Troubles in a European Context* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 14.
[8] D. Cannadine, 'British History as a 'new subject': Politics, perspectives and prospects' in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. A. Grant and K. Stringer (London, 1995), p. 25. For examples, see J. Kerrigan, *Archipelagic English: Literature, History, and Politics, 1603–1707* (Oxford, 2010), p. 27; Lloyd-Jones and Scull, 'New Plea'.
[9] Pocock, 'British History', p. 609.
[10] R. Cust and P. Lake, *Gentry Culture and the Politics of Religion: Cheshire on the Eve of Civil War* (Manchester, 2020); J. Harris, 'Language, Historical Culture and the Gentry of Later Stuart Cornwall and South-West Wales', *Historical Research* 95 (Aug., 2022).

actors[11] and elite scholars[12] (the boundaries are porous) in early modern Britain. This persisted in the face of national historiography, and seventeenth-century antiquarian scholarship may have even shifted *towards* regional subjects.[13] The region remains important, therefore, whether as social 'structure' or subjective 'consciousness'.

If national identity is not necessarily dominant, it cannot be treated as dormant. Attempts to bridge national or 'British' historiography with analysis of provincial realities have proved fleeting. Focus upon a specific text may illustrate the warp and weft of 'regional' and 'national' identities, rather than seeing them as opposed. Denton's *Perambulation* crossed several temporal and spatial crossroads. The work primarily surveys Cumberland, yet appends studies of Westmorland and two non-English nations (Ireland and the Isle of Man), as well ruminating on English history and Anglo-Scottish relations. It unravels England's internal and external vulnerabilities, rather than being a simple expression of regional, national, or 'British' identity.

The *Perambulation* has been subject to incidental glances from modern historians, which will be considered below. As with much regional surveying, there remains, perhaps, the suspicion that only its quantitative data or antiquarian lore remains interesting.[14] A.J.L. Winchester, the co-editor of a modern edition, has made strong cases for its insights, whether regarding the Pilgrimage of Grace[15] or Cumbrian landowning practices.[16] Our study will look, somewhat

[11] A. Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2012).
[12] J. Broadway, *'No historie so meete': Gentry Culture and the Development of Local History in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Manchester, 2012); R. Mayhew, *Enlightenment Geography: The Political Languages of British Geography, 1650–1850* (New York, 2000).
[13] S. Mendyk, *'Speculum Britanniae': Regional Study, Antiquarianism, and Science in Britain to 1700* (Toronto, 1989).
[14] J.D. Marshall, 'Agrarian Wealth and Social Structure in Pre-Industrial Cumbria', *Economic History Review* 33 (Nov., 1980), p. 504.
[15] R.W. Hoyle and Winchester, 'A Lost Source for the Rising of 1536 in North-West England', *English Historical Review* 118 (Feb. 2003).
[16] Winchester, 'Regional Identity in the Lake Counties: Land Tenure and the Cumbrian Landscape', *Northern History* 43 (2005).

contrastingly, to 'subjective' identity formation: how Denton narrates regions and nations inside county boundaries and the surrounding Isles.

An English nation in two counties?

The interaction between local and national history is key to the *Perambulation*. Denton's geographical focuses inwards and outwards, incorporating Cumberland and Westmorland into England's glories, while also highlighting their peculiarity. The narration of national and regional unity also comprises attacks upon those responsible for disunity, across economic, political, and religious spheres. Denton's 'England' is underlined by local pride; but also undermined by partiality for and against certain constituents of it. The English nation/state appears integrative rather than uniform, but also exclusive rather than comprehensive, especially on the vexed questions of religion and landholding. Attempts to harmonise interests are, as they were for many seventeenth-century thinkers, combined with disregard towards recalcitrant elements.[17]

Who was Thomas Denton?[18] His family was one of the oldest in Cumberland, and had close relations with the crown prior to the Civil Wars. The Dentons were one of the few Cumberland families to support Charles I, and many members retreated south during the fighting. They re-established links with the court at the Restoration. Thomas (1637–1698), a staunch Anglican, held several local offices. He wound down his civic duties in the late 1670s and 1680s, but developed an interest in antiquarianism. Supporters of church and king tended to dominate antiquarian scholarship in this period,[19] putting him in good company. In the 1680s, he accepted a commission from MP Sir John Lowther to produce a survey of Cumberland. Lowther, a landowner whose holdings spanned both counties, was of similar

[17] J.P. Sommerville, *Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–40* (London, 1986).
[18] Winchester and Wane, Introduction to *Perambulation*.
[19] D.C. Douglas, *English Scholars, 1660–1730* (London, 1951).

stock. He and Denton, despite formerly aligning with the court, supported the Glorious Revolution. Both attended, therefore, to 'local' and 'national' concerns, and took similar political stances regarding them.

Denton's *Perambulation* amalgamates several sources. Accompanying his original research is manuscript material from the *History of Cumberland* by his distant kinsman John Denton (d.1617),[20] and English/British studies by Camden, Speed, Lambarde, and Holinshed. The text generally follows their methodology of studying counties through administrative units of ward and parish. Though sections are taken wholesale from these, Denton's re-arrangement and interpretations allow us to place his work in the politics of late seventeenth-century Britain, much as political historians have analysed the editorship of texts produced in close proximity to Denton's *Perambulation*, including the 1695 version of Camden's *Britannia*.[21] Denton's ultimate intention when reproducing passages verbatim might elude us, but the deliberateness of such inclusions and their integration with his own voice signal their pertinence to his time, including the importance assigned to tradition and authority.

The significant question, for us, is how Denton combined regional and national subjects. In a general sense, Denton's reliance upon older authors sees him recuperate an Elizabethan compound of local antiquarianism with national patriotism,[22] presenting it as relevant in his time. Specifically, there is much focus on propertied individuals and families, perhaps unsurprisingly given Denton's background, political identity, and the nature of Cumbrian tenancies. The holdings, heroics, piety and charity of major landowners all receive marked attention, themes sympathetic to the work's intended recipient, Lowther. The *Perambulation*

[20] A.J.L. Winchester ed., *John Denton's History of Cumberland* (Woodbridge, 2010).
[21] J. Hone, 'John Darby and the Whig Canon', *HJ* 64 (Dec. 2021); T. Roebuck, 'Edmund Gibson's 1695 *Britannia* and Late-Seventeenth-Century British Antiquarian Scholarship', *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 5 (2020).
[22] G. Parry, *The Trophies of Time: English Antiquarians of the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1995), ch.1.

affirms the 'good reputation' of many an 'ancient familie';[23] Denton uncovers their social relations and lineage, successes at court, and gallantry through the ages.[24] Indeed, Cumberland and Westmorland appear to be an assemblage of such families. Although this is not unusual for the age, the work's focus on individuals and the 'genealogical over the topographical'[25] revealed a distinct conception of the counties.

Denton's gentrified 'county community' is not at odds with the English kingdom. The 'symbiotic relationship' detected between local and national identity by many historians of early modern England is evident here.[26] Denton's conception of 'England' underlay this, and is worth considering initially. His is not an ethnically exclusive nation, privileging or burying the inheritance of the Britons, Anglo-Saxons, or Normans. This was characteristic of many antiquarians and polemicists of the age: English and 'British' history was becoming a battleground in which the dominance or submission of one ethnic influence evidenced a parable or defined contemporary political identity.[27] Denton incorporates with equanimity the contributions of Anglo-Saxon, Norman, and Plantagenet monarchs.[28] He initially avows to explore the counties' and nation's 'first inhabitants and foreign invaders', but not to establish the legitimacy of one group: though the Normans 'conquered', there is no chasm between their baronies and the divisions of Anglo-Saxon Cumberland and Westmorland.[29] Norman law is seen to uphold the administrative, legal, and even linguistic heritage of the Anglo-Saxons.[30] He alerts the reader to Brittonic, Saxon, and Norman influences in the counties,

[23] *Perambulation*, pp. 185, 310, 399.
[24] Ibid., pp. 64–71, 81, 89–96, and *passim*.
[25] Broadway, *'No historie'*, p. 39.
[26] K.J. Kesselring, "Berwick is Our England": Local and National Identities in an Elizabethan Border Town', in *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, eds. N.L. Jones and D. Woolf (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 94.
[27] Kidd, *Identities*.
[28] *Perambulation*, pp. 74, 84–86, 111, 139, 418, 422.
[29] Ibid., pp. 30, 41.
[30] Ibid., pp. 35–42.

sometimes in combination.[31] He notes Scottish, Roman, and Irish roots and remnants impartially, deferring to his sources but with no sense of exclusion.[32] In this sense, Denton illustrates a non-partisan commitment to the inherited remains comprising England's history.

Regarding the contemporary counties' place within the national community, a pluralistic attitude prevails. Denton takes pride in various Cumberland and Westmorland localities. He praises specific communities' bounties and ingenuities, including successes relative to the county and country.[33] But he rarely hints at antagonism with the centre. His accentuation of certain localities reinforces national strength and their contribution to the English polity. He presents criticism, too, of localities which fail to uphold law and possess certain deficiencies.[34] He criticises individuals' 'usurp[ations]' of crown rights, and rebellions by 'the northern English' from the Normans to Henry VIII's time.[35] As such, the counties appear no better or worse than the rest of England.

This intertwining of locality, county, nation, and state shows an integrative identity. But Denton's conception of the national community is also exclusionary. Any openness regarding England's migrations, monarchs, and regional components does not extend to oppositional forces. Denton praises loyalty to the crown throughout. In recent times, the *Perambulation* expresses profound regret for England's 'late troubles'.[36] Denton severely criticises the 'rebellion', its 'Oliverian' politicians, and persecution of Cavaliers, clerics, and landowners.[37] The 'happy restauration' and return of estates receive high praise.[38] Regarding the past, he often assimilates his voice to that of other antiquaries. A lengthy genealogy of two

[31] Ibid., pp. 99, 164, 219, 310, 315.
[32] Ibid., pp. 82, 210, 362.
[33] Ibid., pp. 105, 120, 140, and *passim*.
[34] Ibid., pp. 174–177, 216, 229.
[35] Ibid., pp. 71, 406.
[36] Ibid., p. 418.
[37] Ibid., p. 151.
[38] Ibid., p. 260.

Westmorland families, incorporating material from the jurist Matthew Hale (1609–1676), for example, scorns regional rebellion, whether against early Norman or Plantagenet kings.[39] It praises nobles who avoid all 'broyles & differences at home', attending only to 'forain differences' with the Scots and displaying loyalty to the 'prince & countrey'; it criticises those acting 'confederate in a faction' and seeking 'popular pretence'.[40] Though attending to the past, the modern implications are clear.

In these instances, the *Perambulation* clearly excludes certain tendencies. In other cases, Denton suppresses elements of past or present disunity. He does not acknowledge, for example, the persistence of a northern cultural identity or lowland prejudices about the north in his time.[41] More specifically, in addressing the Civil Wars, Denton overlooks most of the Cumberland gentry taking a neutral or Parliamentary stance,[42] and the struggles royalists, including the Lowthers, had in recruiting tenants as soldiers.[43] Divisions between 'centre' and 'periphery' had a long heritage in Westmorland and Cumberland. The 'north' was perceived as troublesome, and formed the nucleus for many of the civil wars and rebellions against Tudor rulers.[44] Yet despite charting the histories of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century noblemen, and border service against Scottish incursions, Denton fails to recognise the dislocation this created between national and regional forces. He deals with individuals' 'rebellion' or 'treason', whether the ninth Earl of Northumberland's part in the Gunpowder Plot or Leonard Dacre's participation in the Rising of the North, in transitory terms.[45] For the

[39] Ibid., pp. 434–435, 449–454.
[40] Ibid., p. 455.
[41] H. Jewell, 'North and South: The Antiquity of the Great Divide', *NH* 27 (1991).
[42] Winchester and Wane, Introduction, p. 2.
[43] S. Barber, 'The People of Northern England and Attitudes towards the Scots, 1639–1651: "The Lamb and the Dragon Cannot be Reconciled"', *NH* 35 (1999), pp. 98–100, 105.
[44] Jewell, 'North', pp. 14–19.
[45] *Perambulation*, pp. 95, 139, 149.

most part, he ignores noble resistance: the participation of John Lowther's ancestor, Richard, in the Rising of the North is notably omitted.

Although Denton discusses military border service romantically and critically, something explored below, the reader gains little impression of tensions this caused within England. The text acknowledges its fostering of national unity against the Scots, but not disunity between noblemen and the crown. The March units bordering Scotland differed profoundly from 'lowland English norms':[46] private military forces held sway under their Wardens (only nominally employed by the crown) and other families, leaving monarchs with little direct influence in the region.[47] Henry VIII's and other monarchs' attempts to curtail their strength receive little attention. Nor do the Tudor writers who Denton drew upon, including Camden, who viewed the borders as 'savage' and strange.[48] English lords feuded amongst themselves across the region,[49] and little solidarity held between eastern and western borderers.[50] Illegal activity prospered: the Wardens and their retinue often traduced the boundary between 'law-enforcer and raider';[51] many were more interested in themselves, their kin, or locality than national glory, and some allied with Scottish families.[52] The transition from March to county, as 'regional magnates and border wardens were replaced by a new order of landed aristocracy' was significant, and longstanding cultural differences remained.[53] Denton drew

[46] A. Sargent, 'A Region for the 'Wrong' Reasons: The Far North-West in Early Modern England', in *Frontier and Border Regions in Early Modern Europe*, eds. R. Eßer and S.G. Ellis (Hanover, 2013), p. 103.
[47] M. Arnavigian, 'A County Community or the Politics of the Nation? Border Service and Baronial Influence in the Palatinate of Durham, 1377–1413', *HR* 82 (Feb. 2009); C. Etty, 'A Tudor Solution to the "Problem of the North"? Government and the Marches towards Scotland, 1509–1529', *NH* 39 (2002).
[48] D.L.W. Tough, *The Last Years of a Frontier: A History of the Borders During the Reign of Elizabeth* (Oxford, 1928), pp. 31–33.
[49] Sargent, 'Region', p. 108.
[50] M. Meikle, *A British Frontier? Lairds and Gentlemen in the Eastern Borders* (East Linton, 2004), p. 278.
[51] J. Gray, 'Lawlessness on the Frontier: The Anglo-Scottish Borderlands in the Fourteenth to Sixteenth century', *History and Anthropology* 12 (2001), p. 400.
[52] C. Neville, 'Local Sentiment and the "National" Enemy in Northern England in the Later Middle Ages', *Journal of British Studies* 35 (Oct. 1996), p. 423
[53] Arnavigian, 'County', p. 44; Sargent, 'Region', p. 117

attention to little of this. The *Perambulation* assimilated Cumberland and Westmorland to national norms, only peppering their identity with innocuous local distinctions.

Denton disguises differences between county elites and England's rulers. But such integration sits alongside divisions which he cannot repair, and greets with derision. His approach to religion illustrates his explicit exclusions, as well as desire for unity, in a characteristic manner for the age.[54] In minor ways, things seem well: he notes noble participation in the Crusades and the overcoming of Scandinavian 'paganizme' in Cumbria as successes.[55] He looks kindly upon England's ecclesiastical past: hermits, monasteries and monks receive neutral or positive mention.[56] This was not peculiar: many Anglicans regretted the sharper edges of the Reformation, and it is unlikely, as some have contended,[57] that by occasionally noting the conversion of abbeys into parish churches Denton was dismissing rather than preserving former glories. The *Perambulation* also attests to the church's recent strength and recovery. It documents the Bishop of Carlisle's palace, damaged in 1648, being rebuilt by churchmen.[58] In Sebergham, Denton observes that the Book of Common Prayer was 'red in this church in all the late times of trouble & never had a phanatick in this parish, neither then, nor since.'[59] In these areas, exemplary practices flourish.

But Cumberland and Westmorland also become theatres to prosecute national *enemies*. Denton frequently criticises aberrant religious practices, and the *Perambulation* may even highlight the counties as decayed parts of England. He marks with profound regret parishioners' ill-treatment of clerics,[60] and the failure of some institutions to recover from the

[54] D. Hirst, 'Literature and National Identity', in *The Cambridge History of Early Modern English Literature*, eds. D. Loewenstein and J. Mueller (Cambridge, 2003), p. 635.
[55] *Perambulation*, pp. 68, 220–221, 240, 344, 410.
[56] Ibid., pp. 68, 103, 193–195, 245, 309, 325, 327.
[57] H. Lyon, *Memory and the Dissolution of the Monasteries in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2021), p. 157.
[58] *Perambulation*, pp. 243–244.
[59] Ibid., p. 250.
[60] Ibid., pp. 151, 351.

'time of rebellion'.[61] He reserves especial scorn for Quakers and 'phanaticks'. Neglect and remoteness from a parish church apparently causes the infestation of the former,[62] whom he paints as meeting in 'high-crags', seducing others with their 'crafty speakers'.[63]

Curiously, Denton does not pursue Roman Catholics or 'popery'. Though Catholicism was weak in Cumberland, a small number of landed households subscribed.[64] Denton had possible grounds for this. A relative, George Denton of Cardew, was charged with being a papist in 1678.[65] That the present king, James II, was a Catholic, may also account for his equivocation, even if he backed the Glorious Revolution. His failure to attack Presbyterians or Congregationalists may, equally, have been diplomatic. But he does not disguise the dissent of Quakers, 'phanaticks', and lax parishioners: Cumberland and Westmorland appear, like other counties, subject to national divisions. Though Denton presents unity and offers indulgence to some, his partial conception of the national fold is evident regarding others.

Denton combines analysis of national unities and disunities in economic matters, too. Most prominently, he advocates for the rights of property holders, uniting a socioeconomic group with local and national parts, while contending against the rights of tenants. Here, Denton and Lowther survey antagonistic forces. A partial conception of national unity results, again, with Cumberland and Westmorland appearing to contain aberrant elements. Beyond direct 'encomiums' to the Lowthers,[66] Denton upholds the rights of Cumbrian landholders generally, recording their various 'liberties' throughout.[67] He regrets lazy tenants, and records challenging some with threats of violence.[68] His main bugbear is claims of 'tenantright' or

[61] Ibid., p. 262.
[62] Ibid., pp. 121, 150–151, 304.
[63] Ibid., pp. 116–117.
[64] J.A. Hilton, 'The Cumbrian Catholics', *NH* 16 (1980).
[65] C.R. Hudleston and R.S. Boumphrey, *Cumberland Families and Heraldry* (Kendal, 1978), p. 87n.
[66] *Perambulation*, p. 399.
[67] Ibid., pp. 71, 83, 85, and *passim*.
[68] Ibid., p. 354.

terms favourable to tenants. He attacks the 'propagating of that custome', and any 'rebellion' relating to it.[69]

Tenants' customary rights were fiercely contested in Denton's time. Border 'tenantright' allowed tenants to effectively alienate and inherit lands, and access other benefits, in exchange for military service or other goods and services. Rents, fines, and exactions were often minimal,[70] providing the tenant was militarily prepared. Denton included in the *Perambulation* a lengthy treatise – the longest continuous section of the manuscript – against 'tenantright', which combined material from himself and two Cumbrian landowners, Sir John Bankes (1589–1644) and Sir Richard Hutton (1561–1639). This argued that 'tenantright' was tied firmly to border service. Those claiming tenurial rights after Elizabeth's time apparently do so on a 'weak & feeble foundation': the 'pretended custome' never truly existed 'time out of mind'.[71] Landlords' property rights always been absolute and truly 'customary'; tenants, by contrast, assert 'anything to be a custome which is for their advantage'.[72] The text maintains that customary tenants held their lands ultimately 'at will' (at the discretion of landlords);[73] any indulgence during border service was time-limited, and retractable if tenants lacked the fortitude to defend England.[74] Border service was, it underlines, always onerous.[75]

In this sphere, Cumbria contains national enemies – its tenantry discredit England – and is even a focal point for problems. Denton yokes criticism of historic rebellions to tenurial claims, comparing risings of 'the northern English' against William I to claims for tenantright in Henry VIII's time.[76] He criticises the 'notorious rebells' partaking in the Pilgrimage of

[69] Ibid., p. 31.
[70] S.J. Watts, 'Tenant-Right in Early Seventeenth-Century Northumberland', *NH* 6 (1971), p. 64.
[71] *Perambulation*, pp. 470–471, 481.
[72] Ibid., p. 473.
[73] Ibid., p. 465.
[74] Ibid., p. 467.
[75] Ibid., p. 469.
[76] Ibid., p. 406.

Grace for contending for tenantright.[77] This uprising was led mainly by northern nobleman, and mixed religious (mainly Catholic) and political motives: Denton transmutes them into peasant rebellions, maintaining the unity of crown and aristocracy against popular forces. In recent history, tenant challenges are compared to resistance during the 'rebellious times' of the Civil War.[78] Tenantright, rather than being a distinguished local/national inheritance, is conceived as persistently *undermining* the nation.

Clear property rights provide a basis for unity between crown and Cumbrian landowner. The text maintains that when James I made 'this whole British islande one entire monarchie' customary tenants became tenants-at-will or for set years, thus 'extinguishing' their rights.[79] In some border regions, Denton depicts a consensual shift to leases for years occurring, with rent increases naturally following land improvements.[80] Lacking sympathy with tenants in opposition, Denton describes the lords' service to the king as a 'slavery' without 'compensation'.[81] By giving tenants and their heirs inalienable rights, they become masters and threaten landlords' very existence.[82] While Denton's English nation was ethnically and regionally pluralistic, therefore, it entrenched economic inequalities and hierarchies.

The realities of tenantright were muddy: Denton intervened on one side of an argument. James VI and I, once king of Scotland and England, abolished the Marches and offices of Wardens and border service. This left the tenure's status in limbo;[83] James intended to abolish it, too. But Cumbrian and wider 'tenantrights' were upheld by diverse precedents, contests, and concepts of fairness rather than a simple transaction based upon border

[77] Ibid., pp. 468–469, 475.
[78] Ibid., p. 473.
[79] Ibid., p. 386.
[80] Ibid., p. 386.
[81] Ibid., p. 473.
[82] Ibid., pp. 485–490.
[83] Watts, 'Tenant-Right', pp. 71–72.

service.[84] Military service was technically incumbent on all adult males, irrespective of tenure.[85] Tenant rights were regularly altered, and often preceded military service or the sixteenth-century name of 'tenantright'.[86] They coincided with rights copyholders and customary tenants had *without* border service: English tenancies were almost never purely 'at will', nor were customary arrangements set in stone. Even leaseholds were often, on account of border service, granted on favourable terms.[87] As such, both 'the lord's right' and 'the peasant's right to use, transfer and inherit the land' were always shifting variables under ostensibly fixed or 'customary' legal arrangements.[88] Privileges followed less from agreed rights than 'struggle',[89] and either side's resort to unambiguous precedent seems naïve.

As such, the *Perambulation*'s claims fall short. So must modern contentions that we should, as many early modern observers did not, regard tenantright, border tenants, and customary tenures as rigidly separated.[90] Few outside a vociferous landlord class thought that tenurial customs sometimes attached to border service were entirely contingent upon it. Local courts and the Council of the North in James's time often ruled against 'tenantright' holders being treated as tenants-at-will.[91] The judiciary contradicted the king's designs, with a case of 1618–1619 confirming tenants' customary rights on his own Cumberland estates. James claimed to resolve matters by a proclamation of 1620, which ostensibly abolished tenantright as a concomitant of border service.[92]

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[84] R.W. Hoyle, 'An Ancient and Laudable Custom: The Definition and Development of Tenant Right in North-Western England in the Sixteenth Century', *Past & Present* 116 (Aug., 1987).
[85] Tough, *Last Years*, pp. 57–58.
[86] J. McDonell, 'Antecedents of Border Tenant Right', *NH* 30 (1994).
[87] Tough, *Last Years*, p. 58.
[88] R. Brenner, 'Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe', *P&P* 70 (Feb., 1976), p. 38.
[89] McDonell, 'Antecedents', p. 27.
[90] Watts, 'Tenant-Right', p. 67. Cf. McDonell, 'Antecedents', p. 29.
[91] Watts, 'Tenant-Right', pp. 72–74.
[92] Ibid., p. 75.

Many petitions followed, however, and the matter remained unsettled. Prominently, several tenants from Kendal launched a legal challenge in the early 1620s. Denton calls this another 'rebellion'; he reprints their claims, but dismisses them as 'uncharitable and unchristian'.[93] The case came to Star Chamber in 1625, which accepted the tenants' initial contention to focus upon rights regarding inheritance and fines, irrespective of border service. The court confirmed that tenantright was finished, but made the tenants copyholders with customary rights.[94] In self-contradictory verbiage, it concluded that tenants had 'inheritance by the will of the lord'.[95] The simple notion of the king (and Denton), that customary rights were extinguished with border service was, therefore, 'erroneous'.[96] The *Perambulation*'s assurances that most legal cases regarding tenantright since 1603 unambiguously favoured landlords, or that James confirmed the 'law of England' were incorrect.[97] James ventured new ideas in 1620, and without definitive confirmation. Denton makes the 1625 case seem a victory for landlords, while acknowledging that it granted rights of 'inheritance' and extraction only of 'reasonable', if still 'arbitrary', fines.[98] Yet these were the objects of contention. And despite the apparent conversion, even the word 'tenantright' appeared in written documents in the seventeenth century and beyond.[99] Its nominal and real existence persisted after 1603, even after 1620.

After 1625, small landowners survived and even prospered in Cumbria. They upheld customary rights, gained freeholder rights, and even engrossed their estates across the

[93] *Perambulation*, p. 487.
[94] Watts, 'Tenant-Right', pp. 76–78.
[95] T.H.B. Graham, Introduction to *The Barony of Gilsland Lord William Howard's Survey, taken in 1603* (Kendal, 1934), p. xii.
[96] Ibid., p. ix; N. Gregson, 'Tawney Revisited: Custom and the Emergence of Capitalist Class Relations in North-East Cumbria, 1600–1830', *EHR* 42, (Feb., 1989), p. 25.
[97] *Perambulation*, pp. 482, 484.
[98] Ibid., pp. 491–492.
[99] McDonell, 'Antecedents', p. 28

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[100] Landlords lost a number of court cases regarding dues and obligations, tenurial status, and the introduction of higher or more regular fines.[101] Though the Star Chamber ruling left whether fines should be fixed or arbitrary unresolved, by confirming inheritance it diminished the development of leaseholds putting tenants 'at will'.[102] 'Customary' tenures continued to constitute between two-thirds and three-quarters of Cumbrian tenancies into the late eighteenth century,[103] whatever their strict legal status.

We need not judge Denton by our scholarship or sympathies. But the *Perambulation* did not describe or definitively prescribe a situation. It united the interests of magnates and monarchy, laying aside political differences.[104] The text assumes elite concord, but allows national fractures with the tenantry. Furthermore, the *Perambulation*'s prescriptions, like James's, failed to match its descriptions. The text widely documents tenants' rights and gains. Denton notes demesnes which have 'demised to tenants, who now hold their land in tenant-right',[105] and estates where 'Tenantright custome' was instituted or confirmed in Elizabeth's time, and re-affirmed by James without reference to border service.[106] In Crofton, he notes that female heirs waived their inheritance, in keeping with the demands of border service.[107] By acknowledging this exception, however, Denton seems to affirm the rule.

Denton details, without prejudice, a patchwork of rights across Cumberland and Westmorland. He documents diverse fines, rents (including customary ones),[108] duties,[109]

[100] J.V. Beckett, 'The Decline of the Small Landowner in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England: Some Regional Considerations', *Agricultural History Review* 30 (1982); Gregson, 'Tawney', p. 26.
[101] C.E. Searle, 'Custom, Class Conflict and Agrarian Capitalism: The Cumbrian Customary Economy in the Eighteenth Century', *P&P* 110 (Feb., 1986), pp. 112, 121–124.
[102] Gregson, 'Tawney', pp. 25–26.
[103] Searle, 'Custom', p. 109.
[104] Cf. J.H. Hexter, 'Power Struggle, Parliament, and Liberty in Early Stuart England', *Journal of Modern History* 50 (Mar., 1978), p. 42, on James treating parliamentarians as 'tenants-at-will'.
[105] *Perambulation*, p. 82.
[106] Ibid., pp. 198–200.
[107] Ibid., p. 219.
[108] Ibid., pp. 70, 79, 215.
[109] Ibid., pp. 219, 249, 257.

manorial powers,[110] and tenures; landlord rights are never self-explanatory. He notes, in various places, unusual obligations, exemptions, and terms.[111] In several localities, recently sold demesne lands are acknowledged as tenant freeholds and customary tenures.[112] The leasing of demesnes was increasingly common in this period, as landlord absenteeism rose.[113] In Warnell, he notes recently enfranchised tenants performing some services,[114] illustrating a case of negotiation. He exposes, somewhat begrudgingly, Papcastle tenants successfully exempting themselves from fines and tithes.[115] But elsewhere, he notes without hostility the predominance of freeholders on recently acquired lands,[116] customary leases 'for 999 years',[117] and other benefits accruing to tenants.[118] He frequently mutes the notion of tenants being 'at will'. Indeed, he documents estates with 'severall tenures', including freeholders, lessees for lives or years, copyholders, customary tenants, bond tenants, and 'tenant right' holders.[119] The condition of estates being 'part free, part customary' seems widespread.[120]

Although Denton advertises landlords' rights over demesnes and other holdings, therefore, he also notes the usage and ownership rights of tenants within them. Even when he asserts landlord strength, its contingent aspects are evident: he notes, albeit favourably, tenants being 'compell[ed]' to accept different terms and landlords taking 'advantage' of others' 'poverty' to impose leases for lives.[121] The text commends Elizabeth I for outfoxing border tenants;[122] but also neutrally records the letting of demesnes to tenants during her reign.[123] These

[110] Ibid., pp. 165, 309, 430.
[111] Ibid., p. 261.
[112] Ibid., pp. 140, 205.
[113] P. Roebuck, 'Absentee Landownership in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries: A Neglected Factor in English Agrarian History', *AgHR* 21 (1973).
[114] *Perambulation*, p. 249.
[115] Ibid., p. 149.
[116] Ibid., p. 351.
[117] Ibid., p. 161.
[118] Ibid., pp. 172–173, 330.
[119] Ibid., pp. 238, 367.
[120] Ibid., p. 309.
[121] Ibid., pp. 281, 386.
[122] Ibid., p. 481.
[123] Ibid., p. 353.

admissions make clear that property rights were moulded by particular situations, rather than self-evidently favouring landlords.

A disparity is evident between real diversity and ideal domination; between pluralistic contestation and national (hierarchal) unity. This mismatch is also apparent in Denton's own dealings. Denton enfranchised several tenants from the 1660s to 1690s, and acknowledged 'Customary Tennts' and rights of inheritance in exchange for money.[124] Privately, he jotted down customs and statutes supporting tenants against landlords.[125] Indeed, the *Perambulation*, albeit in the third person, acknowledges some of Denton's enfranchisements of tenants, as well as those of his relative George Denton's.[126] These actions and recordings show that Denton was not an utterly bigoted anti-tenant. Many such agreements were also compatible with opposition to tenantright for border service. Yet they are discordant with Denton's assertions of the absolute rights of landowners. In private affairs, he combined sales of lands with protestations of his 'good right full power & lawfull authority' over remaining parcels.[127] Such abstract claims were negotiable, rather than being conclusive.

John Lowther was equally aware of hedges to his power: an earlier manuscript delivered to him by Denton detailed the dues owed to the crown around Penrith.[128] Like many Cumbrian landlords, the Lowthers were locked in legal conflicts with their tenants.[129] The Dentons held lands from others precariously, sometimes contiguously with their tenants. These contingencies receive oblique mention. Thomas, for example, held lands by copyhold of inheritance from the Dean and Chapter of Carlisle, providing rents and 'service […] according to the Custome'. Upon death, this inheritance was secured by 'agreement &

[124] C(arlisle) A(rchive) C(entre), DX/46/BRA/126/5, 6, 14; D/LONS/L5/1/51/1.
[125] Bodleian Library, MS Top. Cumb. C. 1, f. 70.
[126] *Perambulation*, pp. 162, 218, 222.
[127] CAC, DX/46/BRA/126/6.
[128] CAC, D/LONS/L12/4/2/4.
[129] Gregson, 'Tawney', p. 25; Searle, 'Custom', p. 119.

bargain': Denton's son, also Thomas, made his case in the manor court in 1699.[130] Previous Dentons challenged the Bishop of Carlisle's rights;[131] and indeed Thomas defended his rights against the Dean in the court of chancery in the 1660s.[132] Denton's *Perambulation* merely related that the lands were held by a 'lease for 21 years',[133] a precarious and ambiguous arrangement. Other relatives suffered losses in this period: George Denton sold lands in the 1670s and 1680s, including to Lowther, after accruing debts.[134] The *Perambulation* mentions the sales, though not their cause.[135] But the text acknowledged George's father, also George (d.1667), selling family estates after Thomas 'was bound' for him concerning a debt.[136] Lowther and Thomas themselves exchanged lands,[137] something the *Perambulation* acknowledged.[138]

Nonetheless, disguise was common: the reader gets no appreciation of 'party battles and the struggle for personal and family political domination' which were common among Cumbria's landed elites this period.[139] The *Perambulation* fails even to mention Denton's kinsman John, whose *History* was a major source. John's litigiousness may have sealed his omission: he fiercely challenged other landowners, including the church, in court on behalf of the crown and himself.[140] Lowther, meanwhile, is admitted to hold a farm from the Bishop of Carlisle 'for many generations by leases of 3 lives', with the potential instability (or customary inheritance) here unremarked upon.[141] Thomas had his own debts to Lowther, and we have evidence from 1668 of his supplications on this matter, as well as assurances to pursue

[130] CAC, D/LONS/L12/4/4.
[131] J. Wilson, 'The First Historian of Cumberland', *Scottish Historical Review* 8 (Oct., 1910), p. 10.
[132] National Archives, C 10/69/28; C 10/476/64.
[133] *Perambulation,* p. 247.
[134] Hudleston and Boumphrey, *Cumberland,* p. 87.
[135] *Perambulation,* pp. 218, 236.
[136] Ibid., p. 169.
[137] CAC, D/LONS/L5/1/51/1.
[138] *Perambulation,* p. 288.
[139] C. Brooks, 'Public Finance and Political Stability: The Administration of the Land Tax, 1688–1720', *HJ* 17 (Jun., 1974), pp. 291–292.
[140] Wilson, 'First Historian'.
[141] *Perambulation,* p. 243.

George Denton's arrears.[142] But he refrained from exposing such submission, despite its possible fitness for tenants, or other conflicts among the landlord class.

What is the result? The *Perambulation* partly unifies the nation, integrating historical migrants and local communities and individuals into the polity. Their distinctiveness does not undermine the nation/state; it provides unity rather than uniformity. Denton lays much aside to assure this image, particularly conflict within the north and between it and lowland England. He diminished conflicting interests in his own time, and among his social peers. Denton also argued against recalcitrant forces within Cumbria and the nation, however. Religious and economic malcontents frustrate a sense of unity, making it an ambition rather than a reality. This reality intrudes in various ways, from Denton's polemical counter-arguments to his description of events and arrangements contrary to his other theses. As such, there are both unifying and divisive moments in the nation's conception.

Cumberland and Westmorland are integrated in many ways, but also emerge bruised. Denton's attribution of religious heterodoxy to distance from ministerial control echoes tropes of the dangers of peripheral areas. His analysis of tenantright brackets the situation similarly. Rather than seeing tenantright as contiguous with tenurial compromises in the longer past or wider English/British scene, he identifies them as a local deformity. County identity becomes, here, dangerous: although Denton regards Cumbria's landowning class favourably, certain features mark the region as troublesome. Somewhat unwittingly, Denton presents the two counties not only as subject to national divisions, but also as peculiarly divided from the English core.

[142] CAC, D/LONS/L/1/1/17/5.

Four nations and kingdoms?

Disunity intrudes in other ways. Despite the ostensible focus upon two English counties, other nations appear: the 'British' problem of multiple communities under one sovereign is clear. Rather than being sites of retreat from the nation or epitomising English unity, the Cumbrian counties become places of multinational friction. Denton's excisions and analyses again reveal insecurities, rather than harmony, between parts. England's dominance is asserted, rather than demonstrated; its national boundaries appear porous, rather than definitive. As with his unifying and dividing of Englishmen, Denton's prescriptions and descriptions of Scotland, Ireland, and the Isle of Man follow from his political prejudices. The Scottish and Manx communities occupy a mediatory position, subject to criticisms but also portrayed as happily in unison (or parallel) with England, whereas the Irish represent a firm 'other' to English norms.

The Scots might have aroused scorn. While Marcher life drew many Cumbrians away from metropolitan affiliations, the Anglo-Scottish conflict also enhanced national solidarity and links with the centre.[143] Anglo-Scottish relations during the late medieval period, especially on the borders, were marked 'overwhelmingly by animosity';[144] and distrust and hostility defined relations from the union of crowns (1603), through the Civil Wars to Denton's time.[145] Denton is certainly hostile towards the remnants of border service and Civil War 'rebellion' in England, both of which the Scots were enmeshed in. Yet he is curiously even-handed towards them (as with the Catholic community), and does not emphasise these strands of history. He elides contemporary contests, and the structural problem of governing multiple kingdoms.

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[143] J. Schultz, *National Identity and the Anglo-Scottish Borderlands, 1552–1652* (Woodbridge, 2019).
[144] Neville, 'Sentiment', p. 435.
[145] T. Harris, *Restoration: Charles II and his Kingdoms, 1660–1685* (London, 2007), chs.2 and 6.

As with his approach to Catholicism, adherence to the established political constitution appears to win out. The text praises the 'happy union' of crowns,[146] James I and VI making 'this whole British islande one entire monarchie',[147] and the current monarch's unified 'dominions'.[148] Elizabeth is said to have quickly 'foresaw' that James would 'unite both kingdomes'.[149] Admittedly, Denton notes historic conflicts. He upholds the fealty of Scottish kings to Anglo-Saxon monarchs,[150] and legitimacy of Edward I's suzerainty over Scotland.[151] He does not regard such accounts of overlordship, drawn from earlier antiquarians, critically.[152] But he also makes no case for Scottish submission, and he includes Hale's words anticipating the modern alliance, regretting Edward's and Baliol's broils given their ultimate 'affinity'. Despite documenting English victories, the *Perambulation* notes that 'instead of union […] jealousies' continued from the fourteenth century onwards.[153] Regarding the 'late civill warres', Denton only briefly notes the use of beacons to warn of Scots (themselves survivals of 'Border service […] before the union').[154] Even in ancient times, his narrative distinguishes Scottish incursions from 'invading forreiners',[155] marking them as domestic disputants. A brief passage, repeated from Camden, recalls 'Picts and Scots' overrunning the Britons after the Roman withdrawal.[156] But he does not translate this juxtaposition into modern times, pushing domineering claims. The text gestures, instead, towards contemporary 'union'.

[146] Ibid., p. 469.
[147] Ibid., p. 386.
[148] Ibid., p. 29.
[149] Ibid., p. 260.
[150] Ibid., p. 310.
[151] Ibid., p. 440.
[152] Cf. Etty, 'Solution', p. 226.
[153] *Perambulation,* pp. 440–441.
[154] Ibid., p. 59.
[155] Ibid., p. 30.
[156] Ibid., p. 393.

Nonetheless, the *Perambulation* sometimes bristles towards the Scots. Denton recalls his ancestors being 'ready at their arms' to 'expulse the Scots' before the union'.[157] At Askerton, he memorialises in emotional language a land serjeant's readiness to 'expulse the Scots, when they made their inroads upon them'.[158] He notes, sombrely, that nearby settlements diminished, because 'in times of hostility […] the Scots burnt all the towns they came into.'[159] Kirkandrews apparently suffered 'dureing the hostility with the Scots', 'troublesome neighbours' whose 'theft & rapine' left it 'impoverished'.[160] He details from John Denton Scaleby inhabitants retreating to Carlisle, because 'the Scots did so tyronize over the countrey',[161] and quotes Camden on the 'martiall disposition' of families performing border service.[162] Recollections of military fortifications lead to aspersions elsewhere. At Upperby and Carlisle, he notes William Rufus's actions to guard against 'the incursions of the Scots, who about that time did miserably infest and depopulate this countrey'.[163] The construction of sanctuaries from Edward II's time onwards receives similar commemoration,[164] while the re-erection of Pendragon castle, after its wasting by David II in 1341, highlights English fortitude.[165] Other memories spark fond recollections. Denton writes proudly, for example, of his ancestors capturing and ransoming 'a Scotch nobleman' at Flodden Field.[166] Flodden, and another sixteenth century victory, Solway Moss, receive occasional commendations.[167]

But Denton does not use memories to evoke hostility. He demarcates these events as in the past. Kendal Castle is now a 'heap of stones';[168] Pendragon has lost its military function. The

[157] Ibid., p. 59.
[158] Ibid., p. 369.
[159] Ibid., p. 370.
[160] Ibid., p. 386.
[161] Ibid., p. 379.
[162] Ibid., p. 385.
[163] Ibid., pp. 258, 263.
[164] Ibid., pp. 360.
[165] Ibid., p. 403.
[166] Ibid., p. 248.
[167] Ibid., pp. 328, 387, 404.
[168] Ibid., p. 416.

leasing of crown lands in Carlisle to Wardens and 'men of power & dominion in time of open hostility with the Scotch nation' has passed.[169] Denton's memories constitute a fragment – much like Cumbria's ruins – to be wistfully passed over rather than to motivate present feelings. For any lingering hostilities, Denton celebrates the union today, and disdains survivals of the period, whether tenantright or military activity. Ironically, the Anglo-Scottish conflict prompts Denton to exclude subjects *within* England (those claiming tenantrights) more than those without (the Scots, whom he comprehends as Britons). Apart from tenurial claims, he also detects contemporary problems with baronial infighting, a reality he equally regrets among English noblemen in past ages.[170] The men of Kirkandrews, a border town, are apparently 'gentleman-like'. But resembling their 'ancestors' hostile figure' creates problems: they 'become a law unto themselves', and continue to engage in litigation and bouts with the Scots.[171] Denton regrets this, and expresses equanimity towards Scottish combatants. Scotland intrudes on the text, therefore, more to allow inter-national unity than a parochial Cumbrian or patriotic English identity.

In this case, county historiography looks outward. What of other British nations Denton encounters? Denton includes summaries of the Isle of Man and Ireland following his county perambulations. Both communities are thought relevant to the regional story, even if demarcated as adjuncts made possible by having some remaining 'pages unstained'.[172] An aloofness seems common towards both 'Celtic' outliers: their accounts are based largely upon Camden and Elizabethan authorities, and are broadly condescending towards their subjects. But in re-presenting and interpolating within older material, divergent attitudes emerge. Both communities seem to undermine the unity of the British realm, but with Man, we get an

[169] Ibid., p. 259.
[170] Ibid., p. 348.
[171] Ibid., pp. 386–387.
[172] Ibid., p. 32.

acceptance of difference (beyond the acclamations of 'union' with Scotland), while with Ireland we get true boundary setting.

Man, then as now, was a constitutional anomaly within 'British' domains. It was a sub-kingdom of Norway until 1266, after which Scottish and English sovereigns contended for it. The latter gained supremacy in 1333. Its fourteenth- and fifteenth-century rulers were denominated 'kings'. Though mainly called Lords of Man since, the regal title had continued currency.[173] Perhaps more significantly, the island's polity remained mostly autonomous: it was ruled since 1405 by the Stanley family (earls of Derby since 1485, Lord Lieutenants of Lancashire and Cheshire, and reliable allies of the crown). They held significant lands there, and exercised a variety of prerogative rights. The Manx community retained its laws, parliament, and judiciary, which governed with the Lordship and his officers.[174]

How did Denton approach Man? Partly with nonchalance: in the county surveys, it crops up as a place one can see,[175] or to import goods from.[176] He notes landholders of Manx descent and Stanley holdings in England. The island seems even more of an afterthought than Ireland (though before it in the manuscript), Denton announces that 'I was cast upon [Man's] shore by distress of weather, upon my Irish voyage'.[177] His journey there appears accidental: while the Scots bring historical baggage, Man can be looked upon with detachment.

Nonetheless, Denton introduces criticisms of the island which were uncharacteristic of the period. Seventeenth-century English histories of Man often endorsed the island's good laws,

[173] J. Stanley, *A Message sent from the Earl of Derby Governour of the Isle of Man* (York, 1649); T. Thornton, 'Lordship and Sovereignty in the Territories of the English Crown: Sub-Kingship and Its Implications, 1300–1600', *JBS* 60 (Oct. 2021).
[174] J.R. Dickinson, *The Lordship of Man under the Stanleys: Government and Economy in the Isle of Man, 1580–1704* (Manchester, 1996).
[175] *Perambulation*, pp. 100, 113, 146.
[176] Ibid., p. 413.
[177] Ibid., p. 32.

bountiful commodities, and harmonious relations.[178] The *Perambulation* allows that '[t]his island stands like a tryumph upon the sea', before describing its geography in neutral terms.[179] Denton offers social criticism, however, scorning some Manx myths, particularly about St Patrick. He accepts Camden's observation that Manxmen 'hate theft & rapine', but adds that 'they are very poor & lazy, as does evidently appears by the meanness of their habits and the barrenness of their lands, as well as their habitations, all of which are badges of ill husbandry.'[180] As with the Cumbrian tenantry, Denton's offers class-tinged condescension. English visitors during this period often commented, at least privately, on the island's poverty and privations;[181] many administrators found themselves battling Manx tenants and their peculiar customs. But English historians emphasised satiety and accord. Denton did not, rendering Man another theatre of English and Cumbrian troubles.

As with Scotland, however, Denton refrains from harsher criticism or asserting English supremacy. He does not probe Man's constitutional status, a vexed question during this period. Man became notorious for 'smuggling' after the 1650s, partly due to its geography, but also its constitution. Man's Lords, thinking the island free from England's Navigation Acts, allowed foreign vessels to land, setting their own (low) customs rates and tolerating the movement of goods in smaller vessels to England. The English Treasury began sending customs officials to Man in the 1670s and 1680s; but these tended to be rebuffed, sometimes violently, by the indigenous community and Stanley administration.[182]

Denton ignores these ructions, even eulogising Man's independence. Some historians have detected a respectful pluralism in English approaches to Britain's minor nations, including

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[178] W. Blundell, *A History of the Isle of Man*, ed. W. Harrison (Douglas, 1876–1877); W. Sacheverell, *An Account of the Isle of Man* (London, 1702).
[179] *Perambulation*, p. 495.
[180] Ibid., p. 494.
[181] Bodl, MS Tanner 28/2, 175–176; Lancashire Record Office, DDKE/9/62/30; DDKE/acc.7840 HMC/798, 812.
[182] Dickinson, *Lordship*, pp. 331–342.

Man, during this period,[183] and this can be tentatively upheld in Denton's case. He includes, for example, Camden's claim that its 'peculiar' laws and language are 'signes of a peculiar seignory'.[184] After recounting Man's Norwegian kings, he relates that John Stanley I (c.1350–1414) was 'created earl of Derby & king in Man'.[185] This title apparently stands, and he calls the incumbent Lord William Stanley 'king in Man'.[186] He ignores, by contrast, disputes about Manx autonomy under Elizabeth, the Commonwealth, and Charles II. His account of Man's military, criminal courts, and government respects their functioning.[187] He briefly relates that the Stanleys possessed the island 'incontrollably, untill the late king has threatened the present earl with a Quo Warranto, and hath sent Customs House officers out of Dublin to inspect their importation of merchandizes.'[188] But he relents from further discussion and, if anything, may have supported the Lordship by associating its struggles with Charles II's and James II's actions against English town corporations. Man's status is unclear, but its autonomy is respected.

This flowed, partly, from Denton's social situation. The Stanleys were politically and economically important in north-west England and, despite conflicts with customs officials, continued to have national importance. The family supported the crown under Charles II and William III, and in 1691, Lord William achieved confirmation of his right to freely traffic goods between Man and England. This arrangement was initially granted decades previously, but one of the commissioners sanctioning it was now John Lowther.[189] Denton elsewhere sympathised with manorial privileges against central government, including those of

[183] T. Thornton, 'Nationhood at the Margin: Identity, Regionality and the English Crown in the Seventeenth Century', in Len Scales and Oliver Zimmer (eds.) *Power and the Nation in European History* (Cambridge, 2005).
[184] *Perambulation,* p. 497.
[185] Ibid., p. 512.
[186] Ibid., pp. 499.
[187] Ibid., pp. 503–505.
[188] Ibid., p. 502.
[189] Manx National Archives, MS06523, 1719/1.

Cumberland landowners to shipwrecks in the Irish sea.[190] These associations gave him grounds, therefore, to indulge Man's constitutional anomalies.

Crucially, Denton does not (as most customs officials did) view the Manxman or insular government as a threat. Man offered him intrigue or delight, albeit of a prosaic kind. A middle section on its 'Inhabitants' qualifies his earlier criticism, calling the people 'generally tall, strong bodied and of healthy constitutions, who live to a great age, at ease, and in ignorance'.[191] Its ale is compared favourably to England's, and he likes that the Manx are 'no way clog'd nor burthen'd with taxes, customes, or other greivous imposition'. He relates a pleasant reception, with good food and cheap and plentiful foreign wines.[192] He attests to Man's religious uniformity, adding that it has no 'persons popishly affected, Quakers, or other sectaries';[193] it has a 'supream' bishop and functioning ecclesiastical courts,[194] a diminishing presence in England. This respect is balanced by pragmatism: he judges Man's abundance and dearth of certain resources.[195] He documents admirable and deficient qualities in its towns: though sometimes unfavourably comparing them to Westmorland, he commends the island's suitability for Anglo-Irish gentlemen to 'retire […] if they have lived too fast'.[196]

Man is judged in a balanced manner, therefore, much like Cumberland and Westmorland. Like the county surveys, Denton mixes respect for peculiarities with assimilations to English mores and modes of analysis. Man is judged by gentrified, English standards. Denton is less invested in it than in his home counties, not treating Man or its elites as exemplary, but not scorning them either. As with Cumbrian elites, Denton defers political problems, though possibly with greater ignorance. But a consequence of any indifference (or detached respect)

[190] D. Cressy, *Shipwrecks and the Bounty of the Sea* (Oxford, 2022), 101.
[191] *Perambulation,* p. 497.
[192] Ibid., pp. 496, 498.
[193] Ibid., pp. 497–498.
[194] Ibid., pp. 502–503.
[195] Ibid., pp. 495–496.
[196] Ibid., p. 498–501.

is to legitimate Manx autonomy. Controversial in central government, Denton views its low taxes and surfeit of foreign goods as a boon.

His account of Ireland offers fewer ambiguities or concessions. Largely dependent on older authorities, Denton's additions and juxtapositions with descriptions of English, Scottish, and Manx subjects nonetheless situate Ireland within a late seventeenth-century British hierarchy. The political situation remained fraught: like many English contemporaries Denton, who had visited Dublin, was critical of the Irish.[197] His characterisation of Irish beliefs is worth extended consideration, particularly against his judgments regarding other British subjects, before his account of Irish politics. He defines the Irishman as superstitious, a common trope. Ireland is apparently a 'land of wonders', where 'the greatest wonder appears to be that such incredible stories should be told & so firmly believed as they are by the Irish'.[198] Following Camden, Holinshed, and other antiquaries mostly literally, the *Perambulation* reports that people repeat many a 'fable'[199] and 'hystories' abounding in tall tales.[200] The text targets indigenous myths for criticism, particularly regarding St Patrick and his Sepulchre.[201] Gullibility is an essential feature of Irish life, with little apparent change.

This characterisation reveals Denton's epistemological boundaries. With Ireland we reach the limits of his sympathies – favourable to his nation, county, and even Scotland and Man – rather than an historically informed approach. In line with his beliefs, he admits certain myths about the Irish archipelago. While disposing of 'fabulous' tales about Ireland, for example, Denton accepts that it was first peopled by 'Noah's kindred […] who were gyants';[202] he repeats legendary tales regarding visits by Carig Fergus, the originator of the Scots.[203]

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[197] Harris, *Restoration*, chs.2 and 7.
[198] *Perambulation*, p. 515.
[199] Ibid., pp. 541, 545.
[200] Ibid., pp. 515–516.
[201] Ibid., pp. 518, 547.
[202] Ibid., pp. 516–517.
[203] Ibid., p. 548.

Denton is laxer, furthermore, when considering a range of non-Irish myths and legends. Most contemporary historians of Man were critical of 'Manks Traditions',[204] but Denton takes a relaxed attitude towards Manx mythology, denying its corrosiveness and even entertaining its truth. He affirms (from Camden) that Man was never prone to witchcraft,[205] and observes that some superstitions Camden observed have been 'abrogated'.[206] He also credits some supernatural phenomena: he reports that one shipmaster 'shewed me a rock where an infernall spiritt used to annoy passengers […] [b]ut that feind is now layd to sleep and the coast is clear.'[207] Denton relates this second-hand, and regards it as concluded. But he also lends it tentative support: he does not, as with Ireland, castigate island superstitions.

More pertinently, Denton propagates myths that redound to the credit of England and Cumbrian localities. This preference for one's 'own' myths was not unusual.[208] Importantly, it highlights that Denton's attitudes operated on a spectrum within and across multiple kingdoms. His national myths are mostly 'historical', as when the *Perambulation* traces political institutions back to Alfred's time, a supposed golden age. Quoting Lambarde, Denton relates Alfred designing the English shire system, partly following Moses's 'example'. Court leets apparently retain 'some shaddow of King Alfred's politick institution', though the utopian absence of theft in Alfred's time is now a distant echo.[209] Exemplary foundations are thus made markers of English society.

This acceptance descends to specific localities. Denton indulges, for example, contemporary reports in Greenrigg of 'fairies [being seen] formerly and of late', and domestic animals with 'guilded' teeth, 'observable' from their drinking at a local river.[210] The latter is possibly a

[204] Blundell, *History*, 2:chs.1–4.
[205] *Perambulation*, p. 497.
[206] Ibid., p. 495.
[207] Ibid., p. 497.
[208] Walsham, *Reformation*.
[209] *Perambulation*, pp. 38–39.
[210] Ibid., p. 177–178.

naturally occurring phenomenon, but the *Perambulation* leaves matters unclear. From Bede, Denton repeats a story of a relic curing a member of an abbey in Dacre;[211] from Camden, he relates how a 'religious Irish woman' performed 'miracles' in St Bees.[212] He does not attack these fables, 'wonders', or even relics of 'popery'. He gives other speculations credence, including Camden's about Cumberland stone circles.[213] Belief in giants' former existence was widespread in Denton's time,[214] and he happily reports both antiquarian accounts and oral 'tradition[s]' regarding their remains.[215] At Brougham, he relates a legend of a dog running to a Scottish kirk and back, before dying as it leapt in the air.[216] Unlike for Ireland, where he brings forth derision, therefore, he takes a less critical approach to Cumbrian legends and testimonials.

The *Perambulation* shows a spectrum of epistemic openness: entertaining English national and regional ideas, conceding the plausibility of legends from Man, and reacting with hostility towards Irish myths. Ultimately, Denton's regional, national, and international sympathies determine his treatment of mythological material. His wider views of Ireland are apparent. Little individuality defines the community, whom he very occasionally pities or recalls anecdotes about.[217] He embellishes Camden in discussing Irish savagery. They 'love idleness & hate quietness, for like beasts of prey they sleep all day & rob & steal all night.' Only in potato gardens are they 'laborious and industrious'; many want 'manners', are 'viciously wanton';[218] all appear politically rebellious and violent. A stark contrast appears with the morality and humanity which defines Cumbrian communities and individuals,[219] or

[211] Ibid., p. 310.
[212] Ibid., p. 102.
[213] Ibid., pp. 332–333.
[214] S. Piggott, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination* (London, 1989), pp. 48–52.
[215] *Perambulation*, pp. 316, 352.
[216] Ibid., p. 401.
[217] Ibid., pp. 530–536.
[218] Ibid., pp. 514, 543.
[219] Ibid., pp. 141, 145–146.

the neutral and positive inspection of the area's customs and curiosities.[220] Regional integration sits alongside international fragmentation.

Ireland's politics are predictably derided. Denton downplays periods of self-rule, and repeats from Camden that Henry III implanted England's common law in Ireland,[221] a dubious proposition considering continued jurisdictional and legislative controversies. He ignores the minority status of the Church of Ireland, while praising its work.[222] He conceives, ultimately, that 'meer Irish' rebels were defeated by Elizabeth I or at the latest under James VI and I.[223] Indeed, the *Perambulation*'s reliance on Camden's text seems to arrest Irish history at points of Tudor triumph. The Irish remain, regardless of any defeats, degraded: they are neither incorporable like the counties, nor amiable but different like the Scots and Manx. Yet as with friendly regions and nations, Denton avoids dwelling on modern strife, fearing its presence.

We have, then, a panorama of four nations in Denton's ostensible study of two counties. This includes one, Man, rarely considered in 'British' historiography. For Scottish and Manx communities and 'kingdoms', Denton forges a détente, marginally noting tensions, while accentuating harmonies. An innocuous pluralism pervades the *Perambulation* on these matters. Much like England's ethnic groups and regional constituents, Denton accepts difference in unity. The Irish, by contrast, are literally and figuratively beyond the Pale. He prescribes subjection, against descriptions of accord for Scotland and Man.

The use of Scotland and Man as counter-points to Ireland relies on the *Perambulation* expunging historical and ideological tensions. But Denton's material also conflicts with itself: his criticisms of the Irish echo those against the latter-day Scots, and recent English 'rebels' and claimants of tenantright. While the Irish appear aberrant, therefore, they also bear

[220] Ibid., pp. 238, 255, 395, 401–402.
[221] Ibid., pp. 521.
[222] Ibid., pp. 522, 546.
[223] Ibid., pp. 540–546.

characteristics of ostensibly friendly subjects. Denton's ambition to unify one (English) and multiple (British) kingdoms relies on an unconvincing police operation – bullying Irish and English rebels, and cordoning off Scots and Manx problems – by standards external and even internal to the text.

Conclusion

Though historians often note the interleaving of local, national, and international identities today, this has been little considered in the context of county surveys. The *Perambulation* established unity in various ways and to varying degrees. For the counties themselves, Denton corrals diversity to national norms. This smooths over historic and contemporary differences between Cumbrian and English metropolitan actors. Denton acknowledges some divisions, too: he assails religious and economic dissenters, revealing a nation divided. Paradoxically, he regards those English tenants claiming rights descending from defences against the Scots in more hostile terms than the Scots themselves.

Across 'Britain', Denton also asserts unity while making exclusions. He portrays Cumberland's and Westmorland's hostilities with the Scots as honourable, but superseded. As with Man, however, this entailed suppressing antagonisms in the present or recent past. True dislocation is only acknowledged with respect to the Irish, to whom he attributes an asymmetrical set of cultural and political attitudes. This, and criticisms of English tenants and older Scots, mean that Denton does not entirely disguise discord within England and with England's sub-kingdoms. Some tensions escape, but others intrude. As such, instead of neatly presenting harmonious local, national, and inter-national communities, Denton constructs them in part: excluding some conflicts, acknowledging others, and leaving many questions unresolved.

Our analysis affirms that ‘British’ (even imperial) studies need not exclude local and regional analysis, or regard county studies as antiquarian relics. Similar ‘surveys’ will repay comparative study, but an intense focus can highlight subtle contrasts and commonalities. Denton sought to unite locality and nationality: at times describing or prescribing local features as primary, at others yearning for their assimilation to national stories and institutions. The text reveals inter-national relations at a local level, with various differentiations and integrations mapping onto the author’s political and social experience. Its *internal* identity moves inwards and outwards, ultimately, in a manner revealing of the ‘British’ problem.

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