

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RELIGIOUS HOUSES OF CUMBRIA

In Furness, (Lancashire north of the sands), no religious house arose in the poor and remote districts which in the twelfth century became the county of Lancaster, until nearly thirty years after the Norman Conquest.

Of the three Cistercian houses Furness was the earliest, having been founded at Tulketh near Preston in 1124, and removed to Furness in 1127; There were two houses of Austin Canons; the priory of Conishead was founded (at first as a hospital) before 1181, the priory of Cartmel about 1190. Furness and Cartmel, exercised feudal lordship over wide tracts of country. Furness naturally resented the foundation of Conishead so close to itself, and on land under its own lordship, but the quarrel was soon composed.

In Cumberland, within a comparatively small area, six monastic foundations carried on their work with varying success for almost four centuries. Four of these houses were close to the border, and suffered much during the long period of hostility between the two kingdoms. The priories of Carlisle and Lanercost, separated only by some 10 miles, were of the Augustinian order; the abbeys of Holmcultram and Calder, between which there seems to have been little communication, were of the Cistercian; and the priories of Wetheral and St. Bees were cells of the great Benedictine abbey of St. Mary, York.

The priory of Carlisle stood apart from the rest of the religious houses by reason of its peculiar association with the ecclesiastical life of the district. Holmcultram was the largest and most important house in the county, and its abbot was for a time a lord of parliament.

A more extensive introduction to the two groups above and can be found on the links to the British History Online website - [Lancashire](#) (north of the sands).. [Cumberland](#)

Detailed accounts of all the monastic houses in the former counties of Cumberland and Lancashire appeared in the introductory volumes of the original Victoria County Histories of the two counties, published in 1905 and 1908 respectively. **These can be accessed from the main section heading [Religious History](#).** No volume for Westmorland was published.