

LINDALE- the valley of FLAX (a discussion concerning the place-name)

i) Linguistic aspects

Place name scholars always try to find the earliest references to a place-name -the phonetic spellings give the best clue as to its meaning.

The two earliest references to Lindale in Upper Allithwaite are:-

LINDAL¹ 1191 (VCH Lancs 269 n. 10)⁵

LINDALE⁴ 1246 (PNLancs 199)⁶

The second element, dale, is not contentious, from “dalr” (Old Norse) or “dael” (late Old English) meaning ‘main valley’

LIN is more problematical. There are 2 possible origins:-

LIND³ (Old English or Old Norse), Lime Tree

LIN³ (Old English or Old Norse) Flax

Both elements were used throughout Europe from early times. (see appendix)

In general, if the early place-name spelling had ‘lind’ before the suffix, then lime-trees are involved, and if ‘Lin’, then flax is referred to.

a) Examples of lime-tree association:-

Linbeck¹ (Muncaster) (Lindebeck, approx. 1280AD) - the stream where lime trees grow.

Lindfield² (Sussex) -lime trees in open country.

Lindhurst² (Nottingham) and

Lindhurst² (Hampshire) - where hurst is a wooded hill.

Lindeth² (Bowness) (Lintheved 1220-50) (Lyndeheved 1292-1452) –the high place where lime trees grow.

b) Examples of Flax association:-

Limefitt Park¹ (Windermere) (Lynfit 1560) - the water meadow where flax grows.

Line Riggs¹ (Staveley in Cartmel) (no early spellings) – possibly flax ridges.

Linewath¹ (Caldbeck) (Linewath 1560) - the ford where flax is grown.

Linacre² (Derbyshire) and

Linacre² (Lancashire)

Linacres² (Northumberland) and

Linacres² (Worcestershire) - flax + plot of cultivated land.

Linley² (Shropshire) -flax clearing.

Linethwaite² (Cumberland) and

Linthwaite² (Yorkshire) - flax + clearing.

c) Exceptions

However there are exceptions. Lindley², which occurs once in Leicestershire and twice in Yorkshire, West Riding all involve flax and a clearing, even though a "d" occurs after lin.

ii) History of the place-name, Lindale

Thus, taking the examples above, Lindale was most likely to be flax valley, but could also be lime tree valley, Eilert Ekwall, in the Place-names of Lancashire, 1922, chose to come down on the side of lime trees, mainly because lime trees still grew in the upper part of the valley. (see below). As happens so often, in historical analysis as well, Ekwall's verdict was followed by later authors, without any new evidence or examination of the landscape, culminating in Diana Whaley, in 2006, in A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names, "*probably the valley where lime trees grow, because Ekwall in 1922, said that lime trees still grew in the upper part of the valley. Otherwise, ON lin or OE lin 'flax' might have been considered possible*"

iii) Recent evidence

1. **Lime Trees.** (The following is mainly from 'A Flora of Cumbria' ed. by Geoffrey Halliday, pub 1997 by the Centre for North-West Regional Studies, University of Lancaster.)

There are three species of lime trees.

a) *Tilia platyphyllos*. Large leaved lime. "Apparently very rare and almost always planted" .

No record in the tetrad covering Lindale.

b) *T. platyphyllos* x *T. cordata*,

T.x europaea Common Lime

"Widely distributed in lowland hedges and in estate grounds....."

"probably all the individuals have been planted or are descended from planted trees." Virtually all trees appear to belong to clonal group A, characterised by dense epicormal branching.

The "numerous lime trees in the upper part of the valley" seen by Ekwall probably belong to this group and there are still specimens remaining. However, it is clear that these trees form part of the Eller Howe estate, owned by the Webster family in the 19th. In particular, George Webster enlarged the house and developed the gardens from 1827 to about 1850. The style of 'gardenesque' was derived from Repton. ("The Websters of Kendal" by Angus Taylor 2004). There are references in the book to letters from Webster whilst in Europe concerning the gardens and instructions to the gardeners at Eller Howe. There may be specific references to the lime trees in the letters, but these have not been examined.

c) *T. cordata* Small leaved lime "Frequent on the limestone around Morecambe Bay and also in the southern Lake District where it reaches its northern limit as a native tree".(This is the element "lind"). "The individual trees can fairly be described as potentially immortal. The massive bases have been dated as up to 2300 years old. When trees fall they sprout freely from the base or trunks in contact with the soil, if partly rooted".

In the relevant tetrad, there are no records of this tree in the Lindale valley. In addition, the botanical recorder for the Lindale area, Julie Clarke, for hectad SD48 reports the total absence of small leaved lime, *Tilia cordata*, from the area. Surely, one or two trees would have survived if they were so numerous as to give rise to a place-name.

2. Flax.

It is unfortunate that Mike Davies-Shiel died in 2009 before his work on the flax industry in Cumbria was complete. In particular, he had surveyed the area around High Newton and Ayside and interviewed local residents. He found the remnants of an extensive flax industry comprising retting ponds (known as steeping dubs in that area), potash kilns, flax fulling mill, (powered by a carefully engineered watercourse,) weaving sheds, tenter fields, and flax growing in fields within living memory and consumption walls.(see below). Mike was particularly concerned at the proposed course of the A590 by-pass around High Newton in 2008 and wrote to the relevant department "I would plead for the purple line of road, to preserve this unique field name (weaving sheds meadow) and remains, in and adjacent, within Cumbria and possibly within England"

Parish registers and other documents persuaded him that an extensive flax industry reached its height by about 1694, continued till about 1815, gradually diminishing until about 1850 when it suddenly died.

Flax needs water retentive soil, free of stones, so the glacial till left by the Windermere glacier makes the soil ideal. There are several walls, one 4 yards thick and 2 yards tall, called consumption walls by Mike Davies-Shiel, where erratic boulders and stones have been removed from the fields.

Lindale Beck starts at High Newton, its course has been carefully engineered to Lindale village with more retting ponds around Low Newton. It is highly likely that flax has been grown from at least the time of Cartmel Priory (paper and numerous other uses), and also given the proximity of Morecambe Bay (shipping etc).

A paper summarising Mike Davies-Shiel's work was edited by Glenys Crocker in consultation with his wife (Mrs Noree Davie-Shiel) and published in *The Cumbrian Industrialist*, Vol 8, titled 'The wool-fulling and flax-fulling mills of Cumbria, 2013.



Fig. Consumption wall at Barber Green.

iv) Conclusion

After perusing the recent evidence above, Diana Whaley agrees that Lindale is more likely to refer to flax, as follows:-

“So in the light of the evidence for flax rather than indigenous lime-trees in Lindale I'd certainly agree that the name is more likely to refer to flax. The spellings are perfectly compatible with that but they aren't part of the proof. I'm not planning a second edition of the dictionary, but if I was (or if this name should come up in another context) I would certainly want to tweak the entry and acknowledge your helpful information.”

It is also likely that the flax industry was in operation further down the Lindale valley and further research, especially documentary, is needed to establish this.

Appendix –Use of Lin and Lind in European Languages³

LIND, LINDEN Lime Tree

Dutch -linde, lindenboom

German -lindenbaum

The first element, corresponding to Old English lind(e), lime tree, shield, or Old Norse, lind.

LIN(E) Flax; flax thread or cloth

-Old English, lin corresponding to Old Saxon

-Old High German, lin

Dutch, lijn

German, lein

Old Norse, lin

Gothic, lein, normal development of germanic linam corresponding to, or adoption of, Latin linum, -flax, related to Greek, linon.

Irish, lin

Lithuanian, linal

References

1. Diana Whaley, A Dictionary of Lake District Place-Names, (English Place-Name Society, Regional Series, Vol 1) Nottingham 2006
2. Margaret Gelling and Ann Cole, The Landscape of Place-names, Stamford 2000
3. T F Hoad, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology, Oxford University Press 2000
4. Eilert Ekwall, The Place-Names of Lancashire, Manchester 1922
5. The Victoria County History of the Counties of England. A History of Lancashire. Vol.VIII, ed. Wm. Farrer and J. Brownbill. 1914. London: Constable.
6. LAR: Lancashire Assize Rolls. Ed. Col. John Parker. Record Soc. xlvii, xlix.

David Shore May 2016