J. D. Marshall has argued that Wordsworth erred egregiously in calling the customary tenant a ‘statesman’.\(^1\) This term was rarely used in parish registers in Cumbria, before the late eighteenth century, to describe land occupiers who were generally regarded as ‘yeomen’ or ‘husbandmen’. The holder of a customary estate of inheritance, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was quite content to call himself a ‘yeoman’.\(^2\) He even considered this ‘feudal’ name a mark of respect. Marshall has argued that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century travel writers, like John Housman and William Wordsworth (the poet), were largely responsible for the word’s vogue, in the early Victorian Age among prosperous middle-class professionals, industrialists, and tenant farmers, who were searching for their roots in a glorious past.\(^3\) His claims make it necessary for the student of Golden Age ideas to consider carefully the poet’s interpretation of rural ‘facts’, on the one hand, and the relationship between reading, writing and reality, on the other. Marshall’s argument, however, is weakened by his lack of evidence, and the several concessions which he makes to alternative views of the topic. He admits, for example, that etymologically and geographically regarded, the origins and growth of the word ‘statesman’ are both obscure and ambiguous. Nonetheless, he still maintains that the word was not found in the Cumbrian dialect.\(^4\) His reasoning here is somewhat self-serving and directed by his radical beliefs. At least, he seems intent on proving that the word is a middle-class import – perhaps from the South.\(^5\) Moreover, he rejects the idea that the words ‘statesman’ and ‘estatesman’ were evolved from the use of the word ‘estate’. The latter does not evince any ‘special legal or generally expressive force’ in official documents from the period. On the other hand, he allows that the words statesman and estatesman ‘appear as parallel forms’ in documents from the seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, when the ‘e’ was slowly elided from the longer and possibly older word, leaving the shorter word more suitable for use in common speech.\(^6\) This evolution, however,
leads Dr Marshall to conclude that the word statesman was probably used ‘in a rather worldly, sophisticated sense by those [well-to-do yeomen] who chose’ to employ it ‘in private intercourse, as a status word’ comparable to the term ‘Mister’. Here we might recall Wordsworth’s repeated assertion, in poetry and prose, that the statesmen, as he knew them in childhood and youth, were often ‘men of respectable education’, landed property, and independent character. Perhaps this word (statesman) arose locally as a description of such men before the Industrial Revolution had impoverished some, and made others both wealthy and important in the ‘new’ society? Marshall thinks otherwise. Because the word does not appear in early travel and guide books, or those used in the picturesque tradition, he concludes that ‘the word was not in currency in polite or learned circles, in Cumbria at least’. But here we must make four qualifications to his account.

First of all, the Lake District was not fully discovered, even geographically speaking, by outsiders until the early nineteenth century. This conclusion was drawn by Canon Bouch in his remarkable book, *Prelates and People of the Lake Counties* (1948). The Lakes were largely unknown by Englishmen until about 1750. Between that date and 1769, ‘visitors to the easily accessible lakes – the Windermere group, Ullswater, Thirlmere, and the Keswick lakes, probably also Coniston, were not infrequent’. Moreover, most tourists and holiday makers at this time came from within the Border counties. ‘But of the remainder of the Lake District very little had been seen by the outside world. John Wesley seems to have been the only person known to have passed through it’. Even highly reputable books on Lake District history, travel and topography, published between 1770 and 1813, still printed very poor and misleading maps of the district and so perpetuated ‘the general ignorance’ of the region and its people. This geographical ignorance was partly imposed upon the tourists by the Old Lakelanders themselves. The latter were widely engaged in smuggling in the years before Pitt reduced excise duties on foreign goods. Therefore, they did not encourage tours and expeditions into the Lake District proper, and access by road was confined to a few major attractions. Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence that the taste for fell walking and mountain scenery was much more slowly effected in the general population than has been thought to date by Romantic scholars and social historians.

Secondly, late eighteenth-century writers of travel guides, regional history books and geographical surveys used the term ‘statesman’ as a native word with social and economic connotations of freedom and self-sufficiency. Consider, for instance, William Hutchinson’s frequent description of the Cumberland yeomanry, in 1794, as ‘the owners of small landed estates, from whence they are called statesmen’. Likewise, Andrew Pringle, who wrote the Board of Agriculture Report for