

# **Stories from the Edge**

## **Creating an Identity in Early Medieval North-West Staffordshire**

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# ABSTRACT

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This thesis takes as its research area the southern half of Pirehill Hundred, Staffordshire. Despite being in the Mercian heartland, it is an area that has remained on the periphery of discussions by scholars of the early medieval period. To bring this area into focus this study has undertaken both a multi-disciplinary and a multi-focused approach. Chapters one and two discuss burial mounds, both in terms of survival and their cultural context and the lives of local saints. Both are viewed in terms of their historical context as well and through the lens of storytelling and the formation of identity as expressed in the landscape. The discussion pulls in wider themes concerning the power of the dead as expressed in the landscape.

The chapter on the stone sculpture of Staffordshire brings these monuments back into a Mercian context, seeing them as a continuation of this wider narrative as well as bringing to the fore broader discussions around land ownership. This is later linked through a series of case studies to the propensity for early medieval manors to be found on the edge of watery landscapes. It is through these detailed case studies that evidence is provided for a series of ‘symptoms’ by which early medieval settlements can be discerned. The role of the powerful family *Wulf* is discussed in the final chapter, placing this family and their landholding firmly in a Staffordshire context.

What links this thesis is an understanding of ‘edgy-ness’, either in landscape terms with the desire for early medieval manors to seek out the edge, or how this region has remained on the edge of academic discussions. Above all else this thesis is a study of the landscape of the often overlooked rural landscape of early medieval Staffordshire.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

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<i>ASC</i>	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
<i>BAA</i>	British Archaeological Association
<i>BAR</i>	British Archaeological Reports
<i>CASSS</i>	Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture
<i>CBA</i>	Council for British Archaeology
<i>CRSBI</i>	Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland
<i>EPNS</i>	English Place-Name Society
<i>Fem.</i>	Feminine
<i>HER</i>	Historic Environment Record
<i>LRO</i>	Lichfield Record Office
<i>n.</i>	note
<i>OE</i>	Old English
<i>ON</i>	Old Norse
<i>OS</i>	Ordnance Survey
<i>PASE</i>	Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England
<i>PrWelsh</i>	Primitive Welsh
<i>S</i>	Anglo-Saxon Charters are cited by their ‘S’ number in Sawyer
<i>SRO</i>	Staffordshire Record Office
<i>VCH</i>	Victoria Histories of the Counties of England
<i>WSL</i>	William Salt Library

# INTRODUCTION

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2016 marks one thousand years since the first written reference to Staffordshire.<sup>1</sup> To observe the nine-hundredth anniversary, Bridgman and Wedgwood produced perhaps the most comprehensive historical work on the county for the early medieval period, the 1916 volume of the Staffordshire Record Society including a series of papers on the period for the county.<sup>2</sup> As part of their study they undertook a detailed survey of the charters of Staffordshire (some of which have subsequently been attributed to other places in the country) and included thoughts on place-names and topography. Perhaps now, a hundred years later, we may hope that the millennial anniversary will focus a little more attention on the often overlooked early medieval history of Staffordshire. Certainly the finding of the Staffordshire Hoard in 2009 (the most spectacular archaeological find from Staffordshire for the period) near Hammerwich generated renewed interest in the county. Those finds captured the imagination of people across the region and beyond. The ‘hoard’ has toured the USA and so great was the number of individual artefacts found that two regional museums have shared the finds to put on permanent display. However, despite the interest and the gains in scholarship made concerning the artefacts themselves with particular regard to their provenance, dating and assemblage, these dazzling finds continue to lack local context and have, so far at least, been unable to reveal very much about Staffordshire or the people who lived there.<sup>3</sup>

In general the early medieval history of the area that became known as Staffordshire is usually referred, if at all, to within the wider context of the Kingdom of Mercia. Mercia has a good survival rate for charters but lacks the written testimonies of writers that other kingdoms have such as Bede (Northumbria) or Asser (Wessex). In part, at least, it

<sup>1</sup> G. Garmonsway (trans. and ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (1953, Guernsey, 1994 edn), p. 147. The county itself is likely to be older. ‘Staffordshire’ will be used as the point of reference throughout this study although most of the period under discussion will be from the period prior to 1016.

<sup>2</sup> C. Bridgeman and J. Wedgwood (eds), *Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1916* (London, 1918), due to the war it finally came out in 1918.

<sup>3</sup> S. Dean, D. Hooke and A. Jones, ‘The Staffordshire hoard: the fieldwork’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 90 (2010), pp. 139-152.



is for this reason it receives less attention than other kingdoms of the period. Capper has commented that ‘known through the sources of its neighbours, Mercia is prominent as a protagonist in Anglo-Saxon affairs, but is often studied for its effect on others’.<sup>4</sup>

As for Mercia itself, research has shown that it may never have been a completely cohesive unit; the level of variation and complexity of relationships across the kingdom are as yet not fully understood. Brown and Farr’s volume on Mercia is the most recent and comprehensive academic publication concerning the kingdom, preceded in the 1970s by Dornier’s *Mercian Studies*.<sup>5</sup> Both offer a series of papers that have helped focus attention on one of the most important and yet neglected kingdoms of the early medieval period. And yet Brown and Farr’s map of Mercia does not show any Staffordshire places (the blank area to the west on Figure. 1). Nor does the volume index Staffordshire, Stafford, or mention any of the Staffordshire stone sculpture or any of the saints associated with the county, apart from a single entry for Chad (Tamworth and Lichfield do however feature). This valuable work instead concentrates its interests to the south and east of the kingdom. That said, much of the county, in particular the south-eastern section, has become central to our understanding of Mercia. Tamworth is sometimes referred to as the ‘capital’ of Mercia, Lichfield was the Episcopal See of the Mercians and nearby Repton (Derbyshire, some four miles from Staffordshire) acted as a Mercian royal mausoleum, completing a triangle that makes what has been termed the ‘Mercian heartland’.<sup>6</sup> The name Mercia implies ‘dwellers of the march’, probably PrWelsh in origin it gave the meaning border or boundary, perhaps from the region’s relationship to the Welsh kingdoms to the west.<sup>7</sup> This ‘edginess’ is a theme that will recur throughout this study and is useful here to also reflect Staffordshire’s place on the periphery of discussions of the period. For despite its importance, beyond Lichfield and

<sup>4</sup> M. Capper, ‘Contested loyalties: regional and national identities in the midland kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England, c. 700 - c. 900’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> A. Dornier, *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> S. Bassett, ‘Divide and rule? The military infrastructure of eighth- and ninth century Mercia’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 15 (1) (2007), pp. 57-85.

<sup>7</sup> Most recently D. Hill, ‘Mercians: The Dwellers on the Boundary’, in M. Brown and C. Farr (eds), *Mercia; An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), pp. 173-182, but also S. Bassett, ‘Medieval Lichfield: a topographical review’, *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 22 (Walsall, 1981), pp. 93-121, D. Kirby, ‘Welsh bards and the border’, in A. Dornier (ed.), *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977), pp. 31-42, and T. Charles-Edwards, ‘Wales and Mercia, 613-918’, in Brown and Farr (eds), *Mercia*, pp. 89-105; and N. Brooks, ‘The formation of the Mercian kingdom’, in S. Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (London, 1989), p. 160.

the two burhs of Stafford and Tamworth, Staffordshire as a county has received restrained interest from scholars of the period.

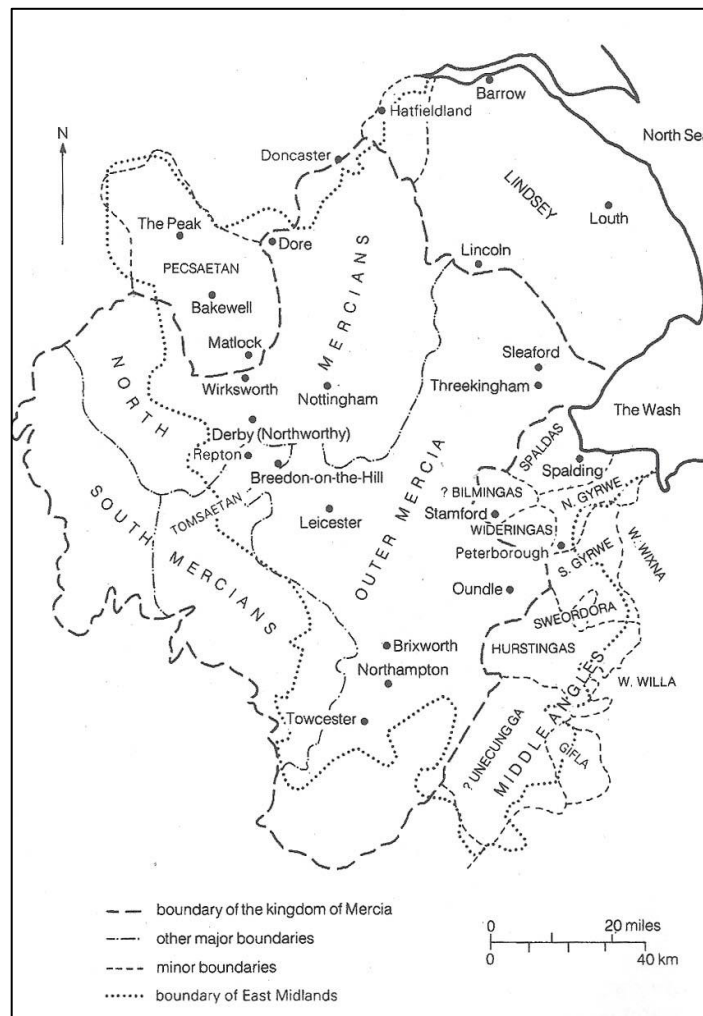


Figure 1: Mercia as described by Brown and Farr.<sup>8</sup>

The first written reference to a place within what was later known as Staffordshire comes with the mention of a bishop and monks at *Caer Lwythgoed*, identified as Letocetum (a Roman and later Romano-British settlement at Wall near Lichfield) in a Welsh poem *Marwnad Cynddylan* ('Lament for Cynddylan', c. 655). This has led to the suggestion that the See of Lichfield was British in origin, with Letocetum understood as the precursor to Lichfield. It was only some 30 years after this date that Lichfield was described as a suitable place for a new bishopric.<sup>9</sup> The important centre of Tamworth may have begun as a significant meeting place for the

<sup>8</sup> Brown and Farr, *Mercia*, opposite p.1.

<sup>9</sup> J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 99.

various Mercian tribes, emerging ‘as a royal centre in order to encourage unity as the authority of the Mercian kings developed in the eighth century’.<sup>10</sup> It was the major royal Mercian centre by the end of the eighth century, and was ‘more like a “capital” than any other English place before the tenth century’.<sup>11</sup> The tendency is for ‘Staffordshire’, within a Mercian framework, to be reduced to what is seen as its most important early medieval centres, namely Tamworth (especially for the earliest period), Lichfield (the ecclesiastical centre) and to a lesser extent Stafford (as a royal burh and later shire town), these are certainly the places that have attracted the interest of archaeologists.<sup>12</sup> Beyond the urban centres the gravel extraction along the Trent Valley and the subsequent finds such as those found at Catholme have further emphasised an eastern bias in discussions about the county.<sup>13</sup>

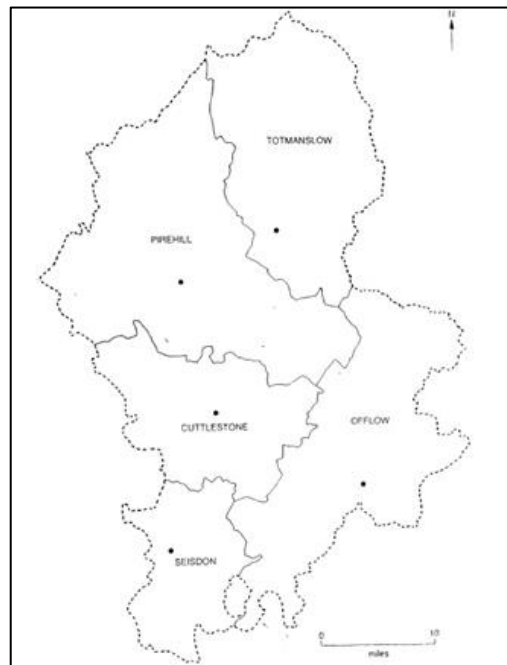


Figure 2: The hundreds of Staffordshire.

A major thrust behind the motivation for this thesis is that without developing ideas about life in early medieval Staffordshire beyond these centres, our understanding of Mercia will always remain incomplete. This thesis seeks to redress this imbalance and

<sup>10</sup> N. Tringham, ‘Administrative areas’, in A. Phillips and C. Phillips (eds), *An Historical Atlas* (Manchester, 2011), p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 277ff.

<sup>12</sup> For example, D. Garner, ‘Archaeological evaluation at Salter Street’, *Earthworks Archaeological Services* (Stafford, 1994), or P. Rahtz and R. Meeson, ‘An Anglo-Saxon watermill at Tamworth’, *CBA Research Report*, 83 (London, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> Catholme is discussed in chapter one, but see also S. Beteux and H. Chapman, ‘Where rivers meet. The archaeology of Catholme and the Trent-Tame confluence’, *CBA Research Report*, 161 (York, 2009), and S. Losco-Bradley and G. Kinsley, *Catholme, An Anglo-Saxon Settlement on the Trent Gravels in Staffordshire* (Nottingham, 2002).

will concentrate mainly on rural centres, away from the main burhs with a focus on one of the five hundreds of Staffordshire, namely Pirehill. This is an area that remains firmly on the periphery of thoughts on the period. Pirehill Hundred covers some 314 sq. miles and takes its name from a hill near Walton in Stone parish. The river Trent flows from the north of the hundred in a south-easterly direction whilst the river Sow rises near Eccleshall and flows past Stafford. It is some 28 miles in length and at its maximum 20 in breadth. It is bounded by Cheshire to the north-east and Shropshire to the east. Within Staffordshire it abuts the hundred of Totmonslow to the north-east, Offlow to the east and Cuttlestone to the south. Within Pirehill, the burh of Stafford has received most attention. Usually considered within a framework of the tenth century campaigns of Æthelred and Æthelflaed, it has also, due to various developments, received archaeological interest which has advanced our understanding of the site. The growth of Stafford has mostly been thought to owe its origins to the tenth century foundation of the Æthelfladian burh.<sup>14</sup> However, more recent work has pushed the development of the site back into the late eighth or early ninth century. This research has shown that Stafford was the centre for a sophisticated pottery industry producing what is known as ‘Stafford ware’.<sup>15</sup> Given the focus and detail of this recent work on Stafford and this study’s emphasis on ‘rural’ estates, Stafford itself will not be examined in any great depth, although because of its importance to the region it will be referred to throughout the work. Of the minor sites Catholme in the east of the county is the only place to have received large-scale archaeological excavation and remains by far the best researched. Within the study of rural settlements, however, Catholme is one of a few western outliers discussed within a corpus of sites that lie to the east (both north and south).

<sup>14</sup> M. Carver, *The Birth of a Borough: An Archaeological Study of Anglo-Saxon Stafford* (Woodbridge, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> A. Dodd, J. Goodwin, S. Griffiths, A. Norton, C. Poole and S. Teague, *Excavations at Tipping Street, Stafford, 2009-10*: Transactions of Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society, 47 (Stafford, 2014), for Lichfield, Bassett, *Medieval Lichfield*, pp. 93-121, and a wider view A. Sargent, ‘Lichfield and the lands of St Chad’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Keele University, 2012); J. Gould, ‘Saint Edith of Polesworth and Tamworth’, *South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, 27 (Walsall, 1987) pp. 35-38; J. Gould and D. Gould, ‘St Michael’s churchyard, Lichfield’, *South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, 16 (Kendall, 1975), pp. 58-61; and J. Gould, *Lichfield; Archaeology and Development*, West Midlands Rescue Archaeology Committee (Birmingham, 1976).

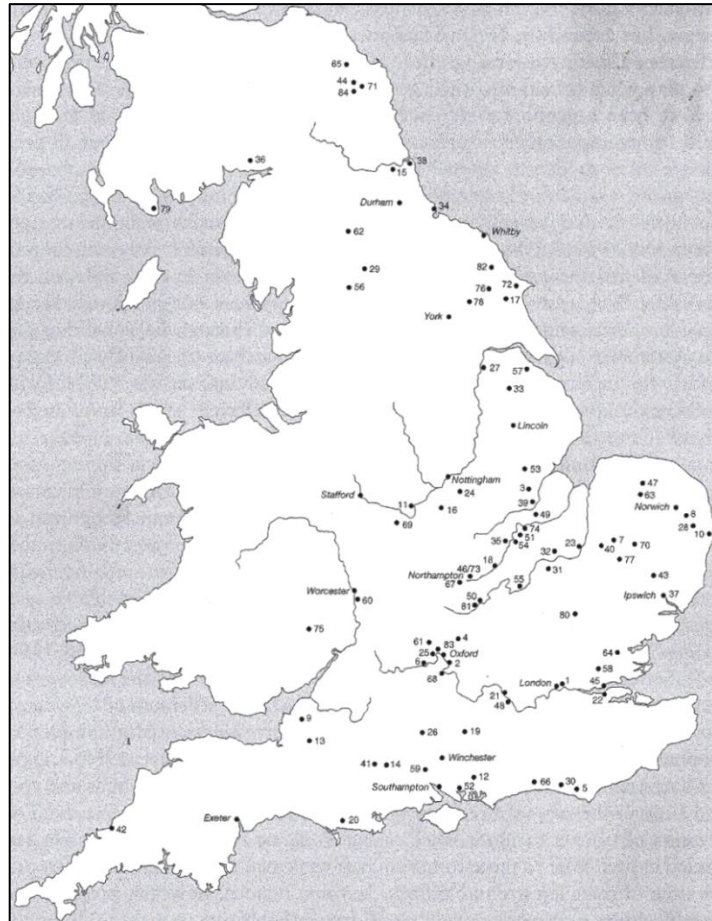


Figure 3: Sites referenced in the most recent work on early medieval rural settlement.<sup>16</sup>

The relief and drainage map taken from *An Historical Atlas of Staffordshire* (figure 4) highlights a major theme in this thesis, that is, one of ‘wateriness’. However, even from this modern map it is difficult for us to get a sense of just how watery the landscape was in the early medieval period. Physical evidence survives for historic water management systems at Croxden Abbey (Totmonslow), the largest Cistercian house in Staffordshire, and also from the Roman period at Wall where Roman baths have been found and where a long wooden aqueduct some 500 metres in length was reported by Stebbing Shaw in 1798.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2012), p. 4. Catholme is shown as ‘11’ on the map and Tamworth as ‘69’

<sup>17</sup> S. Shaw, *The Histories and Antiquities of Staffordshire*, 2 vols (1798, Staffordshire, 1976 edn), 1, p. 19; and M. Leah, C. Wells, P. Stamper, E. Huckerby and C. Welch, *The Wetlands of Shropshire and Staffordshire* (Lancaster, 1998), pp. 113-117. Appendix 8 of this volume lists *A Gazetteer of Staffordshire environmental archives* which includes a small site just north of Eccleshall, p. 205



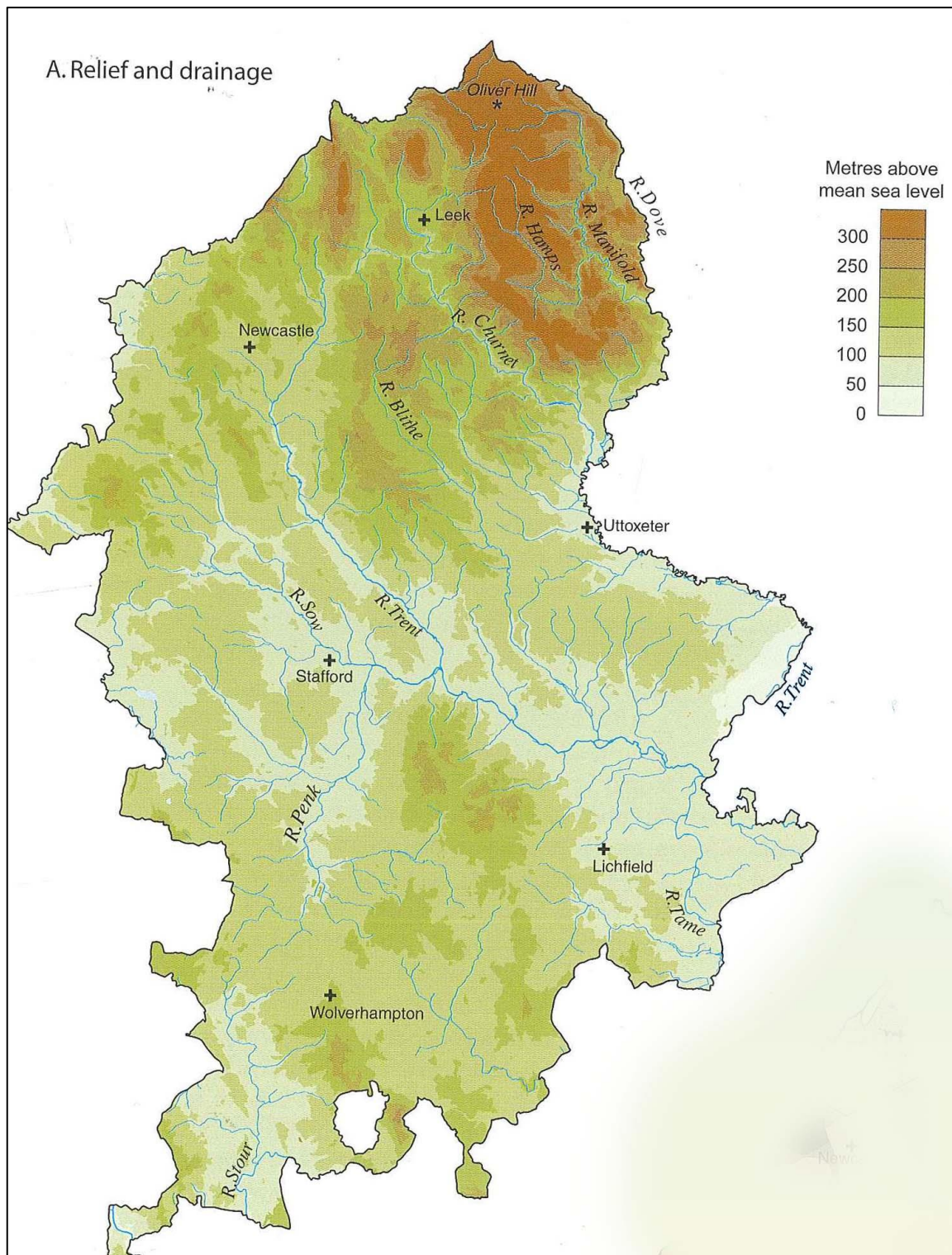


Figure 4: Staffordshire: relief and drainage.<sup>18</sup>

We also have the loss of many natural resources to drainage. A fine example of this is at Shebdon Moss on Norbury manor (Cuttlestone) where drainage led to the end of the annual rounding up of pewits.

<sup>18</sup> Phillips and Phillips, *Historical Atlas*, p. 3 (reproduced by kind permission of A.D.M. Phillips).

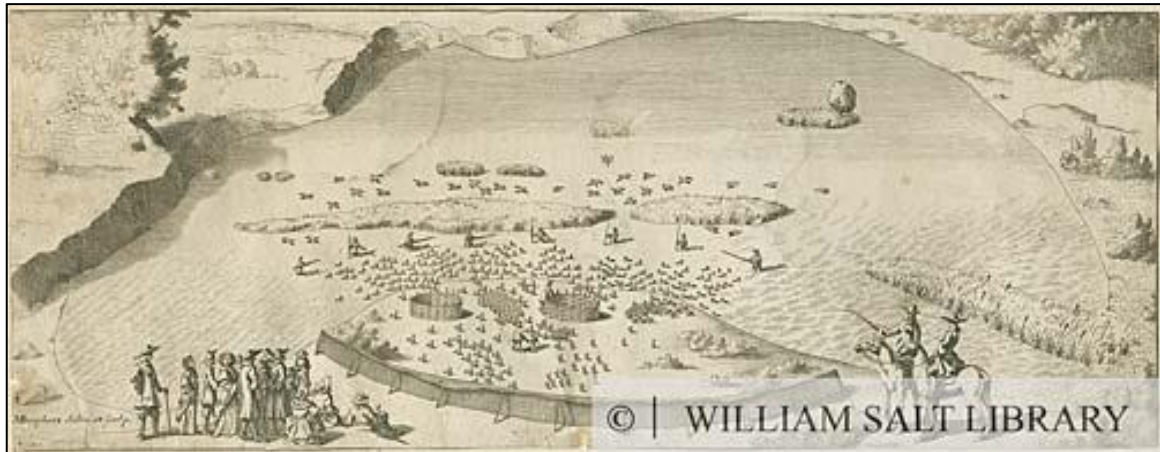


Figure 5: Pewits drive on Shebben (Shebdon) Pool.<sup>19</sup>

Other examples are documented, perhaps the best being the drainage of Doxey Marshes north of Stafford and the Kings Pools to the east which began in 1798. The Kings Pools were dry by 1606 but were re-flooded as part of the town's civil war defences, re-creating the same defensive shield that presumably encouraged the building of the Æthelfladian burh in 913.<sup>20</sup>

The age of agricultural improvement brought about great changes to the Staffordshire landscape, its heavy clay soils having spawned the pottery industry whilst Joseph Elkington, the great land drainage pioneer, moved to 'Bog Farm' in Madeley, one suspects as a retirement project.<sup>21</sup> This process of drainage continued well into the modern era; Loynton Moss has now been reduced from five mosses and meres to just one, a development that continued up until 1969.<sup>22</sup>

In general the western part of the British Isles receives more rain on average than the eastern half of the country. During the period AD 400-900 the climate in Britain was both colder and wetter than the period that had preceded it (and compared to the current climate).<sup>23</sup> It was a period when wetter westerlies dominated the weather.<sup>24</sup> The evidence suggests that during the period under discussion a wetter landscape was

<sup>19</sup> WSL, SV-IV.324b taken from R. Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686, Oxford; Pocket Plot edn, Barlaston, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Leah, Wells, Stamper, Huckerby and Welch, *Wetlands of Shropshire and Staffordshire*, p.113.

<sup>21</sup> For water meadows and their management in the early medieval period see T. Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 184-206

<sup>22</sup> Leah, Wells, Stamper, Huckerby and Welch, *Wetlands of Shropshire and Staffordshire*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>23</sup> J. Kington, *Climate and Weather* (London, 2010), p. 6 and p. 135.

<sup>24</sup> The 'indicators show that the Icelandic low deepened sometime after 600, which, in association with an inferred intensification of the Azores high, may have resulted in one of the strongest westerly periods in historic times'. Kington, *Climate and Weather*, p. 137.

present in Staffordshire (and across the continent) and that during the tenth century the climate warmed, coinciding with, and contributing to, a time of economic expansion. This thesis proposes that it was here, on the edge of watery landscapes, that early medieval settlements were established.

## Historiography

The main documentary evidence for early medieval Staffordshire is principally held within 23 charters and documents from the pre-Conquest period. The majority relate to the holdings of Burton Abbey and the minster church at Wolverhampton, both associated with the family of Wulfrun (see chapter five). They date primarily from the tenth and eleventh centuries. Hooke's work on the charter bounds of Staffordshire represents the most comprehensive examination of the written record for the county and has the additional benefit of taking us away from the major centres described above.<sup>25</sup> The lives of the saints associated with Staffordshire, often written much later, refer on occasion to places within and these saints are usually our first recognisable characters of the period (see chapter two).

The Domesday Survey provides information about the estates of Staffordshire and offers, along with the charters, the baseline data for many of the place-names of the county.<sup>26</sup> The study of place-names of Staffordshire received some early attention with Duignan's *Notes of Staffordshire Place-Names* in 1902.<sup>27</sup> Although the *EPNS* has published only one volume for Staffordshire, Horovitz has provided the first comprehensive modern survey of the county.<sup>28</sup> A broad landscape study has been offered by Palliser covering the early medieval period into the modern era, whilst Gelling attempted a synthesis of the early medieval period across the West Midlands which included Staffordshire.<sup>29</sup> The *VCH* has been quite industrious producing 14 volumes to date. In addition we have seen the publication of *An Historical Atlas of*

<sup>25</sup> D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire: the Charter Evidence* (Keele, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book: Staffordshire* (Chichester, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> W. Duignan, *Notes of Staffordshire Place-names* (London, 1902).

<sup>28</sup> J. Oakden, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire, Part I, Cuttlestone Hundred*, *EPNS* (Nottingham, 1984). D. Horovitz, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* (Brewood, 2005) also provides an overview of previous place-name scholars' work on Staffordshire, pp. i-iii.

<sup>29</sup> D. Palliser, *The Staffordshire Landscape* (London, 1976); M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992).



*Staffordshire* which covers the county through a wide range of thematic studies.<sup>30</sup> The county has been well served by antiquarian interest from the sixteenth century onwards. The works of Erdeswick, Chetwynd, Plot and Shaw mirrored antiquarian interest found elsewhere in the country.<sup>31</sup> This was later supplemented by more local interests such as Hackwood's studies of south Staffordshire towns and Willmore's history of Walsall.<sup>32</sup> The interest of the banker William Salt led to the formation of the William Salt Library (1872) and the Staffordshire Record Society (1879).<sup>33</sup> For the early medieval period we return to Wedgwood, who in 1916, understood the 'arrival' of the Anglo-Saxons as meaning that 'the rulers changed, but it was a shadowy rule; the landowners changed, but they were often absentees; the Saxon masters managed even to change the language in time'. For Wedgwood what remained was the 'Celtic provincialism of Staffordshire'.<sup>34</sup> Drawing allusions from the political world of his time he went on to explain:

'In Staffordshire 'they talked Welsh in the time of Penda, probably well down to the time of the Conqueror; but they left no mark on the map than have the Kafirs on the map of South Africa'.<sup>35</sup>

It seems a hundred years ago historians were perplexed by the relative silence of early medieval Staffordshire. Gelling for her part thought, much like Wedgwood, that the place-names of Staffordshire showed 'evidence for the coexistence between Welsh and English speaking people'.<sup>36</sup> For many good reasons this study avoids deliberating on ideas of ethnic origins or the make-up of tribal groups, and within archaeology there has been a general pulling back from the use of material culture to discuss or define

<sup>30</sup> Phillips and Phillips, *Historical Atlas*.

<sup>31</sup> For a concise history of the county's historians from the middle ages onwards see M. Greenslade, *The Staffordshire Historians*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire (Fenton, 1982); more specifically: T. Harwood (ed.), *Sampson Erdeswick's Survey of Staffordshire* (Westminster, 1820); Plot, *Natural History*, chapter 10, 34, p. 414; Shaw, *Histories and Antiquities*; F. Parker, *Chetwynd's History of Pirehill Hundred, With Notes*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, new series, 12 (London, 1909).

<sup>32</sup> For example, F. Hackwood, *A History of West Bromwich* (Birmingham, 1895); F. Hackwood, *The Annals of Willenhall* (Wolverhampton, 1908); and F. Willmore, *A History of Walsall* (Walsall, 1887).

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed study of the antiquarian interest in Staffordshire from the medieval period onwards see Greenslade, *Staffordshire Historians*.

<sup>34</sup> J. Wedgwood, *Early Staffordshire History*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1916 (London, 1918), pp. 138-208.

<sup>35</sup> Wedgwood, 'Early Staffordshire History', p. 143.

<sup>36</sup> Gelling, *West Midlands*, p. 59.

ethnicities.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, recent studies in linguistics and place-name studies offer reasons to be cautious about using place-names or material culture to define ethnicity.<sup>38</sup> Current thinking around the construction and multiple layering of social identities warns us against generalising and over-simplifying these issues.<sup>39</sup> Just what an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ was in the north-west of Staffordshire, certainly for the early and middle periods under discussion, is elusive and difficult to define.<sup>40</sup> That is not to say these issues have been shied away from here: ideas around identity, memorialisation, ancestry, belonging, image and power are central components of this study. Many of the themes that thread throughout this thesis have revealed themselves as this study has progressed. Chapter one begins the discussion by examining burial mounds, both in terms of their survival and their cultural context. These have generally been understood to survive in very small numbers in Staffordshire and this understanding is challenged here. This chapter is significant because of the general paucity of records for the study area and initiates the first of the methodical approaches by showing how we can make small pieces of evidence work hard to present a different narrative. The notion of ‘social reality’, first brought into the discussion here, comes later to the fore in the chapter two study on the lives of local saints. In the particular example of Wulfhad and Ruffin we can offer an alternative understanding of their cult as expressed in the landscape that differs from the generally accepted one. Both of these chapters are viewed in terms of their archaeological and historical contexts but, just as importantly, through understanding that the landscape was used as a place for storytelling and that the formation and establishment of identity was articulated through landscape. The discussion in these chapters pull in wider themes concerning the power of the dead, for example, how this might be used in early rural settlements such as at Catholme and the association of a burial mound with one of the farmsteads. A later example is that of Æthelred and Æthelflaed and their translation of the bones of St Oswald or the use of saints in newly founded burhs.

<sup>37</sup> M. Johnson, *Archaeological Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1999); but more specifically V. Thompson, *Death and Dying in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (2004, Woodbridge, 2012 edn); and H. Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> H. Tristram, ‘Why don’t the English speak Welsh’, in N. Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 215-230, M. Blake, ‘*W(e)alh tūn*: balancing the probabilities’, in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds), *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, 2012).

<sup>39</sup> W. Frazer, ‘Introduction: identities in early medieval Britain’, in W. Frazer and A. Tyrell (eds), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London, 2000), pp. 1-22; B. Yorke, ‘Political and Ethnic Identity’, Frazer and Tyrell, *Social Identity*, pp. 69-90.

<sup>40</sup> See also Capper, ‘Contested Loyalties’.

The third chapter, on the stone sculpture of Staffordshire, brings these monuments back into a Mercian context, seeing them as a continuation of a wider Mercian narrative rather than forming the edge of Scandinavian practices. It, along with chapter four, brings in broader discussions around landownership and trace a moment of change in the landscape. Through detailed case studies we can draw together a series of symptoms that evidence these early thegnly centres. This ‘thegny moment’ is key to understanding the late Merican landscape in this region and threaded through chapter four and others is the notion of elite emulation. That is, expressions of elite culture were led by people such as Æthelred and Æthelflaed, and copied by elite families across Mercia culminating with the building of local churches in places such as Chebsey. The development model of Gloucester St Oswald links many of the themes within this thesis, such as the development of sites which can be seen as beginning with the use of stone sculpture to signify special places of memory and veneration and that this was then followed by an investment in church building. Encompassed within this process is the use of the powerful dead, be they ancestors or local (for example Beorhthelm) or regional or national saints (St Oswald), reinforcing elite identity. Writ large at Gloucester, we can trace these behaviours in Staffordshire by the powerful family *Wulf* discussed in chapter five. In this final chapter we can trace all of these themes, the use of stone sculpture, the monastic house at Wolverhampton and, a generation later, the foundation at Burton and the incorporation of a local saint there eventually followed by the burial of the founder, Wulfric, and his wife within the church. Using later sources and place-names we can place this family and their landholding firmly within a Staffordshire context.

‘Staffordshire’ is not recorded before 1016 when it first appears in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.<sup>41</sup> It is likely that the shire came into being during the tenth century under the administrative reforms of Æthelred and Æthelflaed. The county seems to be a political construct but may have been based, in part at least, on pre-existing land units. For Palliser, however, it was a subdivision of Mercia created, ‘so far as is known,

<sup>41</sup> ‘The prince Edmund rode to Northumbria to earl Uhtred, and everybody imagined that they would collect levies to oppose king but they went into Staffordshire, and to Shrewsbury and to Chester and harried on their side’. *ASC*, p. 147.

without any reference to previous units of government'.<sup>42</sup> The multiple estates described in the Domesday Survey at Eccleshall and those of Lichfield (Offlow Hundred) and Penkridge (Cuttlestone Hundred) for example do seem to suggest earlier foundations. Eccleshall (Pirehill Hundred) is shown as a multi-vill estate held by the bishop and remained in the bishop's hands throughout the medieval period, and the place-name evidence seems to suggest an early association with the church. Further evidence of its stability is shown by the boundaries that respect the estate, bounded to the south by the hundredal boundary and to the west the county boundary. Penkridge is shown as a large multi-vill royal estate, the place-name incorporates Welsh elements and is associated with *Pennocrucio* in the Roman Antonine Itinerary. It is also associated with the folk group *Pencersæten* mentioned in 849 (S.1272).<sup>43</sup> Lichfield is associated with the nearby Roman settlement at Wall and its (later) early medieval history. St Chad according to Bede 'had his episcopal seat at a place called Lichfield' and it remained the centre of the bishops' estates for most of the medieval period and beyond.<sup>44</sup>

Once formed, the county remained fairly stable for around one thousand years.<sup>45</sup> Staffordshire is almost 40 miles wide and over 60 miles in length. It has a diversity of landscapes, the moorlands rising over 500m in the north descending to 50m where the rivers Dove and Trent meet.<sup>46</sup> There are wide fertile flood plains and we know that by the time of the Domesday Survey the amount of woodland was 'considerable' and the extents of the forests in Staffordshire by the time we have their bounds in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries show large areas of the county under forest jurisdiction.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Palliser, *Staffordshire Landscape*, p. 27.

<sup>43</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, pp. 21-23.

<sup>44</sup> B. Colgrave and R. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), p. 337, HE IV, 3.

<sup>45</sup> 'Although it quickly shed some peripheral areas, and subsequently the detached parishes of Broom and Clent in 1844, and did not acquire Dudley until 1966, the county's shape remained essentially unchanged until the local government reforms of 1974'. Phillips and Phillips (eds), *Historical Atlas*, p.1.

<sup>46</sup> P. Worsley, 'Relief and drainage: bedrock geology', in Phillips and Phillips (eds), *Historical Atlas*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>47</sup> C. Slade, 'The Staffordshire Domesday', in L. Midgley (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 6 (1958, London, reprint 1985), p. 21.

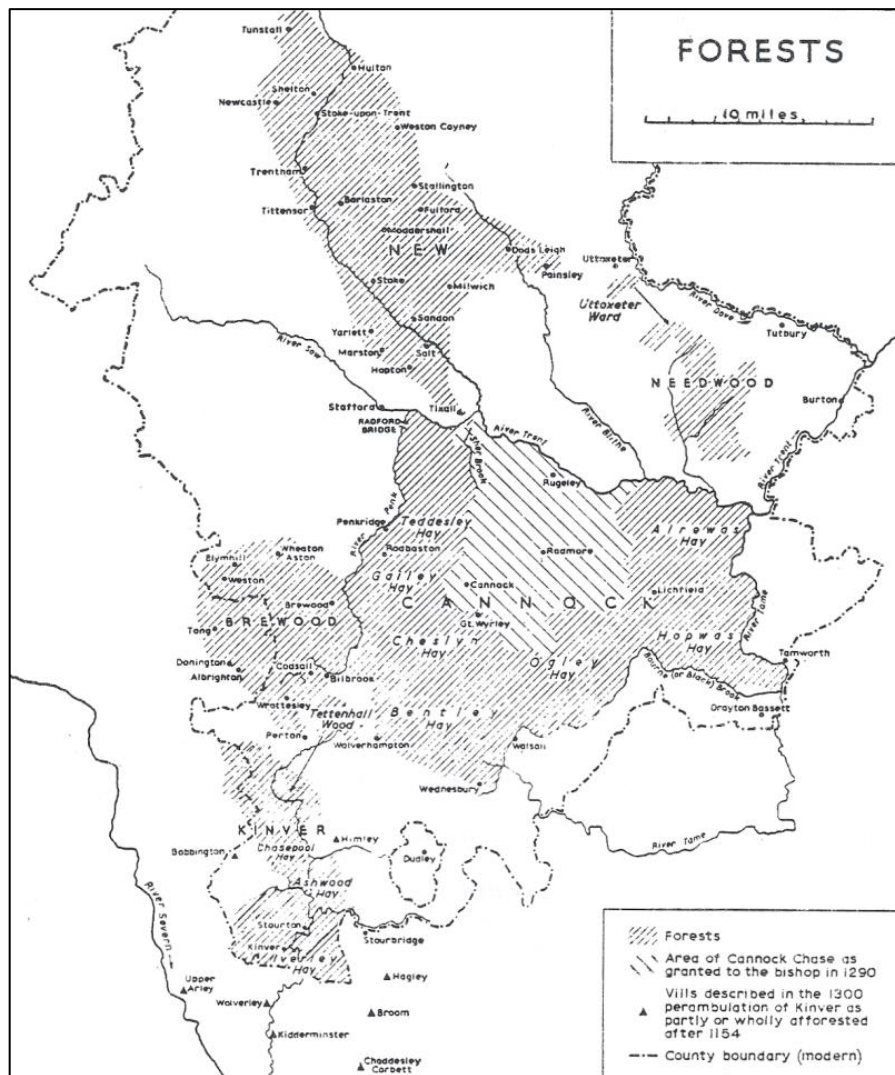


Figure 6: Extent of forests.<sup>48</sup>

It has been said of the county at the time of the Domesday Survey that it was ‘primitive’, ‘backward and largely unsettled’.<sup>49</sup> That case may be somewhat overstated and comparisons across the region suggest that Staffordshire, whilst by no means rich, fits into a pattern similar to other midland counties such as Shropshire, Warwickshire and Derbyshire. Despite this, ‘the low hidation of Staffordshire, the ancient heartland of Mercia, is an unexplained phenomenon’.<sup>50</sup> Part of the explanation must lie in the troubled period of Viking incursions, the demise of Mercia, and post-Conquest turmoil:

<sup>48</sup> M. Greenslade and A. Kettle, ‘A history of the forests in Staffordshire’ in M. Greenslade (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 2 (1967) pp. 335-358

<sup>49</sup> Slade, ‘Staffordshire Domesday’, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> Gelling, *West Midlands*, p. 194.

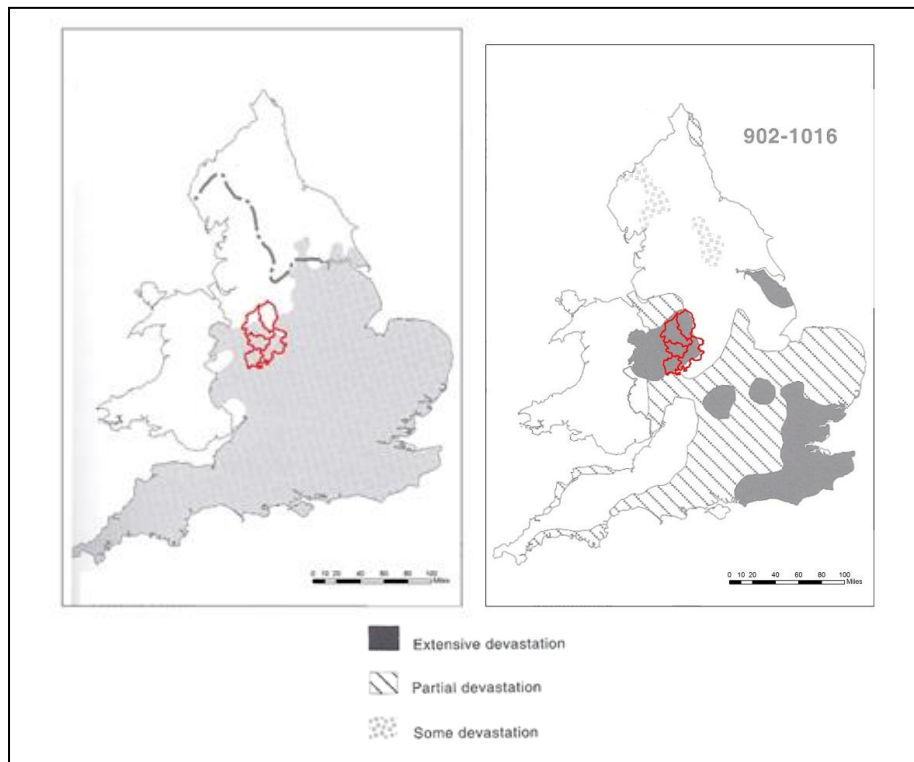


Figure 7: Roberts' map showing devastation in England to 1016 (Staffordshire inserted).<sup>51</sup>

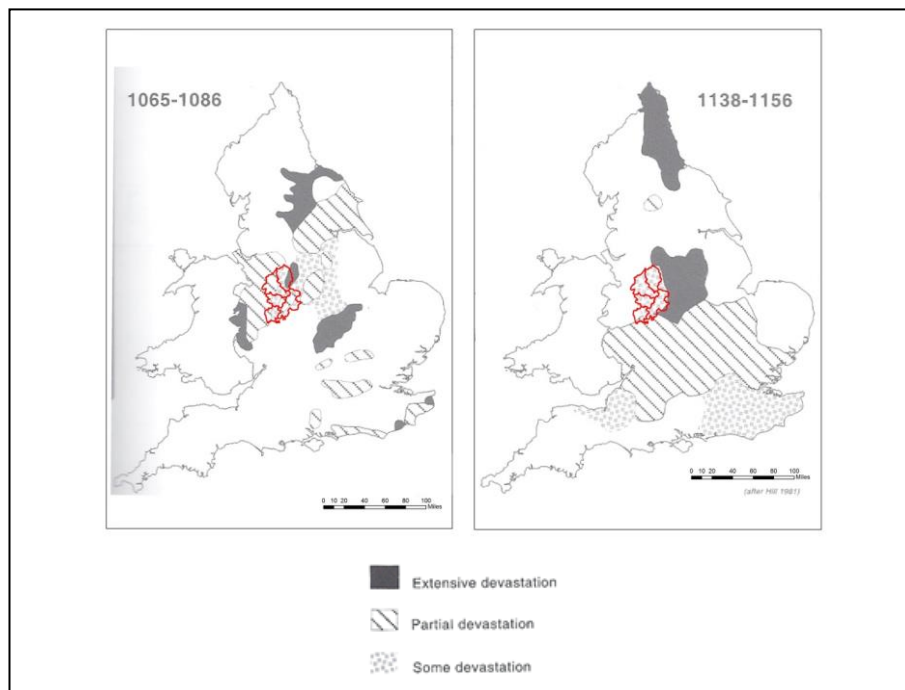


Figure 8: Roberts' map showing devastation in England 1056-1156 (Staffordshire inserted).<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> B. Roberts, *Landscapes, Documents and Maps: Villages in Northern England and Beyond AD 900-1250* (Oxford, 2008), p. 201. Grey in the first map shows the areas with more than 2.5 persons per square mile in 1086.

<sup>52</sup> B. Roberts, *Landscapes, Documents and Maps: Villages in Northern England and Beyond AD 900-1250* (Oxford, 2008), p. 201.

Staffordshire was divided into five hundreds. Totmonslow and Offlow were named after tumuli, Cuttlestone from a standing stone, with Pirehill and Seisdon taking their names from small hills.<sup>53</sup> The hundred was an important administrative unit formed in the early middle ages although there is some debate as to whether it was created after the formation of the shire or whether the shire was constructed around the hundreds.<sup>54</sup> There are also other meeting places in Pirehill (sitting on boundaries) such as *Witenaleage* ‘the clearing of the Witan’ mentioned in 975 at Madeley (S.801). Sitting on the county boundary of Shropshire and Cheshire, the location of *Witenaleage* may suggest that the county boundaries here respect earlier divisions in the area. The Iron Age hill fort at Berry Ring seems to have been reused in the period when the hundredal boundary was formed since both Pirehill and Cuttlestone Hundreds share access to it in a rather deliberate way, as can also be seen at Castle Ring where access is shared by Cuttlestone and Offlow Hundreds.<sup>55</sup> Hillforts were known to been used for a variety of purposes including the corralling of livestock, meeting places and places of refuge.<sup>56</sup> None of the hundreds have an important settlement or borough at their centre, indeed, only Seisdon occurs in the Domesday Survey as a settlement. Pirehill itself sits towards the south of the hundred named after it but on the edge of the major estates of Stafford (site of a royal burh), Eccleshall (an episcopal estate) and Stone (a probable early monastic site).

<sup>53</sup> Palliser, *Staffordshire Landscape*, p. 51.

<sup>54</sup> R. Jones and M. Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape: Beginnings and Ends* (Macclesfield, 2006), p. 74.

<sup>55</sup> This can be discerned from the pattern of the parish and hundredal boundaries.

<sup>56</sup> J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burgal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon Defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013), p.52

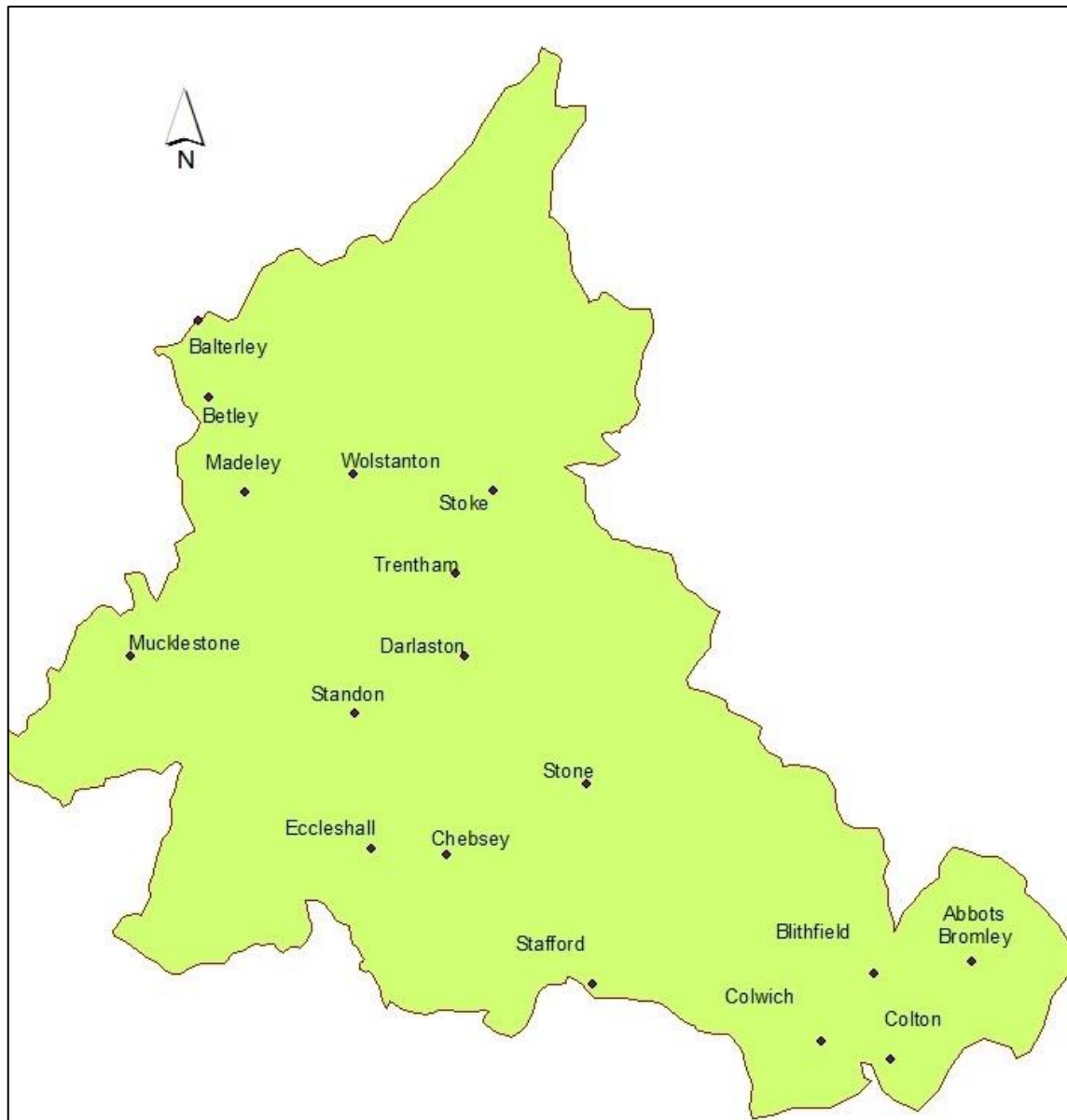


Figure 9: Pirehill and major places mentioned in the text.

In terms of approach this study has been influenced by Johnson's *Ideas of Landscape* which challenges what he terms the 'English Landscape Tradition' in a provocative work that confronts how such studies are approached methodologically and theoretically. He proposes that this tradition grew out of a romantic vision of landscape that can be traced through Hoskins (and the Leicester school) back to Wordsworth and the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth century, and it has found it difficult to shake off this past. We are, he submits, successors to a *Romantic gaze*:



‘Wordsworth tramped across fells, observed the landscape and just gathered it up into his heart and produced a poem...Hoskins tramped across Devon...gathered up his observations and wrote a historical narrative. Contemporary landscape archaeologists walk the fields, gather scatters of pottery, prepare hachured plans of earthworks, collate the sites and monuments record, and then gather this material up and expect it to become an understanding of past processes’.<sup>57</sup>

The difficulty for Johnson with this is that often ‘the past can be held to speak for itself, all we have to do is list or describe the remains of that past’.<sup>58</sup> The criticism levelled is one of localised interest, in solely using the tools to describe a local landscape without context or a broader analytical approach. In part the selection of a study area as narrow as the one chosen here must be open to the same criticism, it is localism writ small. The challenge here is how does a study such as this avoid descent into particularism and un-reflected empiricism (to use Johnson’s words) so commonly associated with local studies?<sup>59</sup> In addition, given that the shiring of the area is most likely to be a tenth century occurrence, the wisdom in viewing the early medieval period through a ‘county’ lens may also be open to question. However, the purpose here is not to write a narrative history of a particular place, rather it is to develop a methodology for examining the available sources and to see what can be gleaned from a relatively silent part of the early medieval landscape. If the sources can be stretched and pulled to tell us something new, then it is hoped that the methodology could be used in other areas often left blank on the maps of those studying the period. This research concentrates on the hundred of Pirehill and the southern half of that hundred in particular. It seeks to find ideas and methods to address a Mercian, but more specifically a west Staffordshire, problem:

‘The absence of a contemporary Mercian apologist and the patchy nature of such evidence as has survived the course of subsequent events, and the West Saxon

<sup>57</sup> M. Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape* (Oxford, 2007) p. 112.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape*, p. 82.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape*, p. 193.

ascendancy, have ensured that, until recently, scholars have tended to err on the side of caution, afraid of over-interpreting what does remain'.<sup>60</sup>

In part the answer to the question why Pirehill? is that this 'backyard' has been carefully chosen. The selection of the research area has been quite deliberate, chosen because it is difficult, because it seems unfruitful and because it is always the blank space on the historian's map. Sargent, when working on the much wider area of the Diocese of Lichfield, wrote that:

'There is a hole in the Kingdom of Mercia: the northwest midlands of England lies largely bereft of many of the comforts that textual and archaeological sources provide to the south and east'.<sup>61</sup>

All too often the same areas get re-worked time and again, little new is added and our horizons are not expanded. This has resulted in areas such as Pirehill on the whole remaining outside current historical narratives:

'the sense of place ends at that point on the ground where the long story of the past is no longer known, where the land and the stories on the other side belong to someone else'.<sup>62</sup>

This thesis proposes that this state of affairs is both misleading and self-perpetuating. This study is multi-disciplinary and, just as importantly, multi-focal, honing in on particular parishes, townships and specific sites. But at the same time it casts its eye more broadly into the wider hundred, county, region and beyond. Moreover, this research aims to stretch those few resources we have, to read against and across them to see how far they can go in informing us about the past. The early medieval period remains at best a difficult period to gain any certainty over, and Mercia a problematic kingdom. This then is partly a study of the historic and part 'prehistoric', and the paucity of evidence at the local level demands a variety of approaches. The aim here is

<sup>60</sup> Brown and Farr, *Mercia*, p.1.

<sup>61</sup> Sargent, 'Lichfield', p. x.

<sup>62</sup> K. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape* (Iowa, 1993), p. 69.

to take one small part of this area, examine it in detail, a hyper-local study anchoring wider discussions about early medieval England.

At best the distant past drifts into our sight, slightly blurred and out of focus, like an indistinct object we squint at to make anything out. One could argue that trying to discern these forms requires a type of ‘fuzzy logic’.<sup>63</sup> This is not a challenge new to prehistorians or archaeological theorists, but it is a challenge for landscape historians to rise to.<sup>64</sup> Johnson is surely correct when he states that, for a landscape study, it is not enough to have ‘a country man’s eyes and a good pair of boots’.<sup>65</sup> Part historic, part prehistoric, this examination of early medieval Staffordshire is a place where the archaeologist, the historian, the linguist, the landscape historian, the specialist in sculpture, pottery, poetry, metal working, place-names, ecclesiastical history can all contribute. In this study will be found close textual analyses of written sources (*Vitae*, the Domesday Survey, charters, medieval deeds etc.), detailed discussions of places-names and, wherever possible, the helping hand of archaeology has been sought. Above all though, this is an investigation of the landscape, numerous site visits and ‘muddy boots’ were essential to its conclusions. Understanding landscape must mean interpreting what we see now, but crucially also how it *was* seen and understood, to appreciate that it is a place where experiences, stories and identities are constantly being forged, re-examined and renegotiated.<sup>66</sup> We must not only people our landscapes but understand the otherness of people in the past, the mnemonic qualities that landscape gives and is imbued with, in effect to understand the past in the past.<sup>67</sup> Not all the conclusions in this thesis will remain unchallenged, the evidence is deliberately stretched, but it is hoped that if grounded in good practice and solid data, we might be able to suggest that certain proposals may at least have been possible, and in some cases even probable. To achieve some sort of truth we have to find a way of reasoning with

<sup>63</sup> An approach which has been developed over the last one hundred years or so in the field of mathematics and one that has become an established method for quantifying ideas. Often presented in complex mathematical theorems, fuzzy logic is used here as a simple illustrative tool rather than a developed theoretical approach. Fuzzy logic countenances the use of partial truths, it allows degrees of truth, but also vagueness and uncertainty to be permitted in a reckoning. L. Zadeh, ‘Fuzzy probabilities’, *Information Processing and Management*, 20(3) (1984), and F. Pelletier, Review of ‘Metamathematics of fuzzy logics’, *The Bulletin of Symbolic Logic*, 6(3) (2000), pp. 342–346.

<sup>64</sup> See Johnson, *Archaeological Theory* and Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape*.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *Ideas of Landscape*, p. 193.

<sup>66</sup> T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Abingdon 2000), and specifically T. Ingold, ‘The temporality of landscape’, *World Archaeology*, 25(2) (1993), pp. 152–174.

<sup>67</sup> See S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2013).

partial knowledge, otherwise the past remains mute by our inability to juggle possible outcomes and uncertainties and we will remain unable to understand how the people and landscape of places like Pirehill shaped each other in the early middle ages.

# CHAPTER ONE: THE CREATION OF MEMORY: HLĀW-LESS STAFFORDSHIRE

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‘It is only by virtue of lying adjacent to Derbyshire that Staffordshire scrapes into the category of counties which have pagan Anglo-Saxon remains’, Margaret Gelling.

Gelling’s assertion that pre-Christian burials are only to be found in the east of the county frames an understanding that places Staffordshire on the periphery of more interesting things happening to the east or indeed to the south, and is a pervasive one.<sup>68</sup> She goes on to stress that ‘finds made within the Staffordshire boundary are overflows...from the barrow burials of north Derbyshire... none of them has a distinctive character which would suggest a different cultural background’.<sup>69</sup> There is no elaboration as to why a separate identity might have been expected but the implication is that the absence of one compounds a sense that these are ‘Derbyshire’ burials that are simply on the wrong side of the (much later) county boundary which, by inference, may have been defined along the lines of earlier cultural divisions. Without new archaeological evidence this observation is difficult to analyse, this research is not a project based upon excavation, and little archaeological work been carried out on burials in Staffordshire since Gelling’s statement. Despite this, this chapter suggests that there is evidence of a wider spread of burials across Staffordshire that challenges the understanding propositioned by Gelling. As a starting point it is proposed that we have lost sight of a considerable number of burial mounds in Staffordshire. In part this is explained by the loss of physical evidence for mounds through attrition but, alongside this, we may have underestimated what might be significant numbers of secondary (early medieval) inhumations associated with prehistoric barrows. Commenting on the survival of prehistoric round barrows in the West Midlands regions as a whole, Garwood writes that ‘the impression that the number of round barrows investigated in

<sup>68</sup> M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> Gelling, *West Midlands*, p. 29.

the region is small and that we know little about them is misleading'.<sup>70</sup> It can be recognised from research across the country that early medieval inhumations could, and often were, to be found in association with prehistoric monuments. It is also known that early medieval monuments were often made in forms similar to prehistoric monuments. The present study does not attempt to provide a full catalogue of all barrow sites in Staffordshire but proposes that how we have defined barrows is restrictive and misleading and, additionally, that tumuli from all periods were essential features in the landscape to the people of the early medieval period. Barrows, monuments and inhumations all played an important part in the imagining of the early medieval landscape. This imagined or invented landscape as expressed through tumuli is a central concern of this chapter.

<sup>70</sup> P. Garwood, 'Late Neolithic and early Bronze Age funerary monuments and burial traditions in the West Midlands', in *The Undiscovered Country, the Earlier Prehistory of the West Midlands*, P. Garwood (ed.) (Oxford, 2007), p.138.

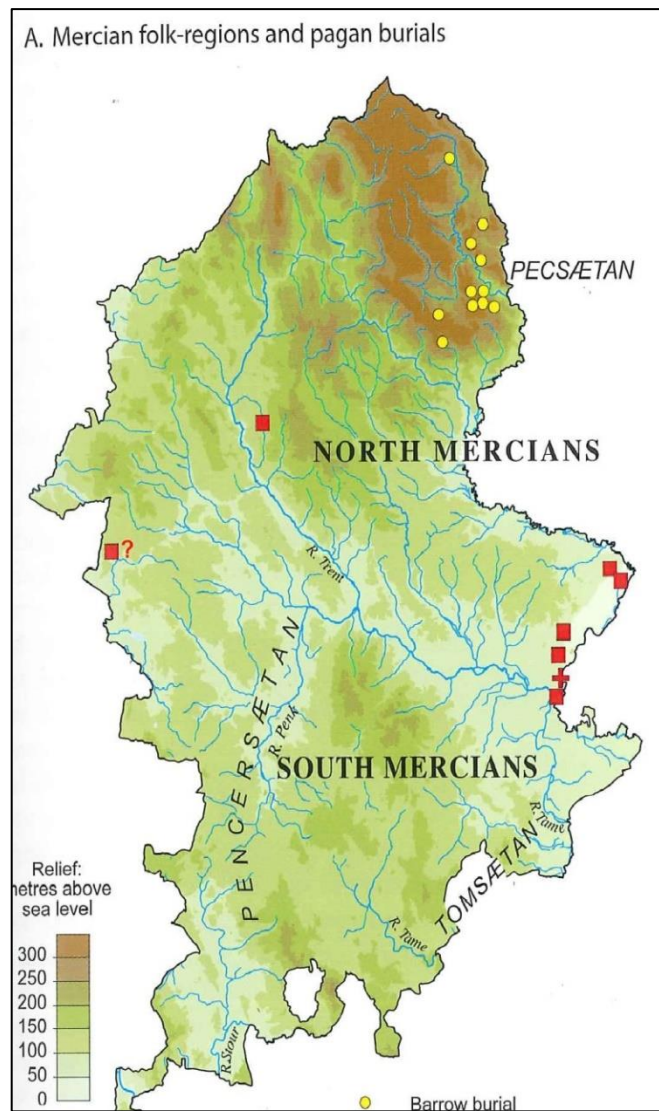


Figure 10: Most recent mapping of the traditional understanding of ‘pagan burials’ in Staffordshire.<sup>71</sup>

Those interested in the early medieval period have often used grave goods as markers of ethnicity, with burials found in central and eastern England used to define or refine definitions of ‘Jutish’, ‘Anglian’ or ‘Saxon’ identities and influences.<sup>72</sup> In Wales and Cornwall burial practices have been used to demonstrate ‘British’ customs and the perceived shifting patterns used to map the advance of ‘Anglo-Saxons’ across England. This east-to-west narrative has also led to a focus on tracing the end of burials with grave goods, to find the ‘final phase’ of furnished burials before the arrival of what were seen as more ‘Christian’ practices. This understanding has led at times to

<sup>71</sup> D. Hooke, ‘The Mercian Heartland’, in A. Phillips and C. Phillips (eds), *An Historical Atlas* (Manchester, 2011), pp. 30-31.

<sup>72</sup> J. Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1991), p. 30, and E. John, *Reassessing Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 7-8.

considering the evidence in an overtly chronological fashion and to search for evidence of ‘outsiders’, invaders and colonisers (pagans and Christians). The strength of this narrative, often painted with broad brush strokes, can loom large over local studies, leading to areas such as Staffordshire (not east enough to be Anglo-Saxon yet not west enough to be British) to be left out of the discussion. Re-working of cultural identities remains with us, the ‘refining of typologies and chronologies remains a central part of early Anglo-Saxon studies, despite some worries about the usefulness of this effort’.<sup>73</sup> Recent research however, has shown that burial practices can be seen as showing both change and continuity over much longer periods than was previously imagined.<sup>74</sup> And so, of the fifth and sixth centuries it has been said that they show themselves to be a period of ‘great mortuary variability, the seventh and early eighth centuries cannot be said to show any greater uniformity’ and extracting any serious conclusions about the ethnic make-up across a given region based upon this evidence seems fraught with problems.<sup>75</sup>

Across the country the preservation of prehistoric and early medieval monuments has been affected over the centuries by factors such as the deprivations of time, leading to erosion and collapse, as well as factors such as land enclosure, ploughing and other causes. Of the wider West Midlands area the ‘agricultural destruction of mounds in the region has clearly been extensive and there is evidence to suggest that this had early origins’.<sup>76</sup> Factors such as the growth in population during the medieval period and with that, increasingly intensive agricultural practices (which accelerated through the early modern period into the twenty-first century) have meant that these monuments often survive only in the remoter parts of the country.<sup>77</sup> Staffordshire is no exception and it is to the north-east of the county, in the higher lands of the Staffordshire Moorlands that we find the best survival. There the land is of a poorer quality and has, over the centuries, not attracted the more intensive agricultural

<sup>73</sup> S. Lucy and A. Reynolds, *Burial in Early Medieval England* (London, 2002) p. 8. See also H. Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>74</sup> Lucy and Reynold, *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales*, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> H. Williams, *Death and Memory in Early Medieval Britain* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>76</sup> Garwood, ‘Late Neolithic’, p. 134.

<sup>77</sup> For survival in Norfolk see N. Whyte, ‘The after-life of barrows: prehistoric monuments in the Norfolk landscape’, *Landscape History*, 25:1 (2003), p. 5.



practices found elsewhere.<sup>78</sup> The scarcity of inhumations that have been identified across Staffordshire may also be due to the low numbers of excavations that have taken place and the poor quality of many of those excavations.<sup>79</sup> Areas with unfurnished burials such as Staffordshire are still seen by some as being outside the main areas of Anglo-Saxon influence.<sup>80</sup> However, we know that this occurrence does not have a simple east-west trajectory since counties such as Hertfordshire and Sussex also contain few furnished burials. Whilst a smaller population in some areas may have led to fewer opportunities for archaeologists to find remains, other possibilities should be considered. It is probable that in these locales other customs of inhumation were followed that leave little evidence behind; such variations can be seen as cultural practices rather than signifiers of ethnicity, although the two are not mutually exclusive. Unfurnished inhumation might be such a practice although soil types will have played an important part in the survival of evidence and other practices such as excarnation should also be considered.<sup>81</sup> In Staffordshire we do not have significant dating evidence from burials, nor can we discuss with any real confidence the customs of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ or ‘British’ burial rites and what that might mean in terms of the ethnic or political makeup of the county. And, while many of the nuances of location, cultural significance and association are now lost to us, that does not mean we have nothing to say about mortuary customs and rites across Pirehill and Staffordshire in general. The methodology proposed here is that seemingly insignificant pieces of evidence, such as field-names, viewed in a wider context, can tell us a great deal about an area ostensibly lacking in physical evidence. As we will see, communities were making definitive decisions when they chose to dispose of their dead and how they engaged with the dead, both their own or those from earlier eras. We know that the names given to these monuments entered the terminology by which people defined places. Barrows played an important part in creating the narratives of the period as encountered for instance in literature, as in *Beowulf* and Felix’s *Life of Guthlac*; but also locally, where they were important features in the creative response to the landscape in which people lived. These barrows and monuments featured not only in the physical world of the early

<sup>78</sup> To this we can add the often destructive practices of eighteenth and nineteenth-century antiquarians. Natural erosion, trees and quarrying will also have made an impact on the survival of these monuments.

<sup>79</sup> H. Williams, ‘Ancient landscapes of the dead: the reuse of Prehistoric and Roman monuments as early Anglo-Saxon burial sites’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 41 (1997), p. 16.

<sup>80</sup> Sargent, ‘Lichfield’, p. 285.

<sup>81</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p. 44.

medieval period, they also entered the language and imagination of the time, becoming integral to the stories told about the places. If these stories can be reconstructed, we might begin to try to understand how the past was understood in the past.<sup>82</sup>

## **‘Real’ barrows**

### **Barrows associated with inhumations in Staffordshire**

This section sets out what is ‘known’ about barrows across Staffordshire, it is based upon a report of all barrows (both prehistoric and early medieval) requested from Staffordshire Historic Environment Record (HER). Their report showed a total of 32 barrows (with associated burials) for Staffordshire.<sup>83</sup> Most of these have been visited within the last 50 years, of these:

**43% (14) are recognisable features, of which:**

15% (5) are under grass or ploughed down

21% (7) above ground and in good condition

6% (2) are said to be in a poor condition (less than 20% of the feature surviving

43% (14) have been lost or destroyed

14% (7) are from early written reports only and have had no site visit and must be assumed to be lost

Figure 11: Barrows associated with inhumations in Staffordshire.

It can be seen that the attrition rate, even within the last 50 years, has been very high. A minimum of 43% (14) of those barrows identified have been lost and upwards of 80% damaged, ploughed down, or about which we have little knowledge.

### **Barrows without evidence of associated inhumations in Staffordshire**

The report also lists 41 ‘barrows’ without associated inhumations for Staffordshire.

Of this list:

<sup>82</sup> For references to place-names found in OE, ON and PrWelsh see M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (1978, Chichester, 2010 edn), p. 133.

<sup>83</sup> Staffordshire HER covers the local authority of Staffordshire and so excludes Sandwell MBC, Walsall MBC, parts of Dudley MBC and the City of Wolverhampton as well as the City of Stoke on Trent.

15 % (6) are recorded with some certainty as being 'barrows'

27% (11) are of uncertain origin

49% (20) are now considered 'natural features' or manmade features like spoil heaps from mining

7% (3) are considered on place-name evidence only

2% (1) is lost

Figure 12: Barrows without evidence of associated inhumations in Staffordshire.

Here only 15% (6) are considered to be 'genuine barrows' with 49% (20) no longer deemed barrows but rather seen as natural features or spoil from mining. Several of these have been de-scheduled. Three have entered the record on place-name evidence only, but no reason is given as to why. The majority of these are in the east of the county with preponderance to the Staffordshire Moorlands. Many are found on former parkland and commons, which gives weight to the suggestion that agricultural activity was mainly responsible for the loss of sites. The 11 barrow sites for Pirehill Hundred show one 'barrow' listed from field-name evidence alone, seven are now considered to be solely natural features, and the remaining three described as 'possible' barrows. The HER reports show that there is an inconsistency as to what constitutes a 'barrow'.<sup>84</sup>

### **Staffordshire barrow sites – early excavations**

To develop this theme it is necessary to examine the early nineteenth century excavations when most of those of barrows we know about today were examined. In Staffordshire the most prolific excavator was Thomas Bateman (1821-1861) one of the 'big four nineteenth century prehistoric barrow diggers'.<sup>85</sup> Based in Derbyshire, Bateman's influence was felt in Staffordshire where he, and in particular his local lieutenant Samuel Carrington (a school master from Wetton), dug over a hundred burial mounds. Between them they rifled through over 300 barrows in the two counties.<sup>86</sup> Bateman, like many antiquarians focused his excavations on reaching the centre of any given barrow, often as quickly and efficiently as possible, often neglecting the wider site. He did not employ a method of sinking a single shaft from above but took a fixed point from the edge of the cairn and drove inwards. Carrington's excavations in

<sup>84</sup> Actual search terms were: 'Burial', 'burial cairn', 'burial pit', 'chambered tomb', 'cist', 'cremation', 'grave', 'human remains', 'tomb'.

<sup>85</sup> B. Marsden, *The Early Barrow Diggers* (Stroud, 1999), p. 49.

<sup>86</sup> Marsden, *Barrow Diggers*, p. 66.

Staffordshire on the other hand are said to have taken a more ‘eccentric’ and ‘meandering’ progress towards the centre of the mounds.<sup>87</sup> Most barrows were dug in a day and sometimes more than one was tackled. This method of digging in from the side rather than straight down contributed to the opinion that Bateman was said to employ far better excavation techniques than his contemporaries, and many of these excursions were written up with the accompanying drawings being of a high standard.<sup>88</sup> The best record of Bateman’s excavations can be found in two publications, *Vestiges of the Antiquities of Derbyshire* (1848) which includes a large section on Staffordshire, and *Ten Years Diggings in Celtic and Saxon Grave Hills* (1861). We can see from the title of his second publication that Bateman was well aware of the possibilities of finding early medieval burials when excavating, although he often misunderstood these for those of ‘Romanised Britons’.<sup>89</sup> Carrington was also alert to the likelihood of secondary burials but he is less forthcoming with details in his descriptions.<sup>90</sup>



Figure 13: Illustration of an excavation at Taylor’s Low, Wetton (Staffordshire) 1845.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Marsden, *Barrow Diggers*, p. 59.

<sup>88</sup> Marsden, *Barrow Diggers*, p.51.

<sup>89</sup> Marsden, *Barrow Diggers*, p.58.

<sup>90</sup> D. Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians in the Peak District’, in P. Morgan (ed.), *Staffordshire Studies. Essays presented to Denis Stuart* (Keele, 1987), p. 10.

<sup>91</sup> Marsden, *Barrow Diggers*, p.60.

## Barrow forms

Our first description of a barrow in Staffordshire was given by Plot, who writing in 1686 about '*Saxons lows*' observed that:

‘at the end of Kinfare (Kinver) heath, near the lane leading to Enfield, there seems also to be another under *Meg a fox hole*; which tho’ now all stone, may possibly have been formerly of earth, now turn’d into stone by subterranean heats’.<sup>92</sup>

He went on to propose that recent experiments confirmed this suspicion, intimating that barrows in Kingswinford and Hints (both Staffordshire) may also have been through the same process. It is difficult to trace this notion much further back in time, at least in a Staffordshire context, but it is conceivable that it had earlier antecedents. It may for example indicate another means of interpreting place-names such as ‘Stoneylow’ as found in Blurton (see Local Study 1). Bateman proposed that early medieval burial mounds were smaller than prehistoric mounds, examples being up to 12 yards (10-11 metres) wide.<sup>93</sup> Semple also suggests that prehistoric barrows tend to be larger than the later early medieval examples which are often associated with these earlier monuments, citing examples at Bishopstone, Sussex and Bowcombe Down, Isle of Wight.<sup>94</sup> Of the some 100 sites Bateman and Carrington dug, we can be confident that about a tenth can be attributed to the early medieval period.<sup>95</sup> This gives us a very rough estimate of 10% of barrows that survived to be dug in Staffordshire in the nineteenth century contained early medieval inhumations. However, the fact that these antiquarian excavators often targeted the centre of the mound led to little or no attention being paid to the possibility of later secondary inhumations on the edges of the mounds. Despite this, when Bateman and Carrington came across such burials they were able to distinguish primary burials from later secondary (early medieval) interments.<sup>96</sup> Others have suggested that where single burial insertions have been found this may well have more to do with the

<sup>92</sup> R. Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686, Oxford; Pocket Plot edn, Barlaston, 2009), chapter 10, 34, p. 414. My thanks to David Horovitz for this reference.

<sup>93</sup> Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians’, p. 7.

<sup>94</sup> S. Semple, ‘Politics and princes AD 400-800: new perspectives on the funerary landscape of the South Saxon kingdom’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 27(4) (2008), p. 415.

<sup>95</sup> Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians’, p. 9.

<sup>96</sup> Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians’, pp. 5-6.

poor excavation techniques employed rather than other factors.<sup>97</sup> More comprehensive excavations of inhumations from all periods in the region have shown that far from being single burial mounds these sites have often revealed burials ranging from five to 25 in number.<sup>98</sup> To summarise, it is probable that the 10% figure for surviving barrows containing early medieval inhumations is a conservative one and it is conceivable that the information we have for Staffordshire seriously underestimates the numbers of inhumations we might expect to find in a given barrow.

### **Barrow composition**

On the composition of barrows in the Staffordshire region Bateman made two interesting observations. First, he tells us that prehistoric barrows were made of stone, in effect cairns of piled up stones, however he states on several occasions that the early medieval barrows they excavated consisted, on the whole, of earth. In addition an excavated Bronze Age cairn at Grindlow near Over Haddon (just over the county boundary in Derbyshire) was shown to have had earth overlaying its stone construction in order to accommodate a secondary early medieval burial. Wilson's analysis of Bateman's research draws our attention to his observations but does not develop them, although he informs us that this identification of mounds of turf-covered earth was something he himself had seen in his own excavations in Cheshire and North Staffordshire. If we can have confidence in Bateman's dating then these turf-covered mounds might be important, and, could have implications for the survival of early medieval barrows in the region and in Staffordshire in particular.<sup>99</sup> Evidence that turf covered these mounds was indicated by the 'thin ochrey veins' found by Bateman. Poor drainage of these barrows, only one of which was said to have been ditched, may help explain the modest survival rate of the bones within.<sup>100</sup> If the Staffordshire mounds were, like Guthlac's, 'built of clods of earth' (see below), rather than stone cairns then it is clear that the attrition rate for them would have been much higher than those constructed solely of stone. We may also add that without a ditch these barrows have less chance of showing up as crop marks on aerial photographs.

<sup>97</sup> Williams, 'Ancient landscapes', p. 17, and H. Williams, 'Monuments and the past in early Anglo-Saxon England', *World Archaeology*, 30:1 (1998), pp. 90-108.

<sup>98</sup> J. Barnatt and K. Smith, *The Peak District: Landscapes Through Time* (Macclesfield, 2004), p. 34.

<sup>99</sup> Wilson, 'Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians', p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> Wilson, 'Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians', p. 7.

Another point made by Wilson, and which drew his attention, was that Bateman says he found evidence that early medieval mounds in this region could have been ‘tempered’. This ‘tempering’ is said to have softened the soil or made it more malleable by adding liquid of some sort which meant it could be applied more easily and moulded for any desired effect giving, Bateman tells us, ‘a very solid and undisturbed appearance’.<sup>101</sup> This practice (if identified correctly) would have had the effect of making the soil more corrosive, leading to increased risk of decomposition. In his reports Bateman tells us that he found ‘the bones were much decayed from the grave having been filled with tempered earth’.<sup>102</sup> It is possible that this was a deliberate act, intended to cause the decomposition of the body and could have been a ritual of long-standing practice. On some occasions the reports suggest that tempering of the earth was only done in the area nearest the remains.<sup>103</sup> An inhumation ritual that involved tempering especially if it was, as suggested by Wilson, a well-established local practice would go a long way to explaining the poor survival rate of bones in Staffordshire.<sup>104</sup> Some caution, however, is required: Wilson also suggests the possibility of ‘a more mundane reason’. Tumuli constructed without ditches implies decreased drainage, and so leading to the impression given to Bateman of ‘tempering’.<sup>105</sup> Interestingly the only early medieval burial found by Bateman to have a surrounding ditch contained the most impressive finds, that of Benty Grange in Derbyshire. It is difficult to see how easily Bateman would have been able to differentiate between tempering and the effects of compacted soil over several hundred years of erosion.

Even if we are suspicious of the idea of deliberate ‘tempering’ in burials, the observations still leave us with one important suggestion, that many of the barrows of Staffordshire were earthen rather than stone cairns. Recent excavations on the continent have shown that mounds were constructed of turf in Bronze Age Denmark and later Iron Age examples have been excavated on marginal land in Holland.<sup>106</sup> Eight out of

<sup>101</sup> Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians’, p. 6.

<sup>102</sup> T. Bateman, *Ten Years Diggings in Celtic and Saxon Grave Hills in the Counties of Derby, Stafford and York from 1848-1858* (London, 1861), p.71.

<sup>103</sup> Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians’, p. 6.

<sup>104</sup> Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians’, p. 7.

<sup>105</sup> Wilson, ‘Bateman, Carrington and the Anglians’, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> D. Fontijn, Q. Bourgeois, A. Louwen (eds), *Iron Age Echoes, Prehistoric Land Management and the Creation of a Funerary Landscape – The ‘Twin Barrows’ at the Echoput in Apeldoorn* (Leiden, 2011), p. 54.

the nine barrows excavated at West Heath, Harting (Sussex) had turf stacks whilst excavations of two Bronze Age mounds at Tixall near Stafford have shown that they were constructed of turf and that they also lacked a surrounding ditch.<sup>107</sup> It is clear that if this was the case early medieval mounds, and prehistoric mounds which may have included secondary inhumations, will have been less robust than mounds found elsewhere. Also the ‘tempering’ found in association with early medieval burials, whether deliberate or as an effect of the construction of the mound, will have had an impact on the survival of any inhumations and associated finds.

### **Place-names: hlāw, beorg and crūg**

The literary depictions of barrows found in *Beowulf* and Felix’s *Life of St Guthlac* provide us with a set of tools for interpreting the cultural associations and imaginings that the people of the early medieval period had with the landscape and its monuments.<sup>108</sup> The use of theophoric place-names in association with barrows suggests a mythologizing of sites in a way that is similar to examples found in early medieval Welsh poetry.<sup>109</sup> The prehistoric barrow in *Beowulf* is seen as a home for a terrifying dragon that stalks the land. The barrow in the poem is described as being an *earth cave* with *stone bows*, and seems to resemble a stone-chambered long barrow.<sup>110</sup> There is no surviving contemporary written evidence for barrows in Staffordshire, although there is for a Mercian saint. St Guthlac (c.674-714) was of royal Mercian lineage who after a period as a warrior took to religious life. He became a monk at the important Mercian centre at Repton (Derbyshire) and moved to Crowland (Lincolnshire) in 699 (later the site of an abbey) and took up an eremitical life. In the *Vita Guthlaci*, composed sometime between 730 and 749, Felix tells us that Guthlac sought out a remote island containing ‘phantoms of demons which haunted it’.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> G. Lock, ‘King’s Low and Queen’s Low: a wider discussion’ in G. Lock, D. Spicer and W. Hollins (eds) *Excavations at King’s Low and Queen’s Low: Two Early Bronze-Age Barrows in Tixall, North Staffordshire* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 90-98.

<sup>108</sup> Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 202.

<sup>109</sup> D. Petts, ‘Burial, religion and identity in sub-Roman and early medieval Britain: AD 400–800’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Reading, 2000), pp. 80-85.

<sup>110</sup> S. Semple, ‘A fear of the past: The place of the prehistoric burial mound in the ideology of middle and later Anglo-Saxon England’, *World Archaeology*, 30:1 (London, 1998), p. 110.

<sup>111</sup> A. Hall, ‘Constructing Anglo-Saxon sanctity: tradition, innovation and Saint Guthlac’, in D. Strickland (ed.), *Images of Sanctity: Essays in Honour of Gary Dickson, Visualising the Middle Ages*, 1 (Leiden, 2007), <http://www.alarichall.org.uk> (1/10/2012), pp. 207–235 and B. Colgrave, *Felix’s Life of Saint Guthlac* (1956, Cambridge, 2007 edn), chapter xxv, p. 89.



‘There was in the said island a mound built of clods of earth which greedy comers to the waste had dug open, in the hope of finding treasure there, in the side of this there seemed to be sort of cistern, and in this Guthlac the man of blessed memory began to dwell, after building a hut over it’.<sup>112</sup>

This barrow was used as a literary device in the *Vita*, mirroring aspects of the life of St Bartholomew, a proposal that is further strengthened by the fact that chambered cairns are sparse in that region.<sup>113</sup> Stocker suggests that there is evidence for a mound near to the abbey remains ‘500m to the north east at a site at the suggestively named Anchor Hill’.<sup>114</sup> The mound, said to contain ‘a cistern’ to one side, implies an earlier chamber of some sort, possibly containing or having contained a burial. Whichever is accurate, the landscape and the barrow were chosen either by Guthlac to dwell within, or by Felix to place the story, and it represented to them ‘the most remote, inaccessible, fearful, dreadful and haunted place that he could conceive’.<sup>115</sup> Interestingly Felix described the mound as made of ‘earth’, and, if this was the site suggested by Stocker at Anchor Hill then it was a round barrow.<sup>116</sup>

Other than physical remains the major source for barrows is place-names. The word ‘barrow’ is one that has been in use from at least the sixteenth century to denote a stone or earthen mound.<sup>117</sup> In this research ‘barrow’ or ‘mound’ is used to denote a modern understanding of a man-made feature that includes terms such as ‘barrow’, ‘burial cairn’, ‘burial pit’, ‘chambered tomb’, ‘cist’, ‘cremation’, ‘round barrow’, ‘tomb’ etc.<sup>118</sup> The use of *beorg*, and in the Midlands the much more common *hlāw*, is used to denote a location containing that place-name element or the early medieval concept of such a place. Gelling considers four words that can give the meaning ‘tumulus’ in the early medieval period: OE *hlāw* and *beorg*, ON *haugr* and PrWelsh *crŷc*. These she tells us are not ‘a fool proof guide to the existence of a tumulus’ as they ‘were all used of natural hills as well as artificial ones. The frequent siting of tumuli on commanding natural eminences adds to the uncertainty’. She goes on to say

<sup>112</sup> Colgrave, *Felix’s Life*, chapter xxviii, pp. 94-95.

<sup>113</sup> S. Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 149-153.

<sup>114</sup> D. Stocker, ‘The early church in Lincolnshire’, in A. Vince (ed.), *Pre-Viking Lindsey* (Lincoln, 1993), p.105.

<sup>115</sup> Semple, *Perceptions* p. 151.

<sup>116</sup> Stocker, ‘The early church’, p. 105.

<sup>117</sup> Gelling, *Signposts*, p. 134.

<sup>118</sup> M. Bowden, *Unravelling the Landscape* (1999, Stroud, reprinted 2006), p. 27.

that there are a number of OE and ON words for hills which are not found in association with tumuli and so these elements ‘may be regarded as partially specialised terms’.<sup>119</sup> Unfortunately she does not elaborate on these specialised terms apart from suggesting that *hlāw* was, when not associated with a barrow, most likely to have been used of hills of ‘an artificial outline’ or that were ‘not entirely of geological origin’, and we are left to consider these elements from a purely archaeological perspective.<sup>120</sup> Hooke has commented on the occurrence of ‘burial features’ in West Midland charters although regrettably Staffordshire is not included in her analysis.<sup>121</sup> However, she goes further than Gelling, seeing the ‘interpretation of the terms *beorg*, *hlāw* and *crūg*, as a *natural hill* as the most likely meaning unless there is direct archaeological evidence of a funerary connection’, although she proposes a ‘second possible meaning’ that they may also have acted as boundary features, although this is perhaps a secondary, later role rather than a second meaning.<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless for Hooke, like Gelling, a true *beorg*, *hlāw* or *crūg* is one that is evidenced by archaeological finds, but she does say that ‘natural features may have been occasionally confused with burial mounds’, but does not expand upon this.<sup>123</sup>

Part of the difficulty with these interpretations is the search for ‘real’ (in an archaeological sense) barrows, rather than having an understanding of what a *beorg*, *hlāw* or *crūg* may have meant to the people who coined the terms. As we have observed even with all our data, equipment, mapping and centuries of investigation, burial mounds can often be confused with natural features such as windmill mounds, clearance cairns and the like.<sup>124</sup> It is impossible to imagine how, unless collapsed, robbed out or opened, the people of the early medieval period would have been able to recognise whether a mound was natural or man-made or of what date. Furthermore it is perfectly possible that these thoughts and concepts were never a concern for early medieval people. Rather than honing in on the mound and its contents in the manner of Bateman, it is perhaps within a wider context that we should understand barrows, within a landscape of memory, story-telling and spiritual cognition. The dominant early

<sup>119</sup> Gelling, *Signposts*, pp. 133–134.

<sup>120</sup> Gelling, *Signposts*, p. 137.

<sup>121</sup> D. Hooke, ‘Burial features in West Midland charters’, *Journal of the EPNS*, 13 (1980-1981), pp. 1-40.

<sup>122</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, pp. 3-4.

<sup>123</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, p. 7.

<sup>124</sup> M. Bowden, *Unravelling the Landscape*, p. 28.

medieval term for these features in Staffordshire was *hlāw*. Howe suggests that the impermanence of timber buildings may have led to people of the period identifying with the wider landscape as ‘home’ rather than, as we might see it, associated with a particular building.<sup>125</sup> The evidence of shifting settlement patterns during this period may add weight to this idea. If barrows are part of a process of mythologizing and interpreting the landscape (and the past) then anything that had the properties of a barrow could attract that description. From this we might conclude that the appearance of permanence that such monuments gave may have meant that they had a strong presence in the mind of local people and in the landscape they inhabited; and that they may have played an important role in how people understood their landscape and their place within it. Howe’s assertions lead us to conclude that these features could have been one of the few permanent features of a shifting understanding of ‘home’. A feature in the landscape that looked like a *hlāw* was a *hlāw*, it mattered not that it did not contain a burial, that is was not man made, a *hlāw* could be created in the mind and not solely on the ground.

### **Barrows: major place-names: *beorg*, *hlāw* and *crūg***

Of the three main OE place-name elements that have been understood to indicate a barrow, Hooke proposed that ‘*beorg* estate names should be suspected of being of archaeological significance’.<sup>126</sup> However, by far and away the most common element found in Staffordshire used to denote a barrow is OE *hlāw*, a word suggested by some commentators is more likely to have been associated with ‘Anglo-Saxon burials’.<sup>127</sup> Of PrWelsh *crūg* Hooke remarks that its occurrence, although significantly less common than *beorg* and *hlāw*, followed similar distribution patterns and that there was no significant preponderance to the west of the region.<sup>128</sup> PrWelsh *crūg* can often be difficult to tell apart from OE *cirice* (church). This is exemplified by Hanchurch (Pirehill) for which it is difficult to find evidence of a church and the more likely meaning is PrWelsh *crūg* indicating a high tumulus. Crakelow may be another example, this time containing *hlāw*. The most secure evidence for place-names that contain

<sup>125</sup> N. Howe, *Writing the Map of Anglo-Saxon England* (Michigan, 2008), p. 47.

<sup>126</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, p. 10.

<sup>127</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, pp. 15-17.

<sup>128</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, p. 13.

indicators of barrows is from the written record of the early medieval period. There are four charters from this period for Staffordshire that contain references to *hlāw*:

*7 of þreo ymere on Eþelwies heie on þone feld on þone lhau. 7 þanen on þa dic  
et þan scagan.*

And from the three boundaries to Ethelwie's hedge, to the open land, to the  
low, and thence to the dyke at the shaw...

Figure 14: Boundary clause from Hatherton charter (S.1380, dated 994).<sup>129</sup>

*Of ðam lytlan hlawan to þan longan snapan on ða stræt*

From the little low to the long boggy piece of land, to the road...

Figure 15: Boundary clause from Abbots Bromley charter (S.878, dated 996).

*7 to ðan þorne to ðan hæg stowe æfter hæg stowe to dotes hlawe of dotdes  
hlawe to þere street þær on ansidelege...*

... from the thorn to the hedge place, following the hedge place to Dot(t)'s low,  
from Dot(t)'s low to the road, thence to Anslow...

Figure 16: Boundary clause from Rolleston charter (S.920, dated 941).

*... Ærst of trente þær þa ðeofes hangað on middan bere fordes holme. of ðan  
holme to geriht to þan lewe butan fif lan beheonan of þan landan to þan sice...*

... first from the Trent where the thieves hang in the middle of the barley ford  
island, from the island straight on to the low outside the lands, from the lands to  
the watercourse...

Figure 17: Boundary clause from Wetmoor charter (S.930, dated 1012).<sup>130</sup>

<sup>129</sup> In Staffordshire *hlāw* is by far and away the most common element used for a barrow.

<sup>130</sup> All taken from D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire: the Charter Evidence* (Keele, 1983).

The four clauses from these charters give the following meanings: ‘little’ *hlāw* (Abbots Bromley), a barrow associated with a personal name ‘Dotts *hlāw*’ (Rolleston), one possibly associated (at a little distance) with criminals (Wetmoor) and one without a descriptor. Given the discussion above it is interesting to note that none of these barrows physically survived into the modern period, with one surviving as a field-name only.<sup>131</sup> The attrition rate of barrow features known to have been in existence in the early medieval period is high, with just one in four surviving as a field-name, a reminder of the fragility of the archaeological record.

### **Naming *hlāws***

The proposal presented here is that place-names contain a way of re-examining the question of the distribution of burial mounds across Staffordshire. Perhaps the most famous reference to the naming of a burial mound from the period is in *Beowulf*:

‘Command men famous as fighters to build a burial mound, a conspicuous one, on the ocean bluff, following the cremation. It must tower high on Hronesnæs as a reminder to my people, so that the seafarers who from afar come navigating their tall ships over the gloom of the waters may thereafter call it Beowulf’s Barrow’.<sup>132</sup>

The poem tells us that at the time of the interment of the great hero a mound was erected and from that point forward was given the name ‘Beowulf’s Barrow’. The barrow bearing the name of a particular (primary) interned individual may reflect early practices; it may however highlight something different. *Beowulf* as a poem is concerned with a mythologized heroic and aristocratic past and names such as this may have been attached to monuments at a much later date, becoming part of a created or invented landscape that reflected mythological or local heroes. The mound to which Beowulf’s name was attached may have been from the early medieval period or from an

<sup>131</sup> Hooke, *Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire*, p. 45.

<sup>132</sup> S. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1982, London, reissued 1991) p. 485.

earlier prehistoric monument, or even one of those ‘natural’ features mentioned by Gelling and Hooke.<sup>133</sup>

Horovitz lists some 150 places in Staffordshire that contain elements that may refer to tumuli. His examples are drawn mainly from major place-names. Some minor names such as the un-located *Goldburynes* ‘burial mound where gold was found’ have been included, although no systematic field-name survey was undertaken by Horovitz.<sup>134</sup> From this corpus we find that 87% (130) of the total are *hlāw* place-names and only 5% (8) contain OE *beorg*.<sup>135</sup> 6% (9) contain the element *calfra* often used for a small object in relation to another larger element, for example a tumuli on a larger hill, as in Cauldon Lowe. The remaining 2% (3) of this corpus include names indicating associations with other physical remains such as standing stones (Stansmore, Stanton and Stone). For the purpose of this discussion only names that Horovitz maintains contain a possible barrow element have been included. Others such as Wednesbury, although considered by some scholars to have a tumulus element (OE *beorg* plus OE *Woden*), are not part of the Horovitz corpus and so have been left out of this discussion.

The personal names given with *hlāw* in Staffordshire include: *Bott/a*, *Catt/a(?)*, *Deora/e(?)*, *Gærm/Garm*, *Dottr(?)*, *Horsa*, *Hrani*, *Hrolla*, *Hroplaf*, *Mocc*, *Offa*, *Pæгна*, *Sveinn*, *Tatmann*, *Waldhere*, *Wær* and *Ware*. These are all male, and the only potential female names are *Cwene* for Queen’s Low. An antiquarian interpretation of the name links it to Æthelflaed.<sup>136</sup> The same element *Cwene*, can be found in the unlocated *Guendelawe*. It seems improbable that two queens rested here, and perhaps a more likely understanding is that the size of the barrow in relation to nearby King’s Low prompted the naming of the Queen’s. Two barrow names potentially refer to being on a boundary, Martin’s Low and Merryton Low (OE *(ge)mære*). Another two, Wardlow (OE *weard*) and Warslow (OE *weardsetl*) suggest look-out places and may feasibly

<sup>133</sup> In some respects it might be argued that the modern association of Raedwald with Sutton Hoo follows a similar process.

<sup>134</sup> D. Horovitz, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* (Brewood, 2005), p. 280.

<sup>135</sup> These are: Barrow Hill, Barrow Moor, Berry Hill, Burnhill Green, Gainsborough Hill Farm, Greensbury Hill, Gooldburynes, Mucheberge. The percentages have been rounded up.

<sup>136</sup> R. Longdon, ‘The naming of King’s Low and Queen’s Low’, in G. Lock, D. Spicer and W. Hollins (eds), *Excavations at King’s Low and Queen’s Low: Two Early Bronze-Age Barrows in Tixall, North Staffordshire* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 3-4.

have been built for that purpose.<sup>137</sup> Tumuli are often said to be found on boundaries, and their usefulness in demarcating the edges of land divisions, being long-lived features, is fairly self-evident.<sup>138</sup> Their occurrence there may indicate a deliberate practice of placing them on the edge of settlement areas. In some instances it may be difficult to know which came first, the boundary onto which a burial may have been placed, or a mound as a feature in a liminal place being used as a boundary marker. Both are feasible. It is of interest, however, that relatively few have directional names, or even names that denote their being on a boundary. Nevertheless, we should remember that the boundary clauses take us around a place; they are never ‘in’ the place they describe, so we are led around space but never enter it. That qualifiers were used, such as ‘long’ (*langan*) or ‘broken’ (*brocenan*) suggests that the early medieval mind was well aware of the different appearances that monuments might present.<sup>139</sup> Broken barrows (OE *brocnan*) have been recorded across the West Midlands region, as have hollow barrows (OE *holh*), both indicating their collapsed or robbed-out status.<sup>140</sup>

The importance of animals to the early medieval world cannot be underestimated. Animals supplied many of the essentials of life such as food, clothing and light. They provided transport, power, and figured largely in leisure activities and in cultural symbolism.<sup>141</sup> It is feasible that animal names were attached to barrows that no longer had cultural or socially significant memories associated with them. Or it may be that these animals were to be found in the locality of those barrows, either in the early medieval period, or later than that. It is also possible that the barrows had physical characteristics that would associate them with animals, for example Dotslow (horn-shaped *hlāw*).<sup>142</sup> In other instances, however, the descriptor might be indicating a different characteristic, for example, the use of OE *cælf* ‘calf’ may have referred to a barrow’s size in relation to another feature near it, rather than to the animal itself.

<sup>137</sup> V. Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-Names* (2004, Cambridge, 2010 edn) p. 653.

<sup>138</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, pp. 3-4.

<sup>139</sup> V. Crewe, ‘Barrows and buildings, ditches and dwellings’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 2010), p. 221.

<sup>140</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, p. 14.

<sup>141</sup> R. Jones, *The Medieval Natural World* (Harlow, 2013), pp. 73-84.

<sup>142</sup> N. Tringham, ‘Horninglow’, in N. Tringham (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 9 (2003), p. 175.

Although the symbolic use of animals in early medieval art, metal working, and stone sculpture is well recognised.<sup>143</sup>

<b>Undomesticated animals:</b>	
Bee	Beelow Hill, OE <i>beo</i>
Jackdaw	Cowlow, OE <i>ca</i>
Fox	Foxlow (uncertain)
Louse (or pigsty)	Luzlow, OE <i>luz</i>
Wild cat	Catshill, Cattleslowe, OE <i>catt(e)</i>
Wolf (or felon)	Morrillow, Warrilow, OE <i>wearg</i>
<b>Domesticated Animals:</b>	
Calf	Cauldon Lowe, OE <i>cælf</i>
Horse	Horseley Fields, OE <i>hors</i>
Lamb	Lamber Low, OE <i>lambra</i>
Pig(sty) (or louse)	Luzlow, OE <i>hlōse</i>
Stud-mare	Stadmorslow, ME <i>stodmere</i>
<b>Plants:</b>	
Gillyflower	Gillow Heath
Fern	Farlawe, Ferlawe (unlocated), OE <i>fearn</i>

Figure 18: OE *hlāw* found in association with animal and plant names.<sup>144</sup>

The use of ‘colour’ descriptors raises ideas about how colour was perceived and expressed in the early medieval period. Barley suggests that although there are several words that can be translated from OE to mean colour, ‘a better rendering is *appearance*’.<sup>145</sup> The colours found in these place-names fit comfortably within what, Barley suggested, was the ‘Anglo-Saxon approach to colour’. That is, being ‘concerned chiefly with the differentiation of light and dark’ and which can be dated within the earliest phases of name giving.<sup>146</sup> Eight *hlāw* place-names contain black (OE *blæc*) as a first element, with one giving grey, Harlow (OE *har*). Another gives red or ruddy, Rudlow (OE *rudig*), whilst we have one unidentified example of the use of white, Whitelow (unlocated) (OE *hwit*). That the colours expressed in these field-names match the early medieval palette is potentially significant and indicates that they were coined during the early medieval period. The example of Goldthorn (OE *gold-hord*) underlines the relationship of barrows and treasure and, by association, treasure with dragons.

<sup>143</sup> R. Cramp. *Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament, A General Introduction to the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*. (1984, Oxford, 1991).

<sup>144</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p.111; p. 180-181; p. 212; p. 252; p. 262; p. 275; p. 327; p. 352; p. 376; p. 397; p. 506; p. 560.

<sup>145</sup> N. Barley, ‘Old English colour classification: where do matters stand?’, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3 (1974), p 21.

<sup>146</sup> Barley, ‘Old English colour’, p. 26.



References to the dragon who ‘belongs in its barrow, canny and jealous of its jewels’ (*Maxims II, Cotton Tiberius B I, fol. 115a-b*), if not commonplace, occur often enough to be reliable associations.<sup>147</sup> And, although we have evidence of ‘hoards’ in Staffordshire (including recent finds), none have yet been proved to be linked with a burial, although Hurdlow (OE *hord*) does suggest that a link was at least thought to have been present when named.

During the later early medieval period barrows came to be seen as places of deviance, that is, home to forces or spirits that were not welcomed. In *The Wife’s Lament* we are told: ‘I was bidden to dwell among a thicket of tree under an oak-tree in this earthen dug-out, ancient is this earthen abode’. This is a reference to the use of monuments as places of execution, the wife confined to an afterlife where she ‘may weep for the ways of my exile’.<sup>148</sup> This practice may have been born out of a desire to see the soul of a criminal plagued by the evil spirits dwelling therein.<sup>149</sup> The references to goblins, thieves and robbers in this corpus show a strong sense of ‘otherness’ being attached to barrows, a process which it is assumed started around the eighth century and marks a shift in the meaning of the nature of the barrow, still magical and other, but now with added menace, possibly in response to the advance of Christianity. Accentuating this point the Wetmoor charter (S. 930) associates a barrow in the landscape (though not the barrow itself) with the place ‘where the thieves hang’ (*ær þa ðeofes hangað*).<sup>150</sup>

Boggart, goblin	Buglawe, ME <i>bugge</i>
Dragon	Drakelow, Drakelow Covert, Drakelaw/Drakilaw, Drakeley Bank, Drakeley Covert, Great Drakeley, OE <i>draca</i>
Robber	Shakerlowe (unlocated, Swynnerton), OE <i>sceacere</i>
Thieves, wolf	Morrillow, Warslow, Warrilow, OE <i>wearg</i>

Figure 19: ‘Deviant’ barrows.<sup>151</sup>

### Naming *hlāws*: summary

We cannot be certain when many of these *hlāw*-names were coined, although we can see that these monuments were significant enough to be drawn into a naming process,

<sup>147</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, pp. 513-514.

<sup>148</sup> The Exeter Book, fol. 115a-b, in S. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 385.

<sup>149</sup> Semple, ‘Fear of the past’, p. 111.

<sup>150</sup> Hooke, *Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire*, p. 99.

<sup>151</sup> Horowitz, *Place-Names*, p. 158; p. 235; p. 397; p. 560.

and have survived to be passed down. Kings Low and Queens Low seem to imply that the size of these mounds impressed in a way that they earned their nomenclature as does their relationship to each other in the landscape and as we have seen this spatial naming is also understood from the use of OE *calfra*. However, none of the barrow names include a directional place-name element (north, south, west, east), which suggests that these barrow names were coined locally and earlier in the naming process.<sup>152</sup> That the colour palette fits a wider understanding is helpful, although the number of names in the Staffordshire corpus is too small to be significant. In comparison, the finding of many personal names in the corpus is potentially telling and, given that all are OE, suggests that the tumuli had ceased to be important landscape features by the post-Conquest period; we find no Norman names associated with barrows. The naming of barrows containing personal name elements may have had a very prosaic inception reflecting the name of the person buried within the barrow or, perhaps, on whose land the monument stood, which might push the dating further back into the early medieval period. However, the use of personal names, in any period, was part of a local mythologizing of the landscape. Men, for it is mainly men, who were of some local or regional standing or notoriety, had their names attached to *hlāws* at a given point. These names and the stories associated with them became memorialised in the local landscape, with the barrow acting as a mnemonic device. In this sense there is no reason for any of these tumuli to be ‘real’, it was the landscape feature and its qualities that attracted the naming.

We know that throughout the early medieval period monument reuse was commonplace and three place-names suggest an association with meeting places.<sup>153</sup> We have a moot by Mottley Pits, OE (*ge*)*mot*; a possible meeting place by Harlow (Wood), OE *here*; and a place for discourse by Spellowe Field OE *spell*.<sup>154</sup> The use of barrows for meeting places was likely to have had wider cultural significance than merely being a useful ‘mound’. It may be that this was a place where people of the past interacted or mediated with or through those who held assemblies there. The barrows, and their associated power, may have given some sort of legitimacy to the proceedings or

<sup>152</sup> See R. Jones, *Directional names in the early medieval landscape*, in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds) *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington 2012), pp. 196-210.

<sup>153</sup> H. Williams, ‘Monuments and the past’, p. 96.

<sup>154</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 300; 399; 503.

judgements, being a place of dialogue between the living and the dead.<sup>155</sup> This creative use of the landscape and the power it could imbue is part of a wider story-telling in the landscape, and fits with other mythologizing naming practices such as the associations with dragons, spirits and treasure. The naming practice itself is another pointer towards the importance of these monuments and if nothing else this exercise considerably expands our understanding of the numbers of barrows that may have been present in Staffordshire. It is also suggestive of the wider cultural world of the people of early medieval Staffordshire, linking them to the poetry and material culture of the period.

### **Minor place-names: *hlāw* field-names in Pirehill**

Having looked at the major place-names of Staffordshire this section focuses specifically on Pirehill. It is comprised of a comprehensive survey of field-names taken from the tithe awards for the Hundred. Dating from the mid-1830s these tithe award field-names often lack earlier recorded forms but, nonetheless, it is proposed here they provide sufficient evidence for a wider distribution of tumuli. It is unlikely that tumuli would come into being after the early medieval period and furthermore, given the accuracy of the early medieval eye for landscape features, the use of the terms *hlāw*, *beorg* and *crūg* are less likely to have been given to landscape features that were not already in existence during that period. That said, the evidence does need to be treated with great caution. It is perfectly possible for a surname incorporating the element ‘low’ to have been given to a furlong or field. For this reason, those field-names suspected of being derived from surnames have been left out and other uses of the word ‘low’ such as ‘low field’ suggesting a field in the valley bottom have been avoided. Moreover, field-names can migrate, and so when using them as evidence it is prudent to examine the wider area in association with that name.<sup>156</sup> It should be acknowledged that some of the examples presented here might be difficult to pinpoint on a map, boundary changes together with field contraction and expansion over time complicate matters. The use of field-names for analysing the early medieval landscape has been

<sup>155</sup> H. Williams, ‘Depicting the dead: commemoration through cists, cairns and cymbols in early medieval Britain’ *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 17 (2007), p. 146.

<sup>156</sup> Semple suggests ‘up to a distance of c. 1.5 km’, S. Semple, ‘Defining the OE *hearg*: a preliminary archaeological and topographic examination of *hearg* place names and their hinterlands’, *Early Medieval Europe*, 15 (4) (2007), pp. 364-385.

used successfully elsewhere.<sup>157</sup> The thrust of this discussion is not aimed at recording all individual instances but rather the purpose is to show that the cumulative effect of gathering together so much data can be persuasive.

The present analysis has revealed 60 plus field-names containing OE *hlāw*. Greater analysis of the names is difficult because of the lack of early forms. However, the preliminary impression is that these names seem to fall into the pattern of the major place-names given above. We find references to animals such as badgers and crows, and mythical animals such as dragons; other field-names refer to the size or shape of the barrows; Big Barrow, Longlow, Mucklow (OE *mycel* great), Round Low, Twirlow (OE *turn* circular) etc. Colours also survive, with the use of white and black reflecting the pattern found in major place-names. Other intriguing field-names survive such as Sparlow, potentially OE *spar* spear, giving the ‘barrow with a spear’ or possibly looking like a spear. Although this analysis is very general, it does suggest that there is clear potential for evidence of barrows to have survived in field-names across the whole of the county and even region, and were we to extrapolate these figures across Staffordshire we might expect to get in excess of 300 field-names of a similar type. Having looked at major place-names across the country and field-names in Pirehill, the following case-studies examine two townships in Pirehill and the best rural archaeological site in Staffordshire, Catholme (Offlow).

### **Local study 1: Blurton**

Blurton is a small township in the east of the ancient parish of Trentham, home in the Middle Ages to Trentham Priory. As the priory extended its lands into Blurton, a series of title deeds was created. In looking for possible *hlāw* field-names, the tithe map of 1845 contained none.<sup>158</sup> This perhaps reflects the fact that some of the land in Blurton may have been tithe free due to it being held, previously, by Trentham Priory, highlighting the variability of the written record and our reliance on it. The medieval deeds reveal only a few field-names most of which are unhelpful to this research such as

<sup>157</sup> S. Oosthuizen, ‘Field-names in reconstruction late Anglo-Saxon agricultural land-use in the Bourn Valley, West Cambridgeshire’ in A. M. Chadwick (ed.), *Recent Approaches to the Archaeology of Land Allotment*, BAR International Series, 1875 (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>158</sup> LRO CA1/1/1/31/687. The sum total of field names given is: Blurton Meadow, Copnall Field, Longton Meadow, New Field, Stockenton, Town Field. The tithe award for Blurton is far less revealing in terms of field names than the example given for Aston and Burston.



## Summary

This small-scale local analysis of a township of just over 2200 acres in a relatively small parish (one of six townships that made up the parish of Trentham) reveals a tithe map with no field-names containing a potential *hlāw*. An earlier eighteenth-century map containing two possible *hlāw* field-names, *Kemlow* and *Stanlow*, emphasises the fragility of field-names, since they are not found in the later tithe award, nor in the earlier medieval deeds where we find the otherwise unattested and potential OE *hlāw* field-name of *Cockeloue*.

## Local Study 2: Aston and Burston

A second local study has been carried out, this time at Aston and Burston a township in the large ancient parish of Stone. The place-name Burston may contain the OE element *burh* ‘a fortification’, or possibly a personal name (*Burgwine* or *Burgwulf*).<sup>165</sup> Burston is associated with the lives and martyrdom of Saints Wulfhaed and Rufinus (see chapter two).<sup>166</sup> The tithe award for Aston and Burston reveals the following field-names of interest:<sup>167</sup>

Berry Hill	Possibly OE <i>beorg</i> ‘barrow’ or possibly OE <i>burh</i> as in Burston
Blind Worm	OE <i>wyrm</i> referring to ‘dragon’ or, more likely, snakes
Broomy Low	OE <i>brōm</i> ‘broom’ and OE <i>hlāw</i> ‘low’
Camp Bank	An ancient earthwork
Clewlow	OE <i>cleo(w)</i> ‘ball’ and OE <i>hlāw</i> ‘low’
Harrow Field	OE <i>hearg</i> ‘land near or containing a sacred site’
Knottingslow	(Or Nuttingslow). Possibly OE <i>cnotta</i> ‘hillock, rocky hill or cairn’ and OE <i>hlāw</i> ‘low’
Peaslow	Possibly OE <i>pise</i> , <i>piosu</i> ‘pea’ and OE <i>hlāw</i> ‘low’, see also Horovitz entry for nearby Peasley which suggests a meeting place here
Stoke Meadow	Probably from nearby Stoke near Aston from OE <i>stoc</i> ‘place or religious place’
Stow Meadow	OE <i>stow</i> meaning ‘place, enclosed place of assembly’ often associated with ‘holy place’
War Stone	OE <i>Har</i> ‘hoary, grey’ and stone. Possibly referring to an earlier monument, hoar used to indicate a stone ‘grey with age’

Figure 21: Field-names in Aston and Burston.<sup>168</sup>

Three, and possibly four, of these field-names contain potential *hlāw* elements. Also present is the field name ‘Harrow’, sometimes associated with pagan religious sites,

<sup>165</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p.163.

<sup>166</sup> A. Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem in Bede and a Mercian martyrdom’ in A. Rumble and A. Mills (eds), *Names, and Places and People: An Onomastic Miscellany in Memory of John McNeal Dodgson* (Stamford, 1997), pp. 307-319.

<sup>167</sup> SRO D4605/7/5b.

<sup>168</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 430 for ‘Peasley’ discussion.

although Briggs has suggested that Harrow field-names are not much more than triangular-shaped fields.<sup>169</sup> In addition, in close proximity to Harrow field we find Stoke (OE *stoc*) which can mean ‘place’ or ‘religious place’, whilst nearby Stow Meadow contains OE *stōw* giving ‘a place of assembly’ or ‘holy place’.<sup>170</sup> The Stowe in Lichfield is a place closely associated with St Chad.<sup>171</sup>

These two case-studies highlight the real potential of later documentary records to identify potential early medieval features, this evidence though needs to be handled with great caution. It also highlights an imported qualifier, which is that each source has its own intrinsic limitations. We find that even where tithe map data fails to identify possible places of interest, other sources for the same area might provide a very different picture. An examination of this sort can only be achieved by a close and detailed examination of all the available sources.

### **Catholme: evidence from a excavated site**

If a close examination of later sources indicates the potential for hitherto unrecognised *hlāws* in the landscape, the extensive excavations at Catholme (Offlow) allow us to examine a single community and their responses to such features. Catholme lies in the east of the county, two miles north-east of Wychnor, south of Burton above the River Trent. Catholme is one of very few English rural settlements to have been excavated on such a scale and the only example to have been fully excavated in Staffordshire.<sup>172</sup> The settlement is probably Romano-British in inception, although it may form part of a shifting settlement pattern across the gravel terrace ranging from the third to the ninth centuries.<sup>173</sup>

Zone VII as defined by the authors of the report is the one of interest to this study. It is defined to the north by D20, with D18, F15 and F16 either indicating the edge of this enclosure’s expansion northwards or, possibly marking a trackway around

<sup>169</sup> Semple, ‘Defining the OE *hearg*’, pp. 364-385, and K. Briggs, ‘Harrow’, *Journal of the EPNS*, 42 (2010), pp. 43-62.

<sup>170</sup> V. Watts, *Cambridge Dictionary*, p.583.

<sup>171</sup> Gelling, *West Midlands*, p. 97 for Stowe in Lichfield.

<sup>172</sup> H. Hamerow, ‘Catholme: The development and context of the settlement’, in S. Losco-Bradley and G. Kinsley, *Catholme, An Anglo-Saxon Settlement on the Trent Gravels in Staffordshire* (Nottingham, 2002), p. 123.

<sup>173</sup> Hamerow, ‘Catholme’, p. 123.



the enclosure. D21 marks the western and southern edge of the enclosure whilst D25 marks the southernmost extension of the enclosure.

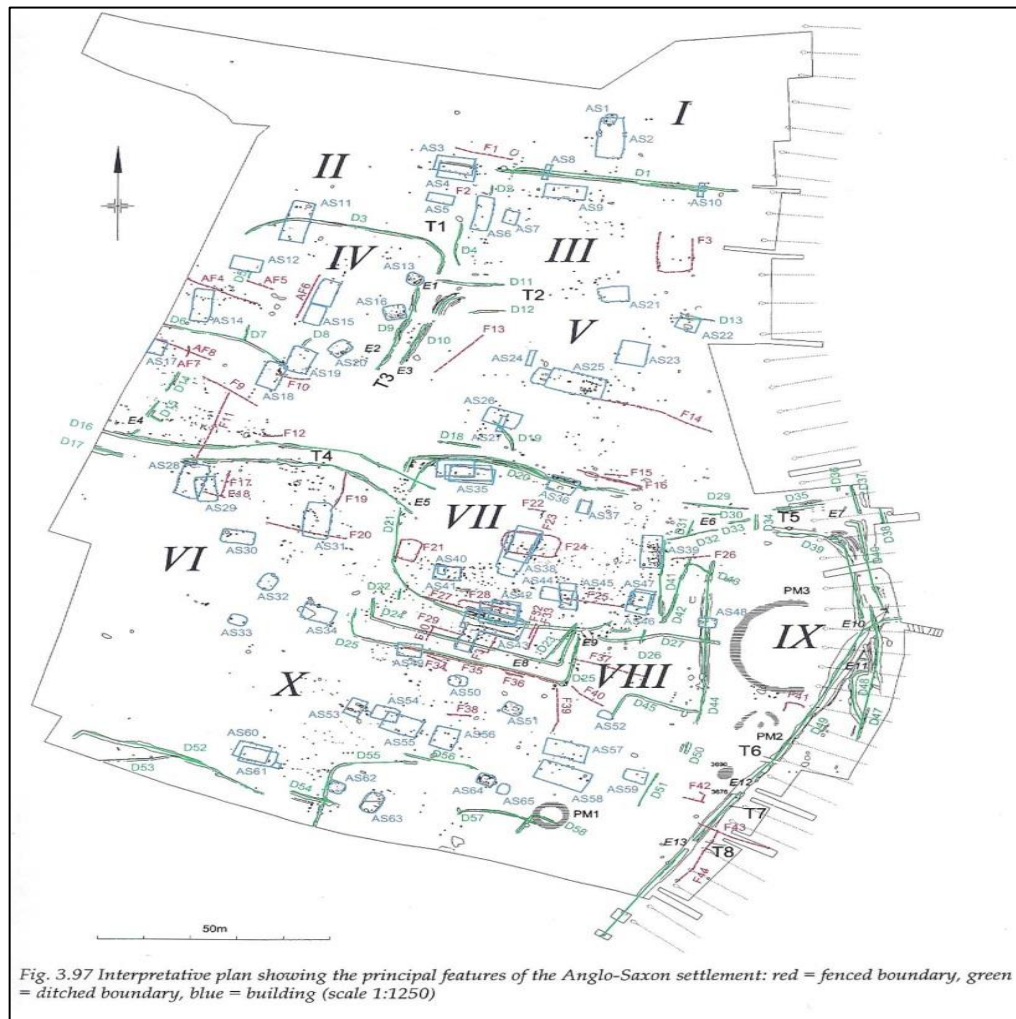


Figure 22: Plan of Catholme.<sup>174</sup>

A major trackway (T4) formed a long-lived single routeway into Zone VII. Here E5 marked what may have been an ‘entrance structure’.<sup>175</sup> To the north-east T5 with D32 and D33 suggests an access point the edge of the terrace and the floodplain.<sup>176</sup> Zone VII sits centrally within the excavations at Catholme. It is possible that this central prominence is illusory as the excavation was incomplete.<sup>177</sup> Irrespective of this Zone VII is marked from the outside as being significant, it lay within the centre of the excavated area with a prominent trackway, long-lived with clearly defined boundaries.

<sup>174</sup> Losco-Bradley and Kinsley, *Catholme*, p. 116.

<sup>175</sup> Losco-Bradley and Kinsley, *Catholme*, p. 31.

<sup>176</sup> Losco-Bradley and Kinsley, *Catholme*, p. 119.

<sup>177</sup> Hamerow, ‘Catholme’, p. 126.



The building in Zone VII, AS38 was one of the major buildings of the sixty-five found at Catholme. It was found to have an End-Wall annex, the purpose of which remains uncertain. Behind Zone VII is Zone IX which was flanked to the east by a boundary ditch, D49 which was likely to have been of prehistoric origin but which survived well into the early medieval period.<sup>178</sup> Zone IX contained the following prehistoric ritual monuments:

PM1 A small ring-ditch

PM2 A segmented-ditch monument

PM3 A large penannular ditch

Also found in this zone are 3690, a large pit of possible ritual significance and 3676, a Beaker burial<sup>179</sup> D49 ran along the terrace edge, and consisted of a bank with a post-line and pits. These monuments (unlike the eight prehistoric round houses found) survived to influence the layout of the early medieval settlement. D49 continued to act as a boundary and was periodically re-cut in the early medieval period. PM3 remained a feature throughout the sites existence and beyond as the later medieval ridge and furrow was seen to respect the edges of this monument.

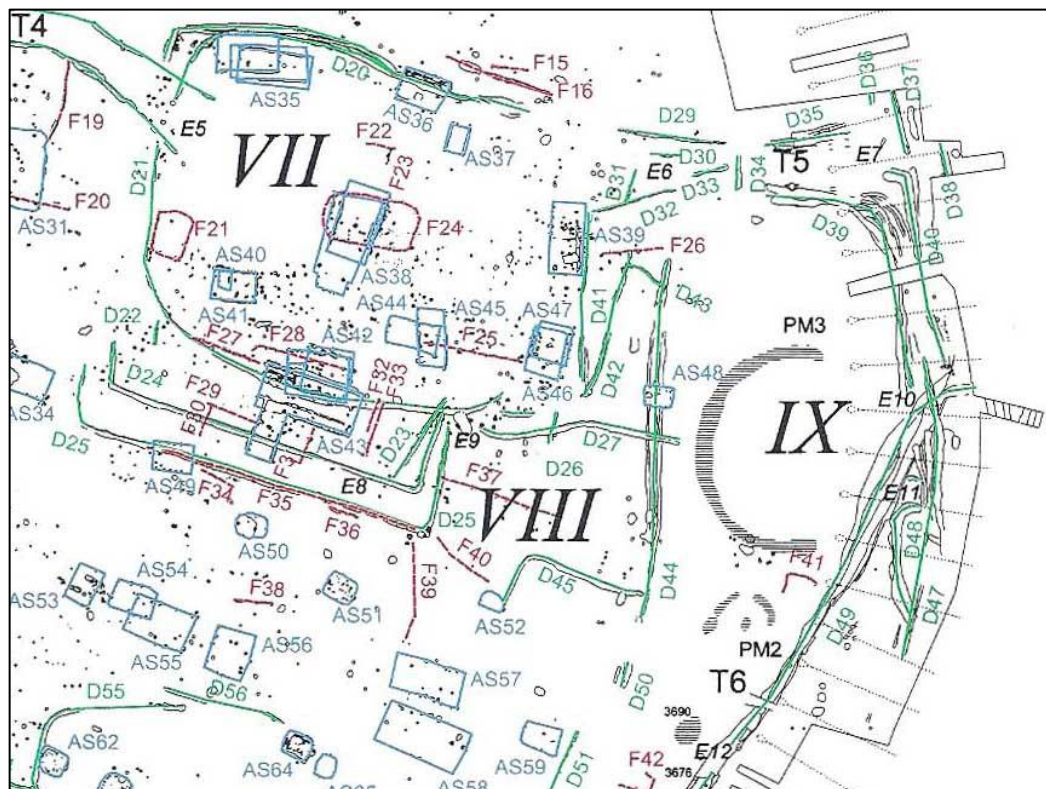


Figure 23: Catholme, excavation zones VII and IX.

<sup>178</sup> Losco-Bradley and Kinsley, *Catholme*, p. 119.

<sup>179</sup> Losco-Bradley and Kinsley, *Catholme*, p. 15.

Zone IX seems to be gathered in by the major enclosure of the site Zone VII, with access to it limited.<sup>180</sup> Just to the south-east of Zone IX, an early medieval grave is dug into D49 (3666). In this grave a small fragment of skull was found along with indications of spine and upper arms with a knife blade also recorded.<sup>181</sup> The excavators were of the opinion that Zone IX was ‘demarcated and respected by the occupants’ of the settlement.<sup>182</sup>

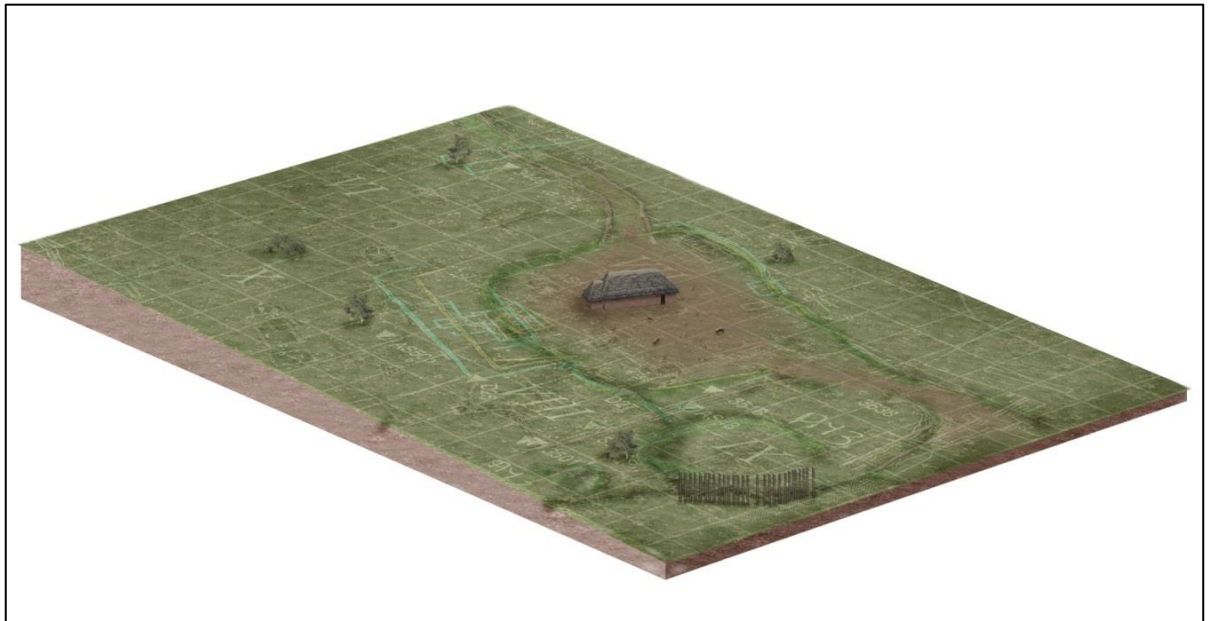


Figure 24: Catholme, reconstruction of zones VII and IX.<sup>183</sup>

The figure above was created following the excavators’ plans for Catholme, it illustrates the main elements of Zone VII and Zone IX. It shows the main building in Zone VII and how the large barrow of PM3 is gathered in by Zone VII and ‘claimed’. It is apparent that the posts found in D49 corresponded to an area behind PM3 in Zone IX. This accentuates the sense that access to this area was restricted in some respect.

This reuse here and at sites such as Yeavering (Northumberland) and elsewhere, demonstrates people consciously reprocessing the past, highlighting perhaps a discontinuity and reimagining rather than continuity of ritual.<sup>184</sup> The reuse of

<sup>180</sup> Zones VII and VIII are reported on together, Zone VII expanded into Zone VIII.

<sup>181</sup> Losco-Bradley and Kinsley, *Catholme*, p. 40.

<sup>182</sup> Losco-Bradley and Kinsley, *Catholme*, p. 119.

<sup>183</sup> © Ben Cunliffe.

<sup>184</sup> R. Bradley, ‘Time regained: the creation of continuity’, *Journal of British Archaeological Association*, 140 (1987), pp. 1-17.

monuments has been recognised as a prevalent feature of early medieval life in Wales, Ireland and across much of North West Europe.<sup>185</sup> It is now understood to have been a fairly commonplace occurrence, and seems to have been equally distributed throughout with little regional variation, although the frequency in the West Midlands has been said to be lower than that of other regions.<sup>186</sup> The reason for this remains unclear and may be as a result of the amount of hereunto unrevealed evidence.<sup>187</sup> Crewe suggests that it was ‘positive’ features such as banks and mounds rather than ‘negative’ features such as ditches and hollows that were more likely to be reused.<sup>188</sup> In West Sussex there is a suggestion that prehistoric barrows were favoured for cemetery sites.<sup>189</sup> Taken on numbers alone, round barrows appear to be the preferred monument for reuse. This may have something to do with their similarity to early medieval funerary monuments, but is also likely to do with the predominance of this type of feature across lowland Britain.<sup>190</sup> It is understood that this reuse was somehow done at arms-length, that the monuments were at a distance from early medieval settlement centres, which, it has been generally assumed, avoided close proximity to prehistoric monuments.<sup>191</sup> However, this is not the case at Catholme, and in Scotland and Ireland prehistoric sites were assimilated into important centres such as the Iron Age barrow at Clogher (County Tyrone) which was incorporated into a royal enclosure.<sup>192</sup> We also know that, throughout the mid- to late early medieval period people were using other prehistoric sites as meeting places or for general assemblies, and as markers in charter clauses (see above for Staffordshire examples). Monuments may also have been altered during the early medieval period, and there is evidence that some have been extended. Some have had large posts erected into the barrow and others have had wooden structures, described as shrines, placed in and around them.<sup>193</sup> In Staffordshire Blair has identified a series of such

<sup>185</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, pp. 51-57.

<sup>186</sup> Crewe, ‘Barrows and buildings’, p. 256.

<sup>187</sup> Williams, ‘Ancient landscapes’, p. 19.

<sup>188</sup> Crewe, ‘Barrows and buildings’, p. 220.

<sup>189</sup> Semple, ‘Politics and princes’, p. 412.

<sup>190</sup> Williams, ‘Ancient landscapes’, p. 14.

<sup>191</sup> Crewe, ‘Barrows and buildings’, p. 35.

<sup>192</sup> D. Petts, ‘The reuse of prehistoric standing stones in Western Britain? A critical consideration of an aspect of early medieval monument reuse’, *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 21:2 (2002), p. 198. Similarly Wednesbury in Staffordshire may have been built on the site of a hill fort and the place-name indicates some association with Woden. Horowitz, *Place-Names*, p. 28.

<sup>193</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, pp. 3-4.

<sup>193</sup> Williams, ‘Monuments and the past’, p. 96.

places northwards from Burton, Beacon Hill and Horninglow Cross.<sup>194</sup> Nearby to Horninglow was Beam Hill containing OE *bēam* suggesting a sacred wooden post.<sup>195</sup>

Semple proposes that when early medieval inhumations have been found associated with prehistoric barrows, that this might ‘offer evidence for dislocated and newly forming communities seeking to assimilate and claim the landscape’.<sup>196</sup> This might imply a weakness of authority and that groups were looking for ways of redefining their claims to ownership of the land, by expressing a connection with those that had gone before them.<sup>197</sup> It also suggests that claims were being made over relatively small territories and ‘sentinel’ mounds such as the one in Blurton often seem to have overlooked a particular landscape: they are ‘seen’ but also ‘see’. Their use was an act of commemoration, creating a collective ‘memory’ or shared stories of the past, forging a common identity and being a ‘means of staking a claim over the present and the future’.<sup>198</sup> Identity was thus being asserted, a topographical claim matched through genealogies and myths creating a common identity and sense of place as ‘doorways’, almost, to another world that reinforced ownership.<sup>199</sup> This idea of reuse can be widened to incorporate the use of a monument as a signifier of status within a settlement, or in association with other monuments, and there is a far greater relationship between early medieval settlements and prehistoric monuments than was once thought.<sup>200</sup> The practice of burials being associated with prehistoric monuments carried on into the eighth century and ‘may have continued into the post-Conversion era as well’.<sup>201</sup> At Brampton (Oxfordshire) prehistoric barrows were used for burials in the seventh century and later still a church was built there.

The custom of reuse coexisted with new monument building across the country and, where this existed on the same site, the aim seems to be to create an internal relationship

<sup>194</sup> J. Blair, ‘Holy Beams: Anglo-Saxon cult sites and place-name element Bēam’, in M. Bintley and M. Shapland (eds), *Trees and Timber in the Anglo-Saxon World* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 186-210.

<sup>195</sup> See Blair, ‘Holy Beams’.

<sup>196</sup> Semple, ‘Politics and princes’, p. 415.

<sup>197</sup> Semple, ‘Politics and princes’, p. 415.

<sup>198</sup> H. Williams, *Death and Memory*, p. 183. See also Z. Devlin, ‘Remembering the dead in Anglo-Saxon England: memory theory in archaeology and history’, BAR British series 446 (Oxford, 2007).

<sup>199</sup> Williams, ‘Ancient landscapes’, p. 26.

<sup>200</sup> At West Halton (Lincolnshire) we find early medieval structures in association with two Bronze Age barrows (contemporarily recognisable features) and at Yeavering (Northumberland) a relationship between the earliest phases of the early medieval settlement and prehistoric sites has also been demonstrated. R. Bradley, ‘Time regained’, pp. 1-17, and P. Frodsham and C. O’Brien, *Yeavering: People, Power and Place* (Stroud, 2009).

<sup>201</sup> Semple, ‘Politics and princes’, p. 413.

between the monuments and the dead.<sup>202</sup> These settlements took prehistoric features into account as they were formed, carefully including them within the settlement form, to exploit their ‘meaning’ and to give power and authority, as seen at Catholme. The example of Catholme is important to this study because it is the only detailed account we have of an excavation of this size, and of a rural settlement, in Staffordshire. It demonstrates an engagement with the past with people of the time and precedes later practices of using the powerful dead to help create identity through the use of saints and their cults. Although by no means exactly similar, Catholme also draws us into later discussions within this thesis about the creation of monumentality in the landscape as later expressed through stone sculpture and monastic foundation, linking neatly to chapter four and discussions about central places for rural elites a few centuries later.

### **Exploiting meaning, establishing memory: the invention of local landscapes**

#### **Creation of meanings**

The disposal of the dead by the living can be seen as an action of social agency in which mortuary practices forge identity. These practices incorporate all aspects of inhumation, negotiating the social, economic, political and religious understanding at one and the same time.<sup>203</sup> The grave and its associated finds can be understood as an expression of identity, but also that the actual process of the funeral, the creation and act leading up to, during and after the inhumation, may well have been among the primary expressions of identity. Drawing on prehistoric studies Williams highlights the ‘agency of non-human agents in mortuary practice’, and the continued presence of the ‘ancestor’ and of supernatural powers associated with inhumation. Thus the supernatural, the dead, and the living are all interwoven in the early medieval mind. Archaeologists have long recognised that inhumation is more than simply the act of disposing of a body. The concept of *personhood* stresses that the ancestor exists not merely in the act of inhumation but also in the interactions between the living and the dead during ritual acts and subsequent memorial rituals or practices. We should also consider the involvement of objects, animals and monuments which can lead to a mixing of qualities, that the world of the living and of the dead, of the supernatural, of magic and of powerful

<sup>202</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, pp. 3-4.

<sup>202</sup> Williams, ‘Monuments and the past’, p. 96.

<sup>203</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p.13. See pp. 5-13 for a detailed mapping of archaeological approaches to early medieval burial.

religious beliefs were all blended together to form the rich interwoven fabric of early medieval identities.<sup>204</sup> Remembering the dead was only one aspect of social memory; inhumation can also be about forgetting, or concealment. Invented pasts, real and imagined genealogies, ancestors, heroes, saints and otherworldly entities all played a part in the creation of identity in the early medieval period.<sup>205</sup> Monuments, be they burial mounds for example, or as we see later stone sculpture, retained meaning and qualities long after the dead and their association with the place were personally remembered. Meanings (entropic perhaps) were interpreted by later generations that interacted with the living, influencing later inhumations associated with the monument and, in the case of Catholme, the lived space of the settlement.



Figure 25: Illustration showing the incorporation of a burial mound into the main enclosure at Catholme.<sup>206</sup>

### Creation of ancestors

The care and attending ritual that accompanied the treatment of some of the dead suggests that they continued in some way to remain part of a wider sense of place and

<sup>204</sup> C. Fowler, *The Archaeology of Personhood* (Abingdon, 2004), and Williams, 'Depicting the dead', pp. 145-164.

<sup>205</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p.11, and pp. 120-121.

<sup>206</sup> AS38 in Zone VII, with burial mound in the background, looking eastwards. © Ben Cunliffe.



kinship. The dead continued to extend some influence over the living.<sup>207</sup> As part of the process in the creation of the ancestor (and place) the dead were also ‘forgotten’, and the mound became the focal point of this interaction. A relationship between the living and the monument could also be possible without memory of the dead who were forgotten, re-remembered or reinvented.<sup>208</sup> The suggestion here, is that it is conceivable for people to have interacted with ‘ancestors’, ‘spirits’ or a non-human agency via a feature that contained the remains of people with whom they had no discernible relationship, or that was in fact not even a man-made burial mound but simply ‘looked the part’, and was in fact a natural feature. We know from elsewhere that the mound itself had meaning, and that the shape of the mounds themselves may have been used to convey associations and meanings.<sup>209</sup> Elsewhere prehistoric tombs have been found with early medieval weapons associated with them but lacked accompanying burials. This can be explained in some instances by acid soils accounting for the lack of human remains with just the artefacts remaining as the surviving remnants of internment. Antiquarian excavators such as those in Staffordshire would not necessarily have looked for the discoloured stains that may have provided the evidence for inhumation. An example of this can be found at Ramshorn in Staffordshire where an iron spear with a shaft was discovered along with an iron knife and no associated burial.<sup>210</sup> This special status was expressed through the association of the burial site with supernatural forces, with ‘ancestors’ or heroes from the past. This is in one way a form of ‘forgetting’, that is, reaching back to the distant past and ‘forgetting’ the intermediate, perhaps less illustrious or useful memory in order to ‘remember’ or create a new association.<sup>211</sup> Tumuli, then, can be seen as places through which the living connected to the past, negotiating authority over the contemporary landscape by claiming lineage, authority and other perhaps less tangible attributes. They may also have been able to negotiate a relationship between themselves and remembered or imagined individuals or groups, evidenced by the place-names associated with these monuments. In this respect it may not even have been necessary for individuals to be buried within a monument for it to fulfil a function within an early medieval society, the meaning of the mound and its use

<sup>207</sup> Hooke, ‘Burial features’, pp. 3-4, and Williams, ‘Monuments and the past’, p. 96.

<sup>208</sup> For an anthropological example from the Pacific see S. Küchler, *Malanggan: Art, Memory and Sacrifice* (Oxford, 2002).

<sup>209</sup> Williams, ‘Depicting the dead’, p.157.

<sup>210</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, pp. 249-252.

<sup>211</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p. 183.

would have been understood and negotiated locally. Ceremonies, gatherings, feasting and the telling of stories may all have revolved around locally specific places. Thus traditions and identities were being forged through acts around inhumation and association. We can see similar processes in the creation of saints *vitae* which use motifs and symbolism to create or re-remember a past (using themes from older saints' lives or biblical contexts) that to the modern eye seem creative but which to the writer would have been the perfect form for expressing sainthood. Tumuli are not merely expressions of identity; they form part of the stories that are aspects of an active re-negotiation of memory and identity.

### **Biographies**

These tumuli also had and have biographies. That is, meaning and interpretation were created at various points in a monument's history. Incorporating these monuments into contemporary understanding was as true of the early medieval period as it is for other periods of history. Thus, earlier Bronze Age burial mounds occupied 'such a conspicuous place in the landscape that people had to include them in their understanding of the world' and so were appropriated by Iron Age communities.<sup>212</sup> Despite remaining an 'unmodified element' during the Iron Age, the 'monuments remained a crucial and integrated component of the Iron Age landscape'.<sup>213</sup> So for Barrett whilst:

'burials no longer took place in or even around these mounds, ...this very lack of intervention best expresses the role the mounds now played. The mythical past stood apart from the present'.<sup>214</sup>

Barrett makes the case for the specialness of these landscape elements in the Iron Age, which made it possible to create the conditions whereby 'Iron Age communities were themselves able to read and to recognise the mythical histories by which they made themselves'.<sup>215</sup> The later example of a decorated stone cross said to have inserted into

<sup>212</sup> R. Bradley, *The Past in Prehistoric Societies* (London, 2002), p. 135.

<sup>213</sup> J. Barrett, 'Mythical landscapes of the British Iron Age', in W. Ashmore and A. B. Knapp (eds), *Archaeologies of Landscape: Contemporary Perspectives* (Oxford, 1999), p. 258.

<sup>214</sup> Barrett, 'Mythical landscapes', p. 262.

<sup>215</sup> Barrett, 'Mythical landscapes', p. 264.



the Bronze Age mound at Tixall (Pirehill) is such an example. According to antiquarian accounts it was inserted in 1803 to commemorate the murder of Thomas Chetwynd in 1493.<sup>216</sup> If this is true for the nineteenth century and the Iron Age how, then, did the people of the early medieval period understand these monuments and re-negotiate their relationships to them?

The Old English poem known as *Guthlac A* differs to some extent in tone and content to the more referred to Felix's *Vita Guthlaci*. It has been seen by some scholars as more 'literary' than Felix's *Vita*, and by inference 'composed in a literary medium not conducive to the sober transmission of historical facts'.<sup>217</sup> Hall suggests that in the *Vita Guthlac* comes across demons and barrows at Crowland, almost accidentally whilst searching for 'wilderness'. The difference being that in *Guthlac A* the hero of the poem actively searches out the mounds:

'For pride he broke mounds/hills  
in the waste where they, enduring  
wretched adversaries, could previously  
spend time after torments, when they,  
accursed, came weary from wandering to  
rest for? Passing periods of time. They  
enjoyed peace which was permitted to them  
for a little while'.<sup>218</sup>

Here Guthlac is on 'a campaign, cleansing one mound after another of its demons'.<sup>219</sup> This corresponds with a wider tradition across northern Europe of stories of warriors breaking into barrows to fight demons or un-dead warriors for their treasure, as can be seen in *Beowulf* as well as some Icelandic tales.<sup>220</sup> Places could also be of 'hellish exile' echoing the fate and exile evoked in *The Wife's Lament*.<sup>221</sup> Research suggests that burials did not commemorate an anonymous collection of 'ancestors' but that the

<sup>216</sup> A. Andrews and R. Longdon, 'The Cross', in G. Lock, D. Spicer and W. Hollins (eds), *Excavations at King's Low and Queen's Low: two Early Bronze-Age* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 33-36.

<sup>217</sup> Hall, *Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity*, p. 208.

<sup>218</sup> Hall, *Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity*, p. 215.

<sup>219</sup> Hall, *Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity*, p. 216.

<sup>220</sup> Hall, *Constructing Anglo-Saxon Sanctity*, p. 218.

<sup>221</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, p.153.

monuments reflected a practice of memorialisation through a relationship to each other, a social relationship as expressed between the graves.<sup>222</sup> We see from the poetry of Wales that burial mounds were assimilated into a landscape, which incorporated natural and prehistoric features as well as legendary leaders.<sup>223</sup> Across northern Europe these features, be they contemporary or part of an inherited landscape, left strong impressions. Icelandic sources often referred to mounds as houses, homes to the ‘corporeal ghosts (*draugar*) of dead chiefs seated almost in suspended animation within their burial chambers and sometimes awakening to roam the surrounding countryside’.<sup>224</sup> The Scandinavian sagas highlight another aspect of early medieval thought. They express ideas of a life that continues in some form, the dead were venerated but also had to be appeased, and, the interred called to one and other.<sup>225</sup> Across Scandinavia there is evidence of drinking and feasting at burial sites, a practice that continued well into the fifteenth century around the Baltic, with the practice of leaving food on graves continuing well into the twentieth century in Sweden.<sup>226</sup> There is evidence too of feasting at burial mounds in early medieval England, at sites such as Sutton Hoo, Snape (Suffolk), and the Bronze Age barrow at Cossington (Leicestershire).<sup>227</sup> In Orkney the tradition of the *Hogboon* (ON *Hög-bûin*, mound dweller) survived in folklore well into the modern era.<sup>228</sup>

### **Conclusion: The work of the dead**

During the early medieval period the qualities of what people recognised as OE *hlāws* or *beorgs* were ascribed to prehistoric mounds as well as to features that *looked* like tumuli. The people of the period would, like us, have been unable to distinguish them from other features without excavation. This sense of what constituted a barrow, OE *hlāw*, its *hlāw*-ness one might say, was also attributed to sites that in our modern (archaeological) meaning are not ‘barrows’ but ‘natural features’. Thus a number of *hlāws* or *beorgs* cannot be proved to have been barrows from an archaeological perspective because they never were barrows in that sense. That is, they were *hlāws*

<sup>222</sup> Williams, ‘Depicting the dead’, pp. 151-159.

<sup>223</sup> Petts, ‘Burial, religion and identity’, pp. 110–113.

<sup>224</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p. 172.

<sup>225</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>226</sup> A. Sanmark, ‘Living on: ancestors and the soul’ in M. Carver, A. Sanmark and S. Semple (eds), *Signals of Belief in Early England* (Oxford, 2010), p. 167.

<sup>227</sup> Sanmark, ‘Living on’, p. 171.

<sup>228</sup> E. Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (1975, Edinburgh, 2011 edn), p. 39.

and *beorgs* in an early medieval sense, a *social reality* rather than an *archaeological reality*. This is important because it has not been the intention of this study to find burial mounds, but rather to see if it is possible to catch a fleeting glimpse of the landscape of the early medieval period as the people who lived in it perceived it. The field-name survey for Pirehill and the local studies have shown that the possible number of barrows across Staffordshire has been widely underestimated and that those mounds that lack archaeological evidence, that were merely lumps and bumps of geology, existed like Hall's *Ælfe*, as social realities.<sup>229</sup> They were perceived by enough people to be *hlāws* or *beorgs* and thus became those things. These perceptions shifted through time and these *hlāws* (for it is *hlāws* rather than *beorgs* we find in greatest number in Staffordshire) were associated with ancestors and spirits both good and bad, just as other mounds were with 'real' inhumations. The survival of the 'barrow' and the role of the dead in the consciousness of the early medieval mind was a pervading one. A monument could incorporate memories (or things chosen to be remembered) through association or position within the wider landscape. The size, shape, material, decoration and form can all be included in the commemorative package, as can associations with other sites and wider myths and cosmologies.<sup>230</sup>

The appropriation of barrows or the reuse (or incorporation) of prehistoric mounds or their form was a strategy of belonging. The assimilation of such monuments into the built environment of settlements was designed to reinforce imagined identities and mythical pasts, articulating and reflecting differing senses of identity.<sup>231</sup> These actions represent a discourse between the people of the early medieval period about how they perceived themselves, their social identity, their relationships with the dead, and with the landscape around them. Landscape was essential to this process; memories and stories were retained through the landscape but also re-formed or invented afresh within it.<sup>232</sup> The process of re-negotiation of identities, of remembering and forgetting was, and is, a continuous process. This concept is perfectly illuminated by Küchler who remarked in her study of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea that 'the work for the

<sup>229</sup> A. Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>230</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p.146.

<sup>231</sup> Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, pp. 58-62, and Williams, *Ancient Landscapes*, p. 25.

<sup>232</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p.3.

dead...is a work that creates ancestors, and in so doing establishes a memory'.<sup>233</sup> This theme of a process of the re-negotiation identities re-occurs in the later chapters in this thesis, concerning for example the naming of places, the evidence for the cult of Wulfhad in Stone (Chapter two) or the family *wulf* (Chapter five). It also appears in the discussions around stone monuments (Chapter three) and the establishment of thegn residences (Chapter four).

This understanding of the forging of identity through monuments linking the past, present and future has not been explored fully for the early medieval period.<sup>234</sup> The dead and these monuments occupied a central part in the landscape. This centrality was shifted, changed, and re-negotiated but nonetheless remained so over a prolonged period. The power of these 'imaginings' can be sensed in several ways, firstly through the sheer number of barrows that seem to have survived into the record, admittedly often only as field-names. Secondly, the fact that such appellations were applied to sites that were not barrows (in a modern archaeological sense) does not weaken the evidence but, rather, reinforces the understanding of the power of the dead, whose stories, names and associations were attached to natural features. In this way the dead or rather their spirits did *inhabit* these places despite the lack of inhumations. These associations could be long lived as we have seen from examples across Europe. In Staffordshire the twelfth-century Geoffrey of Burton in his *Life and Miracles of Saint Modwenna* tells us that at Drakelow (in Derbyshire, two miles south of Burton, Staffordshire) two runaway peasants were struck down dead.

'What followed was amazing and truly remarkable. That very same day on which they were interred they appeared at evening, while the sun was still up, at Drakelow, carrying wooden coffins on their shoulders, now in the likeness of bears or dogs or other animals'.<sup>235</sup>

The two wandered the village infecting local villagers and eventually the bishop gave permission to the villagers to dig up the corpses of the two runaways and for their heads

<sup>233</sup> Küchler, *Malanggan*, p. 5.

<sup>234</sup> Williams, *Death, Memory and Material Culture*, p.145. For the prehistoric period see R. Bradley, *The Significance of Monuments: On the shaping of human experience in Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe* (Oxford, 1998).

<sup>235</sup> R. Bartlett, *Geoffrey of Burton, Life and Miracles of Saint Modwenna* (Oxford 2002), p.195.

to be severed and placed between their legs and for their hearts to be taken out and burnt.<sup>236</sup> Here the dead inhabited and haunted the landscape, disturbing the locals to the extent that the bishop himself was involved in resolving the issue. The dead were originally buried in Stapenhill, and their hearts eventually at *Dodecrosseforal/Dodefreseford* where they were burnt and ‘cracked with a great sound and everyone there saw an evil spirit in the form of a crow fly from the flames’.<sup>237</sup> It is surely of significance that this took place at Drakelow, a place-name that incorporates OE *hlāw* along with the magical element associated with a dragon OE *draca*.<sup>238</sup> This association as this Maxim illustrates, was perceived as a natural one:

‘A mast must sway a sailyard on a ship. A sword must be in the lap, a lordly iron. A dragon must be in its barrow, wise, proud in its treasures. A fish must spawn its kind in the water’.<sup>239</sup>

Horninglow Cross is probably the site of *Dodecrosseforal* associated with a burial mound and the site of a holy beam or tree.<sup>240</sup> Blair suggests that the place-name Stapenhill contains OE *stapol* which he gives as being a *beam* (post or tree) interpreted as ‘an image-platform supported on posts rather than a single post’.<sup>241</sup> This story retains a memory of the otherness of *hlāw* places, and is part of a biography of a special place, which retained its specialness, and became part of the rolling re-invention of the past, continually forgetting, continually re-remembering. As Küchler put it, ‘one must know how to forget in order to know how to remember’.<sup>242</sup> We should see these mounds as important material culture of the early medieval period. Whether set aside and not used, as in the Iron Age, or re-used, re-imagined or simply imagined, the landscape is integral to understanding the stories that created local memory.

<sup>236</sup> Bartlett, *Geoffrey of Burton*, p.xxix.

<sup>237</sup> Bartlett, *Geoffrey of Burton*, p.197.

<sup>238</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 235.

<sup>239</sup> ‘*Draca sceal on hlaewe,frod, fraetwum wlanc*’, Maxims II from R. Bjork, *Old English Shorter Poems, Volume II Wisdom and Lyric* (Harvard, 2014), pp. 176-177.

<sup>240</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 327.

<sup>241</sup> Duignan suggested OE *stapol* for Stapenhill although Horovitz prefers OE *steapn* ‘steep’, Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 509; and Blair, ‘Holy Beams’ p. 189.

<sup>242</sup> Küchler, *Malanggan*, p. 5.

# CHAPTER TWO: THE REALITY OF SAINTLY STORIES IN THE LANDSCAPE: STAFFORDSHIRE'S 'WORTHLESS' SAINTS

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This chapter will survey those saints most closely associated with Pirehill Hundred and examine their role within the landscape, including a study of their lives, and their role after death which as we have seen is a major theme of chapter one. It will begin by exploring the practice of the promotion of saints by Æthelred and Æthelflaed and then re-examining the lives of four saints, Wulfhad and Ruffin, Wærburh and Beorhthelm. The role of Æthelred and Æthelflaed as elites who sent standards and styles of the day, later to be emulated across Mercia will be picked up again in subsequent chapters. Their foundation at St Oswald's, Gloucester is a key case study that is referred to in the next chapter on stone sculpture and which ties in with the final chapter on the family *wulf* as well as offering context for the establishment of thegnly centres in chapter four. Evidence will be sought from a wide geographical area to highlight various aspects of the period but will always return to Pirehill. Similarly, sources will be gathered in from a period much later than that under discussion. It will be argued here that evidence such as the work of Henry Bradshaw and other neglected sources such as field-names can help us to locate the essence of a cult in a particular location, if not necessarily locate an historic figure. These sources may provide echoes of an earlier belief or story that can help us, in the case of Wulfhad and Ruffin in particular, identify where the story or belief was taken up, and so lead us to areas where the cult was particularly strong. Having looked at the saints of Pirehill the chapter will conclude exploring how the dead were brought into the lives of the living.

## **Æthelred and Æthelflaed**

One of the first known acts of Æthelred and Æthelflaed in the promotion of holy relics was their involvement in the removal of the remains of St Oswald from Bardney

(Lincolnshire) to Gloucester. In examining this act and in particular the site at Gloucester we can glimpse the motivations and expectations that lay behind this practice, this will shed light not only on the use of the dead in the early medieval period but lays the foundation for understanding what was taking place across Mercia. The cultural uses of the dead will also contextualize the landscape evidence that we find in Pirehill. St Oswald's story takes us to that other major religious centre, burh, and former Roman city associated with Æthelred and Æthelflaed, Chester, where his cult was also promoted. There in the later middle ages a chapel was dedicated to him at the church founded by Æthelred and Æthelflaed, later known as either St Werburg's or St Oswald's.<sup>243</sup> That the cult prospered is known by the fact that the minster went on to found two churches on its holdings to St Oswald.<sup>244</sup>

Like Chester, Gloucester had been a Roman town with the earliest evidence for Roman occupation found in the Kingsholm area. Activity there is shown to have declined after the Roman period as is evidenced by the loss of the Roman grid street pattern during this period. From what we know Gloucester had by 628, along with the territory of the Hwicce, passed into Mercian control.<sup>245</sup> It was also in this period that an episcopal see dedicated to St Peter was established in the 670s. The religious house of St Peter's appears to have fallen into decline by the late eighth century, being refounded by King Beornwulf in the 820s.<sup>246</sup> The Danish army occupied the town in 877. Ninth-century Gloucester was 'not a prepossessing place' with an economy which 'can hardly be termed urban'. In 896 a Mercian council was held at the royal palace at Kingsholm and it was there that Aethelflaed and Æthelred founded their minster to St Oswald. It is interesting to note that the site of St Oswald's priory had been a Roman cemetery and, likewise, the royal palace at Kingsholm was a Roman cemetery 'whose chapel might, if investigated, prove to have Roman origins'.<sup>247</sup> Gloucester's importance seems to have been, like Chester's, a site that could show its provenance. It was at Gloucester and not Chester, however, where Æthelflaed and Æthelred chose to be buried. The Mercian

<sup>243</sup> A. Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester: early ecclesiastical organization in two Mercian burhs', *Northern History*, 18 (1982), p. 204.

<sup>244</sup> G. Jones, *Saints in the Landscape* (Stroud, 2007), p. 156.

<sup>245</sup> N. Herbert, 'Anglo-Saxon Gloucester: c.680 – 1066', in N. Herbert (ed.), *VCH Gloucestershire*, 4 (1988), pp. 5-12. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42268> (01/05/2013).

<sup>246</sup> N. Herbert, 'Gloucester: the cathedral and close', in N. Herbert (ed.), *VCH Gloucestershire*, 4 (1988), pp. 275-288. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=42310> (01/05/2013).

<sup>247</sup> Herbert, 'Anglo-Saxon Gloucester', pp. 5-12.

Register states that Æthelflaed ‘was buried at Gloucester in the east *porticus*’.<sup>248</sup> The later *Chronicle of John of Worcester* tells us that:

‘Æthelflaed Lady of the Mercians, distinguished by her prudence and justice, a woman of outstanding virtue, in the eight year after that in which she began to rule on her own the kingdom of the Mercians with vigorous and just government, died...Her body was borne to Gloucester and buried with honour’.<sup>249</sup>

The intervention at Gloucester, which received a new street lay out, ecclesiastical development, a new mint, the establishment of a royal complex at Kingsholm, and the bones of St Oswald, shows a real investment in what in effect became Æthelred’s and Æthelflaed’s capital.<sup>250</sup> Likewise in Chester we find re-organisation of minsters and the introduction of a Mercian royal cult, in this instance St Werburgh.<sup>251</sup> Thacker proposes that we may also see a similar process in Shrewsbury linked to Æthelflaed. There St Chad’s was the mother church, St Mary’s a royal free chapel smaller in scale, and St Alkmund’s in honour of a saint who like Oswald was a Northumbrian favoured by the Mercian royal house. Æthelred and Æthelflaed can be associated with the taking of St Alkmund’s relics to Shrewsbury as well as with a further example, that of the relics of St Guthlac to Hereford.<sup>252</sup> It is interesting to note that Shrewsbury had a St Chad, a St Mary’s, and a St Alkmund’s as Stafford had a St Mary’s, a St Chad’s, and a St Bertelin’s. Thacker recognises a similar process of ‘refortification and reorganisation...with the introduction of a royal relic in Shrewsbury, as in Gloucester and Chester by Æthelflaed.’<sup>253</sup> The stone sculpture from St Oswald’s appears to indicate that Gloucester may have been a place of some regional significance prior to Æthelred’s and Æthelflaed’s founding of the burh at least in terms of being a place of high-status burials, if not as an economic centre. This status was sustained, since know that at the time of Edward the Elder’s second marriage, Æthelstan, later king of England, was sent to the court of Æthelred and Æthelflaed to be brought up and educated in Mercia. Although the evidence for this is not contemporary, it is enforced by Æthelstan granting

<sup>248</sup> ASC, p. 105.

<sup>249</sup> R. Darlington and P. McGurk, *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1995), 2, p. 381.

<sup>250</sup> Herbert, ‘Anglo-Saxon Gloucester’, pp. 5-12, and Thacker, ‘Chester and Gloucester’, p. 209.

<sup>251</sup> Thacker, ‘Chester and Gloucester’, p. 210.

<sup>252</sup> V. Thompson, *Death and Dying in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (2004, Woodbridge, 2012 edn), p. 16.

<sup>253</sup> Thacker, ‘Chester and Gloucester’, p. 210.



land to St Oswald's in 925 in accordance 'with the pact of paternal piety which formerly he pledged with Æthelred, ealdorman of the people of the Mercians'.<sup>254</sup> This suggests that Æthelstan recognised that 'St Oswald's, Gloucester was of particular political significance'.<sup>255</sup> This significance is highlighted by the fact that we know that it was here in 939 that Æthelstan died.<sup>256</sup> We can also surmise that it was of some personal significance to Æthelstan, since Æthelred and Æthelflaed were said to have been buried here.<sup>257</sup>

The development of the site at St Oswald's and the investment made there by Æthelred and Æthelflaed at that site is one that holds a key linking role of ideas and practices that relate to many aspects of this thesis. In particular, although not solely, this relates to the use of stone sculpture (Chapter three) and the secondary development of the church (Chapter four and Chapter five) and the use of saints' relics (Chapter one and Chapter two) and how local elites attempted to emulate their practices (Chapter four and in particular Chapter five). We know that the church at St Oswald's was built from limestone re-used from the Roman period. To the east was a free-standing building which is dated to the early tenth century. It is in this free-standing building that the relics of St Oswald may have been kept, along with the tombs of Æthelred and Æthelflaed. The excavation report states that 'the closely related events of the translation of Oswald's relics in 909, the burial of Æthelred in 911 and Æthelflaed in 918 provide the probable context for the building'.<sup>258</sup> Moreover, a significant quantity of stone sculpture has been found at St Oswald's, in particular a group of fragmentary remains of several stone grave covers. These date to the early tenth century, and so are contemporary with Æthelred and Æthelflaed.<sup>259</sup> Of these fragments *Gloucester St Oswald 5* is perhaps the most impressive, described as 'the most significant' and which formed 'part of a magnificent, foliate-decorated, tapered and chamfered grave-cover'.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>254</sup> P. Stafford, 'The annals of Æthelflaed, annals, history and politics in early tenth century England', in J. Barrow and A. Wareham (eds), *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 113 n. 49.

<sup>255</sup> S. Foot, *Æthelstan, the First King of England* (London, 2012), p. 34.

<sup>256</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, p. 186.

<sup>257</sup> Thacker is a dissenting voice with regards to their burial here. Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester', p. 209.

<sup>258</sup> C. Heighway and R. Bryant, 'The excavation and the structural evidence', in C. Heighway and R. Bryant, *The Golden Minster, The Anglo-Saxon Minster and Later Medieval Priory of St Oswald at Gloucester*, CBA Research Report 117 (York, 1999), p. 67.

<sup>259</sup> R. Bryant, *CASSS: The West Midlands*, 10 (Oxford, 2012), p. 105.

<sup>260</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p. 105.



Figure 26: Gloucester St Oswald 5.<sup>261</sup>

The motifs on *Gloucester St Oswald 5* are comparable to the Alfred Jewel (probably made for Æthelflaed's father, possibly to give away as a gift) and to artefacts associated with St Cuthbert, namely golden embroideries which include the name of Æthelflaed's sister-in-law and the border of a picture in which her nephew Athelstan presents a book to St Cuthbert.<sup>262</sup>

Stylistically these fit within a group of high-status artefacts found elsewhere and associated with elite family groups across the English kingdoms but which also link directly to Æthelflaed's family. Other grave fragments have also been found, with *Gloucester St Oswald 6*, thought to be another part of *St Oswald 5*.<sup>263</sup> Another decorated grave cover was revealed as *Gloucester St Oswald 7*, although it is 'badly weathered'.<sup>264</sup> *Gloucester St Oswald 9-10*, seem to be from another grave cover and 'are four joining pieces from a plain, tapered and chamfered grave-cover'.<sup>265</sup>

Four cross shafts have been recovered from St Oswald's and it is suggested that all four crosses stood together. *Gloucester St Oswald 2* appears to be modelled on *Gloucester St Oswald 1* but is not as fine, and 'the carver had ideas that were greater than his capabilities'.<sup>266</sup> *Gloucester St Oswald 3* was found in the precinct wall as were both parts of *Gloucester St Oswald 1* which is late eighth century in date and has some

<sup>261</sup> For illustrations see Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, pp. 295-297.

<sup>262</sup> J. West, 'Fragment of Grave Cover', in J. Backhouse, D. Turner, L. Webster (eds), *The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966-1066* (London, 1984), p. 43.

<sup>263</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p.105.

<sup>264</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p 105.

<sup>265</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p 105.

<sup>266</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p 208.

features that are similar to Northumbrian pieces.<sup>267</sup> *Gloucester St Oswald 3*, is similar to carvings at Cropthorne (Worcestershire), Acton Beauchamp (Herefordshire) and Wroxeter (Shropshire) and is possibly by a single centre or school. It is rich in detail, a ‘masterpiece of eclecticism’ which is dated to 800-825.<sup>268</sup> *Gloucester St Oswald 4* is dated to the mid-ninth century. Given this sequence it is thought that the final cross, *Gloucester St Oswald 4* stood for no more than 60 to 70 years before being broken up and incorporated into the new minster. These crosses stood on the site of the later foundation of Æthelred and Æthelflaed, which may have been a cemetery site (at least one burial dating to the period before the minster has been found). Stylistically the crosses share motifs such as ‘vine-scrolls and tree-scrolls, dense patterning of surfaces, and birds and animals in profusion’.<sup>269</sup> They are said to be ‘Hiberno-Saxon’ in character which may indicate a Northumbrian influence. However, it has been suggested that what we may see here is ‘British’ in its origin or influence.<sup>270</sup>



Figure 27: Gloucester St Oswald 1 (left) and 2 (middle and right).<sup>271</sup>

It is suggested that the *Gloucester London Road 1* cross is part of the same monument as *Gloucester St Oswald 4*. The figure (its head missing) is wearing a pleated garment and over garment. It is similar to mid-ninth-century sarcophagus fragments found at Breedon-on-the-Hill, Leicestershire.<sup>272</sup>

<sup>267</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p 105.

<sup>268</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p 210.

<sup>269</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p. 208.

<sup>270</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p. 208.

<sup>271</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, illustrations pp. 271, 274, 275.

<sup>272</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, pp. 221-224.



Figure 28: Gloucester London Road 1.<sup>273</sup>

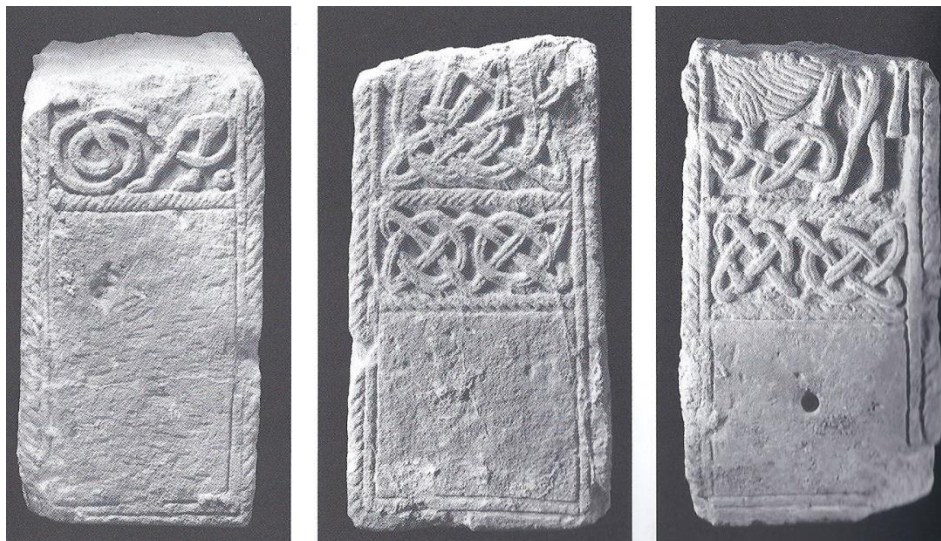


Figure 29: Gloucester St Oswald 4.<sup>274</sup>

The crosses offer us an interesting opportunity to glimpse a neglected part of the story of the area before the arrival of St Oswald, and before the intervention of Æthelred and Æthelflaed. The stone sculpture crosses can be seen, to some extent at least, as acting as monuments to the dead, though not necessarily as grave markers, and they seem to display quite remarkable levels of shared characteristics. None of the crosses from St Oswald's have human figures on them, although *Gloucester London Road 1* does. We

<sup>273</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, illustration p. 360.

<sup>274</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, illustrations pp. 287-289.



know that the crosses were broken up and built into the foundations of the refounded minster.<sup>275</sup> We know that at the nearby site of St Mary de Lode the cross fragment *Gloucester St Mary de Lode 1* was found in a level of destruction debris. This cross would have been quite new when it was destroyed in the ninth or tenth century.<sup>276</sup> We cannot be certain what caused this destruction but we know that the Danish army was garrisoned at Gloucester in 877 and it may have been then that the crosses were broken.<sup>277</sup> All of this seems to suggest that St Oswald's marks two other significant occurrences. Firstly, the quality and dating of the stone sculpture suggests that this area had been one of some significance to the Mercian elite (long before the arrival of Æthelflaed). This could have been a significant place for the rulers of Mercia, or possibly a powerful local elite, perhaps the family of Æthelred? We have indications that St Oswald's might have retained its status as a place of importance for the elite of southern Mercia. 34 charcoal burials were found during the excavations, that is, the type of burial where a body or coffin is put onto a bed of charcoal. At *St Oswald's* 17 of the 34 burials were sampled and all were shown to have had charcoal made from oak (of mature branch or trunk).<sup>278</sup> This type of burial became common in the ninth century but is seemingly more common at larger minster sites. Charcoal and ash are said to represent 'a complex symbolic association of penitence and purity'.<sup>279</sup> At St Oswald's this practice was spread across the genders, the percentage of charcoal burials for the area north of the church was twice the rate (42%) as that of the area south of the church (21%). This may indicate that the northern area was of a higher status. It is also 'noticeable that all but one of the charcoal burials occurred close to the church'. The number of such burials declines swiftly by the late eleventh century.<sup>280</sup> Thompson suggests that they were associated with 'penance-oriented anxieties' and so indicate 'clerical involvement'.<sup>281</sup> This is important as it implies a specialist ritual performed by a specialist cleric, and accessed by the most wealthy and powerful at their minster sites. Even within these sites it was a ritual that was limited to those who could access, at death, the most important areas of the minster site as at St Oswald's.

<sup>275</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p. 105.

<sup>276</sup> Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p. 108.

<sup>277</sup> Herbert, 'Anglo-Saxon Gloucester', pp. 5-12, and Bryant, *CASSS*, 10, p. 105.

<sup>278</sup> Heighway and Bryant, *Golden Minster*, p. 202.

<sup>279</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 119.

<sup>280</sup> Heighway and Bryant, *Golden Minster*, p. 202.

<sup>281</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, pp. 121-122.

Secondly, we see here a shift in how elites were choosing to have themselves and their family members or political leaders monumentalised and remembered, Thompson tells us that:

‘Establishing proprietary churches became one of the defining activities of tenth-century aristocrats. Nonetheless, within her own generation, Aethelflaed was acting in a more royal than aristocratic fashion, living as she did in a period of hiatus between the old, pre-viking, dispensation and the new’.<sup>282</sup>

At Gloucester we appear to be able to observe a shift from the use of crosses and stone sculpture as monuments, to the building of churches which were to act as monuments to the founders and as houses for the highly valued relics of the holy dead. Æthelred and Æthelflaed are at the beginning of a shift in religious sensibilities.

### **The saints of Staffordshire and Pirehill**

The early medieval Staffordshire saints have seldom engaged historians of the period to any great extent. At least two have been described as ‘worthless’ and of the others only Ceadda (Chad), a Northumbrian sent to Mercia, has attained some respectability. Modwenna and Wearburh have attracted some interest, whilst the likes of Beorhthelm, at best, have achieved footnote status.<sup>283</sup> Sargent’s recent work touches upon the saints involved in this study in varying degrees but has a wider remit, namely the diocese of Lichfield.<sup>284</sup>

It can be agreed that most saints from Staffordshire fit the Mercian pattern of being ‘murdered royal saints’ such as Wulfhad, Ruffin and Beorhthelm. As Rolleston has noted,

‘The lives and cults of some of these murdered royal saints are well attested in pre-Conquest sources. Others, however, are known chiefly from post-Conquest texts which are mainly hagiographical in character and which were written

<sup>282</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 24.

<sup>283</sup> Bartlett, *Geoffrey of Burton*, and Tringham, VCH Staffordshire, 9, pp. 107-130.

<sup>284</sup> A. Sargent, ‘Lichfield and the lands of St Chad’ (unpub. Ph.D. thesis, Keele University, 2012).

considerably later than the events which they describe. For these reasons these latter texts have not generally been taken seriously as historical sources and the saints who figure in them have been largely neglected by historians'.<sup>285</sup>

The problems scholars have faced with these saints are exemplified by an important local saint, Modwenna of Burton. The difficulty for many is that Geoffrey's *vita* of Modwenna includes many aspects of the life of an Irish saint, Monenna. In general, the 'historical' standing of Modwenna and many of the other Staffordshire saints is not very high, and this intermingling of stories has meant that 'some scholars believe this renders the *Vita* worthless'.<sup>286</sup> Thacker thought the cult of Beorhthelm genuine, although considered the 'legend worthless'.<sup>287</sup> However, as Jones and others have pointed out, not all aspects of a *vita* need be considered 'worthless', and 'in landscape, as well as historical terms, this is far from the case'.<sup>288</sup> Rollason, too, has cautioned against 'excessive scepticism' when dealing with sources of this type.<sup>289</sup> Scholars of other regions from the same period point out that we should also consider that 'medieval historiographers mostly dealt with truths that were already there... even invented pasts could not be created freely, they had to be likely enough to have come to pass'.<sup>290</sup> The stories, then, may contain some truths, but it is which truths they contain that should concern us. Innes has stressed the importance of these lives as stories:

'Precisely because narrating is not "telling things as they really were", but involves organizing them to fit a preconceived scheme... invites us to relate them to the wider cultural world in which they worked'.<sup>291</sup>

### **Æthelflaed and Wærburh**

Æthelflaed played an important role in promoting the cults of certain Staffordshire saints. She herself has often captured the imagination of scholars and it is her military

<sup>285</sup> D. Rollason, 'The cults of murdered royal saints in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 11 (1982), pp. 1-22.

<sup>286</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 197.

<sup>287</sup> A. Thacker, 'Kings, saints and monasteries in pre-Viking Mercia', in *Midland History*, 10 (1985), p. 18.

<sup>288</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 197.

<sup>289</sup> Rollason, 'Cults of murdered royal saints', p. 12.

<sup>290</sup> W. Pohl, 'Memory, identity and power in Lombard Italy' in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 27.

<sup>291</sup> M. Innes, 'Introduction: using the past, interpreting the present, influencing the future', in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 5.

campaigns, as documented in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that have awakened most interest. She was the first born child of Alfred the Great and his wife Ealhswith, a Mercian daughter of Æthelred (an ealdorman of an unlocated Mercian tribal grouping called the *Gaini*) and Eadburh a ‘notable woman’ of ‘royal stock of the king of the Mercians’,<sup>292</sup> and likely to have been a descendant of King Coenwulf.<sup>293</sup> The Mercian connection is further exemplified by the union between Alfred and Ealhswith of which Asser tells us that Alfred ‘celebrated the wedding which took place ceremonially in Mercia in the presence of countless persons of both sexes’. For a child of the king of Wessex, Æthelflaed’s Mercian credentials were of the highest order. Æthelflaed was the first of their children, ‘after her Edward, then Aethelgifu followed by Aelfthryth and finally Aethelweard’.<sup>294</sup> The children were well educated and ‘were at all times fostered at the royal court under the solicitous care of tutors and nurses’. They were not permitted to live idly and they ‘attentively learned the psalms and books in English, especially English poems, and they very frequently make use of books’. Æthelflaed, ‘when the time came for her to marry was joined in marriage to Æthelred, the ealdorman of the Mercians’,<sup>295</sup> who is mentioned in a charter of 883 (S. 218).<sup>296</sup> Æthelred appears to have become the ruler of Mercia having succeeded Ceolwulf (under Alfred’s over lordship) around 880.<sup>297</sup> Their marriage, having taken place in 887-888, meant that Æthelflaed headed the Mercian royal household as her aunt Aethelswith had done.<sup>298</sup> The role of these royal Mercian women was significant and it has been suggested that Mercia may have played a key role in the development of queenship in not only England but across Europe.<sup>299</sup> Æthelred died around 910 and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* implies that his death may have been associated with the Battle of Tettenhall (Staffordshire) that year.<sup>300</sup> She was around 40 when she took control of Mercia after the death of Æthelred and possibly under 50 when she died in June 918.<sup>301</sup> Æthelflaed’s rank, as the daughter and sister of kings of Wessex, wife of Æthelred, and

<sup>292</sup> S. Keynes and M. Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources* (London, 1983), p. 29.

<sup>293</sup> P. Stafford, ‘Political women in Mercia, eighth to early tenth centuries’ in M. Brown and C. Farr (eds), *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (Leicester, 2001), p. 45.

<sup>294</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser*, p. 75.

<sup>295</sup> Keynes and Lapidge, *Asser*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>296</sup> Keynes and Lapidge *Asser*, p. 256.

<sup>297</sup> F. Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 307.

<sup>298</sup> Stafford ‘Political women’, p. 44.

<sup>299</sup> Stafford ‘Political women’, p. 44.

<sup>300</sup> *ASC*, p. 97.

<sup>301</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 306.



with her own lineage of Mercian royal stock, put her in an unusually powerful position. A position which, it could be said, could ‘satisfy all sides of this delicate balance between two old kingdoms’.<sup>302</sup> Despite this, our main source for the period, the West Saxon version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* ‘pointedly ignored’ Æthelflaed and her role in the early tenth century.<sup>303</sup> This may have been so as to not detract from the successes of the house of the West Saxons. Another version of the chronicle does survive, this fragment known as the *Mercian Register* is found in texts B, C and D of the chronicle. It concerns itself with around 20 years of mainly Mercian events and, it has been said, ‘might be styled the *Annals of Æthelflaed*’.<sup>304</sup> It is this document that gives us much of what we know about Æthelflaed and, in particular, her military campaigns.<sup>305</sup> From this we know that she pursued a programme of constructing fortified sites (burhs) across Mercia. This process, which had begun in Wessex under her father Alfred, was carried out as part of a campaign of defence and consolidation against Viking incursions across Mercia and Wessex with her brother, King Edward. Whilst Æthelred lived, Worcester (887-899), Chester (907) and *Bremesburh* (910) were all fortified. After Æthelred’s death she had two burhs built at *Scergeat* and Bridgenorth (912) whilst at the same time her brother Edward was building a series of burhs further south.<sup>306</sup> The fortification of Tamworth and Stafford, both in the summer of 913 seems to have been in response to Danish attacks out of Northampton and Leicester. The following year, the gap in a line of fortified burhs between Tamworth and Edward’s burh at Hertford was filled in by further building work by Æthelflaed at Warwick (914) and Edward at Buckingham (914).<sup>307</sup> The fortifications built at Eddisbury (914), Chirbury (915), *Weardburh* (915) and Runcorn (915) strengthened the line to the north and west. This campaign consolidated the position of Æthelflaed and her brother in respect of the Viking threat and in 917 the military campaign was progressed further, with attacks by Edward’s forces taking place further south. Whilst in the midlands region Æthelflaed moved to take Derby, one of the ‘Five Boroughs’ of the Danelaw. The campaign was successful and Æthelflaed’s army took Derby and the

<sup>302</sup> Stafford, ‘Political women’, p. 47.

<sup>303</sup> F. Wainwright, *Aethelflaed, Lady of the Mercians in Scandinavian England* (Chichester, 1975), p. 306.

<sup>304</sup> P. Szarmach, ‘Aethelflead of Mercia: Mise en page’ in P. Baker and N. Howe (eds), *Words and Works: Studies in Medieval English Language and Literature in Honour of Fred. C. Robinson* (Toronto, 1998), p. 106.

<sup>305</sup> Szarmach, ‘Aethelflead’, pp. 105-126.

<sup>306</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 310.

<sup>307</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 314.

land it controlled.<sup>308</sup> The following year Edward took Stamford whilst she seized Leicester, unopposed.

918, the year of her death started with military success. A later source, the Irish ‘fragmentary annals’, tell us that she triumphed at the second battle of Corbridge against the Viking Ragnall. This she is said to have done by co-ordinating a campaign with the Picts and the Scots:

‘The pagans were slaughtered by the Queen like that, so that her fame spread in all directions. Æthelflaed, through her own cleverness, made peace with the men of Alba and with the Britons, so that whenever the same race should come to attack her, they would rise to help her. If it were against them that they came, she would take arms with them. While this continued, the men of Alba and Britain overcame the settlements of the Norwegians and destroyed and sacked them’.<sup>309</sup>

Although unverified elsewhere, it is possible that these annals contain elements of an untold chapter of Æthelflaed’s campaigns.<sup>310</sup> The suggestion that she obtained an alliance with the ‘men of Alba’ (Picts and Scots) implies that she was recognised as the leader of an anti-Norse coalition in the north.<sup>311</sup> Her reputation appears to have spread; in the *Annals of Ulster* she is described as *famosissima regina Saxonum*.<sup>312</sup> Certainly she seems to have been prominent in the north, where she secured the agreement in York where, as the Mercian register states, ‘the people of York had promised her to accept her rule, some of them engaged themselves to do so by pledge, others ratifying it with oaths’.<sup>313</sup> She died, at Tamworth, some six months before the end of Viking resistance in the midlands and the re-conquest of the southern Danelaw.<sup>314</sup> That, after her death, Edward took the submission of the Welsh kings at Tamworth implies two things: that prior to her death there was recognition by the Welsh kings of Æthelflaed’s over-lordship which was now passed to Edward and that, at this time, Tamworth was

<sup>308</sup> In a move that ‘deserves to be called brilliant’, Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 315.

<sup>309</sup> J. Raner (ed.), *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin, 1978), p. 181.

<sup>310</sup> M. Costambeys, ‘Aethelflaed [Ethelfleda] (d. 918), ruler of the Mercians’, [www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com) (08/04/2013).

<sup>311</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 319.

<sup>312</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 319.

<sup>313</sup> *ASC*, p. 105.

<sup>314</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 316.

the Mercian centre where authority needed to be established.<sup>315</sup> Æthelflaed's building work and military and political campaigns in Mercian territories and beyond should be seen as paving the way for Edward's eventual pacification of the north.<sup>316</sup>

Æthelflaed was a rare example in early medieval Europe of a female ruler who, effectively, ruled a kingdom in her own right.<sup>317</sup> She is seen as granting charters jointly with Æthelred and after his death in her own name only.<sup>318</sup> Although not referred to as *rex* or *regina*, the charters do speak of the pair as 'holding the monarchy of the Mercians by the grace of God' (S. 221), and of Æthelflaed as ruling alone 'by the gift of Christ's mercy ruling the government of the Mercians' (S. 225). Although never *regina* she was 'Lady of the Mercians' (S. 225).<sup>319</sup> The exact significance of 'Lady of the Mercians' (*Myrcna hlaefdigei*) may be difficult to pin down but it does correspond to 'Lord of the Mercians' (*Myrcna hlaford*), the title given to Æthelred, and 'the implication is that she succeeded without qualification to the position which he had held'.<sup>320</sup> For Stafford Æthelflaed was part of a longer tradition of Mercian political women:

'These were rooted in family, household and inheritance and in control of monastic lands as well as perhaps warfare and defence. Imagery linked her to Cynethryth and the elevation of a Mercian Queen and mother... Æthelflaed was the beneficiary of a century and a half which made queens a familiar, acceptable and necessary part of Mercian political life'.<sup>321</sup>

Towards the end of her reign, or possibly just after it, the Mercian register was composed. This fragmentary work emphasises her military and building campaigns and pointedly stresses the divine assistance she received.<sup>322</sup> It is here we learn of her death:

'she died twelve days before midsummer (12 June) at Tamworth, and in the eighth year of her rule over Mercia as its rightful lord.'<sup>323</sup>

<sup>315</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 322.

<sup>316</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 321, and Costambeys, 'Aethelflaed'.

<sup>317</sup> Stafford, 'Political women', p. 35.

<sup>318</sup> Stafford, 'Political women', p. 45.

<sup>319</sup> Stafford, 'Political women', p. 47.

<sup>320</sup> Wainwright, *Aethelflaed*, p. 309.

<sup>321</sup> Stafford, 'Political women', p. 49.

<sup>322</sup> Stafford, 'Political women', p. 48.

Alongside this impressive military record and the building of burhs, Æthelflaed was also responsible for investing in religious cults in all of these centres. This has been seen as a fortification strategy but is also born out of the religious sensitivities of her family. Alfred, her father, did ‘very often get up secretly in the early morning at cockcrow and visited churches and relics of the saints in order to pray’.<sup>324</sup> Æthelstan who was educated at her court is said to have been known as a collector of saints’ relics.<sup>325</sup> At this time elite families in Mercia, Wessex and across Europe were engaging in meaningful religious investment in the face of ‘heathen’ (Viking) pressures. In Æthelflaed’s case this was more than endowing churches with lands or rededicating the churches. She (along with Æthelred whilst he lived) caused the translation of religious relics that spanned the region, and undertook building projects and investment in cults across the whole region. For example, we see a remodelled New Minster at Gloucester and the transfer of the relics of St Oswald there and, likewise, the relics of St Wærburh to Chester.<sup>326</sup> Often seen in military terms (investing in prayers and relics as protection against the heathen) we should not underplay the significance of saints and their myths in creating identities, nor the fashion for concerns about the souls of the powerful elites such as Æthelred and Æthelflaed.

To put this in context it should be noted that Mercia was second only to Northumbria in the production of local saints, and produced more royal saints than any other English kingdom.<sup>327</sup> In Mercia, saints seem to have played an important role in defining what it was to be Mercian, and royal saints in particular ‘symbolised past glories and represented an idealised homeland’.<sup>328</sup> Thus the descendants of the (pagan) Mercian king, Penda, account for 31 saints. The beatification of these people not only commemorated their lives and the symbolism that was communicated through their stories but harked back to Penda and the early period of Mercian greatness. Thus the *vita* of Wærburh stresses her royal connections, as the daughter of Eormenhild (herself a daughter of Eorcenberht King of Kent and Seaxburh an East Anglian queen) and the great Mercian king Wulfhere and, as already discussed, the sister of Wulfhad and Ruffin. The *vita* describes further royal and saintly Mercian links,

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<sup>323</sup> ASC, p. 105.

<sup>324</sup> Keynes and Lapidge *Asser*, p. 74.

<sup>325</sup> Foot, *Æthelstan*, p. 34.

<sup>326</sup> Stafford, ‘Political women’, p. 48.

<sup>327</sup> Jones, *Saints*, pp. 154-155. Jones attributes 49 saints to Northumbria, Mercia 43, Wessex 32, Kent 19.

<sup>328</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 155.

‘dear Wærburh’s nobility and saintliness is more intimately adorned by her most holy aunts, the daughters of King Penda, Cyneburh and Cyneswith’ and ‘the blessed Tibba’.<sup>329</sup>

This early Mercian history is commemorated in Bradshaw’s later account, which takes the story of Mercia back to Penda’s postulated grandfather, Creoda:

The seconde sone of Penda / we meane kynge Wulfere,  
A noble valyant prynce / by lynyall dyscent  
Reygnynge vpon the Mercyens with royalte & power,  
Maryed saynt Ermenylde / þ<sup>e</sup> kynges doughter of kent;  
  
Where[by] throughe the grace of god omnypotent  
He had fayre yssue / saynt Werburge / saynt Kenrede,  
Saynt Wulfade / saynt Ruffyn / in story as we rede.<sup>330</sup>

Wærburh remained a powerful and unifying symbol. Her shrine at Chester, built in the mid-fourteenth century, contained images of royal lines from across Mercia, Wessex and Kent, highlighting the role that Wærburh played throughout her life and sainthood, a powerful symbol of unity as conveyed through her royal lineage.<sup>331</sup> These royal connections would have proved an enticing mix to Æthelflaed, herself the daughter of a great military leader who had strong Mercian links.

The *Vita Sancte Werburge* is attributed to Goscelin of Saint-Bertin from the 1080s.<sup>332</sup> It appears to have been commissioned at Ely, a possibility emphasised by the relatively scant information about the translation of her relics to Chester, the details of which ‘can hardly seem sufficient for a Chester audience’. This in itself suggests that there may have been another, eleventh-century Chester life.<sup>333</sup> The *vita* tells us that she was the daughter of Wulfhere, King of the Mercians (657-74). Occasionally her place of birth is given as Stone from the association with *Wulfherescestre*. She became a nun

<sup>329</sup> R. Love (trans. and ed.), ‘Goscelin, Vita S. Werburge’, in R. Love (trans. and ed.), *Goscelin of Saint-Bertin, the Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 25-52, c. 1.

<sup>330</sup> H. Bradshaw, *The Life of Saint Werburge of Chester* (1887). Book 1, 43: lines 295-301. <http://lion.chadwyck.co.uk.ezproxy3.lib.le.ac.uk> (28/04/2013).

<sup>331</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 156.

<sup>332</sup> Love, *Goscelin*, p. lxxii and lxxvi.

<sup>333</sup> Love, *Goscelin*, p. lxxvi.

at Ely. When Æthelred became king (674-704) she was recalled and made abbess over Hanbury (Staffordshire) and *Triccengeham*. This has on occasion been associated with Trentham (Pirehill), and ‘the position of Trentham just 20 miles north-west of Hanbury might seem convincing’ although ‘the form of the name... corresponds rather more closely to Threekingham in S. Lincolnshire’.<sup>334</sup> Wærburh died at *Triccengeham* where her remains were laid to rest. The importance of Wærburh seems to have increased after her death, the community at *Triccengeham* was said to have locked her body away ‘to keep the holy treasure in that place forever’.<sup>335</sup> The power of the dead, their ability to bestow protection and to intercede on behalf of the living is illustrated by the ensuing squabble over her remains. The *vita* claims that in the case of her death she was said to have ‘instructed the community at Hanbury that wheresoever she might depart this life, they should come without delay, and transport her body to their monastery’.<sup>336</sup> This they of course did, stealing back the remains and taking them back to Hanbury. Later in 874 Wærburh’s remains were taken to Chester, and we have a fifteenth-century work as a guide to these events, a vernacular verse by Henry Bradshaw, a monk of Chester.<sup>337</sup> Although ‘much garbled in transmission’ sources such as these should not be dismissed and although from a much later period than the one under discussion, it can be considered to contain ‘the kernel of truth’.<sup>338</sup> Bradshaw’s verse tells us how the people of Hanbury took the relics of Wærburh to Chester for their safe-keeping:

This seconde translacion of this virgin bright  
 From Hambury abbay vnto Chestre cite  
 Was celebrate, with ioye and gladnes full right,  
 The yere of our saueour in his humanite  
 viii. hundreth complet .v. and seuentie.<sup>339</sup>

Æthelflaed’s interest in Wærburh was said in part to have developed out of a political and economic interest in Hanbury. Through her contact with Hanbury, her interest

<sup>334</sup> Love, *Goscelin*, p. 46, n.1.

<sup>335</sup> Love, *Goscelin*, c. 10.

<sup>336</sup> Love, *Goscelin*, pp. 25-52, c. 8.

<sup>337</sup> For a broader discussion about Bradshaw’s work and its importance to the identity of Chester see L. Varnam, ‘Sanctity and the city: sacred space in Henry Bradshaw’s life of St Werburge’, in C. Clarke, *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester c. 1200-1600* (Cardiff, 2011).

<sup>338</sup> Thacker, ‘Chester and Gloucester’, p. 203.

<sup>339</sup> Bradshaw, *Life of Saint Werburge*, pp. 142-143.

deepened.<sup>340</sup> Bradshaw furthers this belief for us, informing us of Æthelflaed's deepening dedication to Wærburh:

This lady Elflede, duchesse of merciens,  
Had speciall loue and singular affection  
To blessed Werburge, and true confidence:  
Wherfore she mynded with great dilectacion  
To edifie a mynstre, a place of deuocion,  
To this holy virgin, for profite of her soule,  
Enlargynge the church of Peter and of Paule.<sup>341</sup>

This minster at Chester, dedicated to St Peter and St Paul, is said to have been refounded by Æthelflaed, having been a church 'which had existed in the city from Roman times'.<sup>342</sup> Joint dedications to St Peter and St Paul are often indicators of important churches, often royal estate centres, and it is possible that this was the case at Chester.<sup>343</sup> Thacker believes that the 'monastic traditions recorded by Bradshaw were in essentials right, and that Æthelflaed was responsible for establishing the cult of St Wærburh in Chester, and for the re-founding of the minster there in her honour'.<sup>344</sup> Sargent in his survey proposes that the translation must have occurred by 'the later-ninth or first half of the tenth century'.<sup>345</sup> Rollason suggests it occurred before a grant 985 by King Edgar to the community of St Wærburh at Chester.<sup>346</sup>

It is of interest that Wærburh has several associations indicating a role as a protector or sentinel. Her name means 'Fortress Guardian', Jones suggests that this is reflected in her feast day, her translation to Chester which was three days before midsummer, and her nativity feast (3<sup>rd</sup> February) at Candlemas, a winter feast of light. Both these may have been accompanied by bonfires, a typical warning system.<sup>347</sup> It appears likely that the story of Wærburh's miracle, in scaring away geese, may also have been understood in terms of a guardian, as geese are associated with guarding in

<sup>340</sup> Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester', p. 203.

<sup>341</sup> Bradshaw, *Life of Saint Werburge*, pp. 150-151.

<sup>342</sup> Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester', p. 203.

<sup>343</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 138.

<sup>344</sup> Thacker, 'Chester and Gloucester', p. 204.

<sup>345</sup> Sargent, 'Lichfield', p. 114

<sup>346</sup> Rollason. 'Cults of murdered royal saints', p. 9

<sup>347</sup> Jones, *Saints*, pp. 156-158.

their own right, especially in Roman legend.<sup>348</sup> So, dedications to Wærburh may imply that they were in some way defensive, taking on the characteristics of the eponymous saint. Churches dedicated to Wærburh are concentrated in the north midlands, and the promotion of her cult is seen as a way of strengthening or fortifying the northern flanks of Mercia against the Viking threat.<sup>349</sup> Chester is the best known example but there were also dedications to her at her Staffordshire resting place, Hanbury, which still carries her name, as does the church at Kingsley (Staffordshire).

In addition, in Derbyshire there were dedications at Derby (Friary Gate), Spondon (near Derby) and Blackwell (with a pre-Conquest cross in the churchyard). Warburton, on the south bank of the river Mersey (Cheshire), is a place-name that is linked to Wærburh meaning *Wærburh's tūn*. There is evidence that the cult spread wider than the north midlands with dedications near Bristol (Mina Road where a river crossing also took her name), and two 'lost' dedications one in Bath (Broad Street), the other at Holley at Henbury (Saltmarsh, Gloucestershire).<sup>350</sup> These southerly dedications along the Avon in Bristol and Bath have been seen as part of a process of strengthening this vulnerable area, by Æthelflaed and Æthelred, against seaborne attack from Viking raids.<sup>351</sup> Wembury (Devon) sits in a position overlooking both the Tamar Estuary and Plymouth Sound and may be seen, similarly to those sites on the Avon, as a guard or sentinel. Interestingly, it came into the hands of Edward the Elder, Æthelflaed's brother, in 920 at a time when the promotion of Wærburh's cult would have been at its most vigorous and her powers thought of as being at their most effective.<sup>352</sup> Wærburh is chosen as a deliberate act, a 'Fortress Guardian' acting as a sentinel against outsiders, she can be seen as acting as a protector, a sentinel saint very much like sentinel barrow burials from an earlier era.

### **Wulfhad and Ruffin**

It should be stressed that it is not the intention of this chapter to discuss all the Staffordshire saints of the period, but only those associated with Pirehill (no matter how loosely), to examine how they fit into the narratives of early medieval Staffordshire, and, to assess how they and their stories were worked into the landscape by people of

<sup>348</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 158, and Love, *Goscelin*, c. 6.

<sup>349</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 156.

<sup>350</sup> For a discussion about these dedications, see Love, *Goscelin*, p. 156-157.

<sup>351</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 156.

<sup>352</sup> Jones, *Saints*, p. 157.



the period. Farmer's *Dictionary of Saints* lists 'Wulfhad and Ruffin' as 'traditionally brothers who were martyred at Stone where their relics were kept' and that they were 'sons of Wulfhere, king of the Mercians'.<sup>353</sup>

In the *Vita* Wulfhad, whilst out hunting, met a hart who led him to St Chad's hermitage in the forest. Ruffin arrived later and the brothers were both secretly baptised, and they asked Chad to move closer to their father's castle so that they could visit him more frequently (*'castro patris sui'*, see below for *Wlferecestria*).<sup>354</sup> Notwithstanding the story revealed here, Wulfhere ostensibly ruled as a Christian, or at least had a succession of Christian bishops: Trumhere, Jaruman, Chad and Winfrith.<sup>355</sup> In the story though Wulfhere, who according to the *passio* was a Christian by name only, in order to marry Eormenhild, relapsed into idolatry encouraged by his counsellor, Werebold, who had previously asked Wærburh, the brothers' sister to marry him. Thwarted, by a combination of the actions of the siblings, Werebold, jealous of the brothers, spied on their visits to St Chad. He informed Wulfhere of their visits who, in great anger, encountered them at St Chad's hermitage and killed them. Wulfhad died instantly, whilst wounded Ruffin escaped to die finally at Burston near Stone. Their mother and sister subsequently placed their bodies in a stone sarcophagus at a place called Stone, where a college of canons was later founded to care for the saints' relics. The version from Stone Priory also places both their deaths at Burston (*Borstone*). Wulfhad carried his own head in his arms to Stone whilst Eormenhild, led by a company of angels, carried Ruffin to burial.<sup>356</sup> In Hugh Candidus' chronicle the appended 'Extracts from the register of Walter of Whittlesey', tells us that Eormenhild 'had a finely-constructed church built at the same place' and that the 'infirm' and those 'suffering weaknesses and of others seeking God' were accustomed to frequent that place and to carry stones thither'.<sup>357</sup> Wulfhere, filled with remorse, spied on St Chad and became convinced of the saint's holiness and, once baptised, was said to have thrown all the idols out of Mercia, founding churches throughout the land, with *Medeshamstede* being the most notable. The *passio* preserved in Hugh Candidus tells

<sup>353</sup> D. Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford, 1997), p. 516.

<sup>354</sup> W. Mellows, *The Chronicle of Hugh Candidus, a Monk of Peterborough* (London, 1949), p. 146.

<sup>355</sup> Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede*, p. 295, HE iii.24.

<sup>356</sup> The name Ruffin (*Ruffinus*) is a problematic one and not common in early medieval England. It was possibly used by the authors of the story 'to lend an exotic touch to their tale', Rumble, 'Ad Lapidem', p. 312, n. 25.

<sup>357</sup> The translation is by Rumble, 'Ad Lapidem', p. 314. Original in Appendix II, 'Extracts from the register of Walter of Whittlesey', in Mellows, *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, p. 153.

us that at Wulfhere's reacceptance of Christianity, and as an act of contrition, he also founded a house of secular canons at Stone.<sup>358</sup>

Their lives have been most effectively accounted for by Rumble, who has attempted to link the legend with two 'historic' events recorded by Bede and in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.<sup>359</sup> He suggests that Bede's story of Cædwalla's suppression of the Isle of Wight (a West-Saxon king who reigned 685-688) is connected to the story of the killing of two young princes which are said to have occurred *ad lapidem* ('at Stone').<sup>360</sup> The story, he proposes, 'could fit just as well into the circumstances of Wulfhere's (king of Mercia 658-675) invasion of the island' as attested to in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 661.<sup>361</sup> This merging of events which concerns two different kings from two separate kingdoms, and within a quarter of a century of each other is problematic, although Blair considers it 'reasonably argued'.<sup>362</sup> Rumble maintains that these inconsistencies can be explained by the fact that Bishop Daniel of Winchester, Bede's source for the story, was,

'a man perhaps more interested in promoting the deeds of West Saxon rather than Mercian kings...[and] may well have informed Bede of the martyrdom of the two princes only in context of Cædwalla's exploits on the island'.<sup>363</sup>

If this is accepted, Rumble argues that 'the relocation of events to Staffordshire from Hampshire presents little difficulty'.<sup>364</sup> To explain the *ad lapidem* association with Stone (Staffordshire) he then proposes that the version of events Bede set in Hampshire was 'remembered in Mercian oral tradition and was later reconstituted as a Mercian royal cult centred upon Stone, Staffordshire', becoming formalised in a legend written in the twelfth century. Rumble's thesis is, as it must be, very speculative. Indeed it

<sup>358</sup> Rumble, 'Ad Lapidem', p. 313, and Mellows, *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, p. 153 'in illo autem loco vocabulo Stanes, ubi sanctorum matrium Wulfadi et rufini corpora in pace sepulta sunt, collegium canonicorum regularium divinis obsequiis mancipatur'.

<sup>359</sup> A. Rumble, 'Ad Lapidem in Bede and a Mercian martyrdom' in A. Rumble and A. Mills (eds), *Names, and Places and People: An Onomastic Miscellany in Memory of John McNeal Dodgson* (Stamford, 1997), pp. 307-319.

<sup>360</sup> B. Colgrave and R. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), p. 383, HE IV, 16.

<sup>361</sup> ASC, pp. 33-34.

<sup>362</sup> J. Blair, 'A saint for every minster? Local cults in Anglo-Saxon England and a handlist of Anglo-Saxon saints', in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (eds), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), p. 562.

<sup>363</sup> Rumble, 'Ad Lapidem', p. 309.

<sup>364</sup> Rumble, 'Ad Lapidem', p. 314.

would be very difficult to prove that these events did take place in Staffordshire. In essence, his case rests upon matching two (differing) historical ‘facts’ with a later ‘myth’ and transposing them around the country. Rumble intimates that there may have been a ‘Mercian royal cult’ that at some point became associated with Stone, but he does not say when this might have occurred, and he is content with the tradition coming ‘into a formal hagiography’ after the foundation of the priory at Stone in 1135. He goes on to say that ‘if the conjecture above is accepted’... ‘then the further suggestion is possible that the Mercian legend of S.S. Wulfhad and Ruffin is a later, somewhat modified version of the same events’. To summarise his position, Rumble conjectures that Bede’s story concerning Cædwalla is not West Saxon, but actually a Mercian one concerning Wulfhere that is wrongly interpreted by Bede’s source; and that it took place in Hampshire and was remembered as a Mercian story later transposed to Stone in the twelfth century.<sup>365</sup>

Despite this rationalised connection, no evidence for the existence of a cult in Hampshire is presented, and nor is there any discussion on how the cult survived in any location. The cults of royal murdered saints are not rare in early medieval England; in fact they are relatively common, especially in Mercia as Rollason has demonstrated.<sup>366</sup> There appears little in this reasoning to rule out the possibility of Stone having a pre-Domesday cult relating to Wulfhad and Ruffin and even less to suggest that there was ever such a cult in Hampshire. Nor is there landscape or place-name evidence in Hampshire to support this interpretation apart from the evidence for Bede’s *ad lapidem*, for which there is a fair degree of uncertainty, and for which there are at least two possibilities which have been put forward in Hampshire, namely Stone Farm and Stoneham.<sup>367</sup>

So, what evidence do we have for the cult at Stone and what evidence is there of its survival in Staffordshire? The Latin text of the *Vita* is found in *The Book of Walter of Whittlesey* (M.S. 1 Peterborough Dean and chapter, c.1329) attached to a cartulary of Peterborough Abbey. There may have been another version, *Cotton Otho A. XVI*,

<sup>365</sup> Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem’, p. 314.

<sup>366</sup> See Rollason, ‘Cults of murdered royal saints’.

<sup>367</sup> Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem’, pp. 310-311. Coates says of Stone ‘The place mentioned by Bede is usually placed here, though in earlier writings one of the Stonehams was preferred’. R. Coates, *The Place-Names of Hampshire* (London, 1989), p. 156.

which was destroyed in the Cotton Library fire of 1731.<sup>368</sup> That the *passio* survived at Peterborough is interesting, since the death of these two royal princes is said to be directly linked to the foundation of *Medeshamstede* (later Peterborough).<sup>369</sup> The other extant Latin versions are found in the *Gotha Codex*, and the British Library *M.S. Lansdowne 436*, once owned by Romsey Abbey. The story also survives in a litany from Norwich from the twelfth century.<sup>370</sup> This version may pre-date the *passio* and makes no mention of Ruffin, suggesting that he is a later addition to the story.<sup>371</sup> Vernacular texts include *M.S. Cotton Nero C Xii* which appears to be either the original, or a copy, from a table which hung in the choir of Stone Priory (later transcribed by Dugdale), and, some rhyming couplets beneath nine glass windows in the cloister of Peterborough Abbey, now destroyed. All texts give the site of the saints' burial as being at Stone.<sup>372</sup>

### **The Wulfhad and Ruffin story in the Staffordshire landscape**

Of the two saints, Wulfhad is the dominant figure and, as we have seen, there are reservations about the name of the second saint, Ruffin. Despite this, an edition of Sampson Erdeswick's (c.1538–1603) *Survey of Staffordshire* suggests that a 'memory' of Ruffin survived in a chapel at Burston (*Burweston*).<sup>373</sup> Harwood, the editor of that edition qualifies this by telling us that this was:

'... the site of an ancient chapel, erected in memory of Rufin, second son of Wulfere, who was slain at this place by his father, in consequence of his conversion to the Christian faith. This chapel, which was standing in the time of our author, is now levelled to the ground'.<sup>374</sup>

Burston is half a mile away from Sandon where Eardeswick lived and so presumably somewhere that the antiquarian knew well. The remains of the chapel were said to be still standing into the nineteenth century.

<sup>368</sup> M. Brown, 'The Legend of St Wulfhad and St Ruffin' (unpub. M.A. dissertation, University of Liverpool, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>369</sup> Rollason. 'Cults of murdered royal saints', p. 13.

<sup>370</sup> Rumble, 'Ad Lapidem', p. 316, and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS. 470.

<sup>371</sup> A. Sargent, personal comment.

<sup>372</sup> Brown, 'Legend', p. 2.

<sup>373</sup> Harwood, *Sampson Erdeswick's Survey*, p. 40.

<sup>374</sup> Harwood, *Sampson Erdeswick's Survey*, p. 39.

The search for place- and field-names in and around the area where the cult seems to have been active is another way of gauging interaction with the cult. These can be, it is argued here, the outer ripples of an active cult, which cannot have been formed without some sort of local understanding of the cult, and, may be a way of sensing how that cult penetrated the landscape. *Wlverlowe*, a previously unknown field-name, is found in a grant of 1314 at Sandon (the neighbouring parish east of Stone). The place is as yet unlocated but could possibly be at Burston as other deeds in this collection refer to land there. The gift refers to an acre of arable land consisting of 3 selions in the field of *Wlverlowe* between the land of Sir Roger on one side and of William son of Robert on the other; one edge abuts the land of Sir William de Stafford and the other upon *Wlvelowedych*.<sup>375</sup> It contains the OE place-name element *hlāw* and a personal name, probably giving 'Wulfhere's *hlāw*'.<sup>376</sup> It is tempting to speculate that this mound refers to the burial mound of Wulfhere, but, this element fits into a wider understanding of how people in the early middle ages described the landscape around them and inscribed their stories upon it. *Wolfelega* is unlocated in the Darlaston area. Possibly from Wulfhere with OE *lēah* (clearing) or 'clearing with the wolf'.<sup>377</sup> The Stone chartulary has the following entry:

*Dionisia de Dorlaveston filia Engenulfi de Gresele dedi etc dimidiam virgatam terrae quam Hugo de Waleford tennuit de me in Dorlaveston et total partem meam de Wolfelega*<sup>378</sup>

Rendering: 'Dionisia of Darlaston daughter of Engenulf of Gresley gives etc... that half a virgate of land that Hugo of Waleford holds of me in Darlaston and all my share of *Wolfelega*'.<sup>379</sup> It is surely significant that this parcel of land is to be found in the cartulary of Stone Priory. The association of the lands with Darlaston may also be significant, being part of the holdings of Wulfric Spot also defined in a charter of 956 (S.602), and seemingly containing the land of the hillfort known as *Wulfherescestre*. Other instances of this element can be found: in an unlocated field-name which is first

<sup>375</sup> WSL, SD Cooke/8.

<sup>376</sup> D. Horovitz, personal comment. Also M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, 1984), pp. 156-157. 'Wlferus', 'Wlfero' is how Wulfhere is referred to in the *passio*, see Mellows, *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, p. 155.

<sup>377</sup> D. Horovitz, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* (Brewood, 2005), p. 583.

<sup>378</sup> G. Wrottesley, *The Stone Chartulary*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 6 part 1 (Birmingham, 1885), p. 8. Dr Philip Morgan has transcribed and translated the original chartulary, expanding on those details left out by Wrottesley, and has kindly let me use a draft of this for my own research. Where the details are taken from this draft I will indicate that it is the case.

<sup>379</sup> P. Morgan, Translation of *Cotton Ms. Vespasian E.xxiv*, 'The Stone Cartulary' (unpub.).

attested too much later *Wolferle* (c.1758) near Lane End seven miles north-east of Stone (see also *Wolfelega*).<sup>380</sup> *Wolfesbrigg* (1306, *Wolvesbrugge*) is unlocated but near to Uttoxeter and gives either ‘bridge of the wolves’ or ‘Wulfhere’s bridge’.<sup>381</sup> Similarly we find *Wolfotesbridge* (1332, *Wolfotebrugge*), unlocated in Penkhull, some seven miles north of Stone, an ME form of Wulfhad with bridge.<sup>382</sup> *Wulfursyde* (unlocated) near to Bignall and Audley appears to have an association with Wulfhere (father of Wulfhad and Ruffin).<sup>383</sup> *Wulredeston* (1214) too is unlocated, but probably somewhere near Weston some seven miles down the River Trent from Stone.<sup>384</sup> We also have *Wulfraed’s tūn*, with the same derivation as *Wulverdistone*.<sup>385</sup> *Wulverdistone* is somewhere in Newcastle just north of Stone (given by Horovitz as possibly *Wulheard’s tūn*).<sup>386</sup> Rumble gives *Wlfadi*, *Wlfadi* (both genitive) and *Wlfharda* and *Wlfuuard* as forms of *Wulfhad* found in the charter roll of Stone Priory and ‘the latter two show confusion of the second element OE *heard* and *weard*’.<sup>387</sup>

*Wullphateshadleg* (Colton, late thirteenth century) is an interesting example found in a deed, a ‘Feoffment of a certain assart in the field of Coultun... lying between land of Hugh son of Gerard and of Adam de Prel, leading towards Wullphateshadleg’. Rumble defines this as ‘Wulfhad’s heathy clearing’, suggesting that he must have been a thirteenth-century contemporary of Hugh and Adam, or, an earlier owner of the field.<sup>388</sup> Another possibility that should not be ruled out is that the name is associated with a rent connected with an altar dedicated to the saint at Stone, although ‘this is not specified’.<sup>389</sup> Rumble dismisses the possibility of this field being named after Wulfhad himself and it is unlikely that this name harks back to direct ownership. It may be, however, that this name was locally remembered as a place linked to a cult associated with the princes. Similarly, if the personal name lived on to be used by a local landowner in Colton, this again might be a sign of the cult of this saint living on locally.

<sup>380</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 583.

<sup>381</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 583.

<sup>382</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 584.

<sup>383</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 594.

<sup>384</sup> G. Wrottesley, *Staffordshire Suits Extracted From the Plea Rolls*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 3 (Birmingham, 1882), p. 163.

<sup>385</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 594.

<sup>386</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 594.

<sup>387</sup> Horovitz also mentions the un-located *Wodewardington* containing OE personal name *Wulheard* or *Wulfhere*. Horovitz, *Place-Names*, pp. 582-583, and Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem’, p. 317, n. 49.

<sup>388</sup> Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem’, p. 318, gives the incorrect reference number D938/106 instead of D938/108.

<sup>389</sup> Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem’, p. 319.

Further afield we have a reference from Chester, *Porta Wlfadi*. This suggests that one of the gates at Chester commemorated Wulfhad, the brother of Wærburh, who was venerated at Chester, although earlier forms *Wlfidgate* and *Wlfeildgate* (1162-1181) may indicate ‘OE fem. *Wulfhild* (or ON *Ulfhildir*)’ with *gate*.<sup>390</sup> It may be that, in this instance, the personal name was re-interpreted by the monks of Chester. Wærburh was closely associated with concepts of defence and protection, and her cult at Chester was one that was clearly defined as being a ‘protector’.<sup>391</sup>

Apart from the fragmentary remains of the priory at Stone, the one major archaeological monument associated with the cult is that of *Wlferecestria* (*Wulfcestre*, *Wulfecestre*, *Welfercestre*, *Wulfercester*). This is the name given to the hillfort just north of Stone (now known as Bury Bank), and is ‘first’ referenced as *Wulfcestre* in the Stone Cartulary with a thirteenth-century date.<sup>392</sup> However, it is possible, just, to push this date back a little. Morgan’s more complete translation of an earlier deed from the Stone cartulary gives us:

*‘Henry son and heir of Dionisia de Darlaston to Saint Wulphad the Martyr of Stone...that piece of land in Wlferecestre super Trent...and the whole land in Wlferecestre which is called Le Buri’.*<sup>393</sup>

This is undated in the cartulary. However the next entry ends:

*‘Dionisia de Darlaston dtr.of Engenulf de Gresley for my soul and the souls of my ancestors and successors in power and widowhood’*

We know that Dionisia was widowed by 1199.<sup>394</sup> Pushing the date back a decade or two is not hugely significant, but it does bring into question whether or not the cult of Wulfhad (promoted by the new Priory at Stone) was responsible for the name practices that we see in the surviving place-names that appear in reference to Wulfhad and his family. For this to have been the case, these names would have had to have taken hold quickly. The Priory was founded in 1130 and these names would have had to have been not merely in use, but coined and established by the 1180s or 1190s at the latest, to have

<sup>390</sup> J. McNeal Dodgson, *The Place-names of Cheshire*, English Place-Name Society (Nottingham, 1981), p. 26.

<sup>391</sup> Varnam, ‘Sanctity’, p. 127. See also C. Clarke, ‘Remembering Anglo-Saxon Mercia in late medieval and early modern Chester’, in Clarke, *Mapping the Medieval City*, pp. 201-218.

<sup>392</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 165, from Wrottesley, *Stone Chartulary*, p.10.

<sup>393</sup> Morgan, entry 16, and in Wrottesley, *Stone Chartulary*, second entry p. 9 (3, folio 8 in manuscript).

<sup>394</sup> Parker, ‘Chetwynd’s history’, p. 17.

been secure enough for them to be used in a legal document. The charters and deeds were written in Latin but the place-names were given in the vernacular so that they could be recognisable on the ground. The naming of fields and the like was no top-down process. For these names to have become established in the landscape, and in legal deeds, suggests that the cult would have had to have been established locally for some time, or promoted vigorously. It remains debateable whether the names could have been taken up and entered into the vernacular tradition in such a short time. This seems less plausible than a slower percolation over a longer period of perhaps a century or two. In addition, in this example at least, we know that the name is a secular one, being passed on to the church and so not being coined by the priory in association with payments, altars etc. It is difficult to know when these place-names came into being or to have any certainty that they specifically refer to the characters in the *passio*, but, the grouping of these names and the close association with the cult at Stone suggests a belief in a local cult.



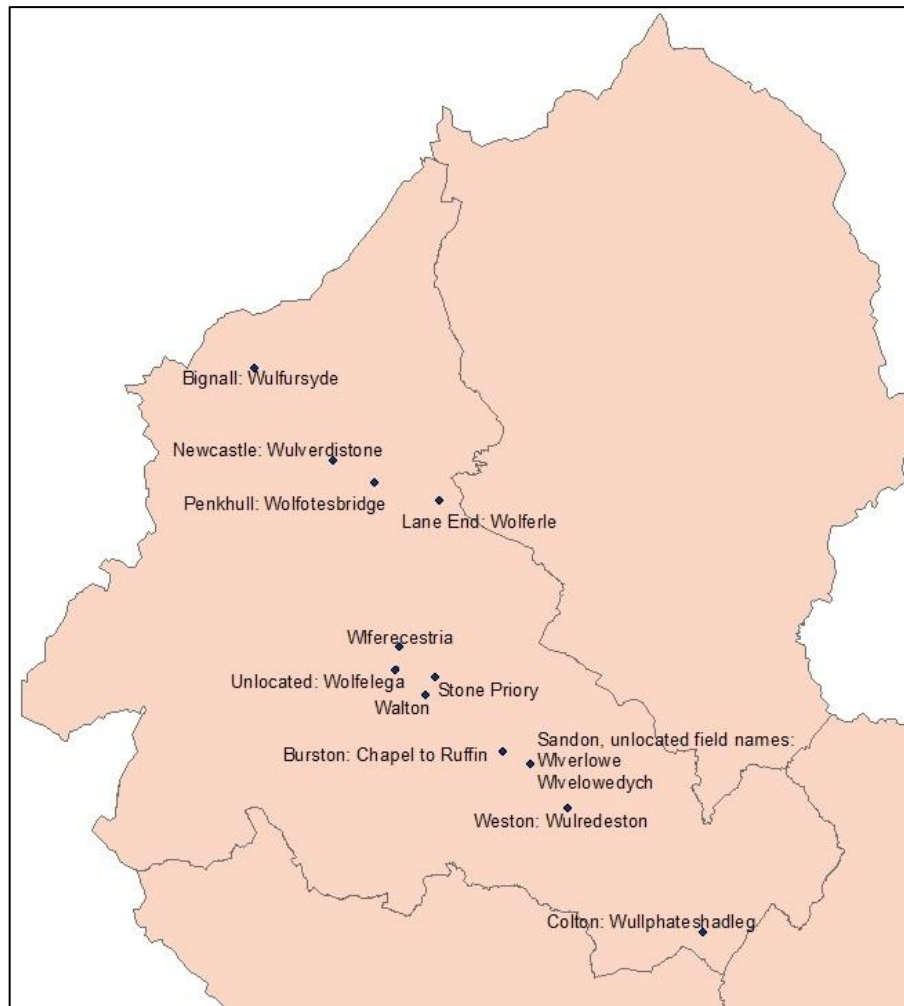


Figure 30: Place-names in Pirehill with Wulfhad associations.

The hillfort known as Bury Bank was first properly surveyed in the 1880s as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> edition OS mapping. It is first referred to as ‘le bury’ in the thirteenth century which is also when *Wlferecestre* is first attested to.<sup>395</sup> It is referred to in the *passio* as follows, ‘*Cumque appropinquaret castro patris sui a quo discesserat, que nunc vocatur Wlferecestra*’ (And when he came near the castle from which his father had left, which is now called Wlferecestra).<sup>396</sup> Little archaeological work has been carried out on the hillfort and so far there is little or no evidence for early medieval activity on the site. If we look back at the charter we remember that this says it grants ‘the whole land in Wlferecestre which is called *Le Buri*’. This might imply that *le Buri*

<sup>395</sup> Morgan, entry 16 and in Wrottesley, *Stone Chartulary*, second entry p. 9 (3, folio 8 in manuscript).

<sup>396</sup> Mellows, *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, p. 146.



50 years later the land had passed into the hands of Wulfric Spot and was used to endow his Benedictine foundation at Burton.<sup>400</sup> The abbey still held the land at Domesday.<sup>401</sup> That the earls of Mercia continued to hold land in this area is indicated by the Domesday entry for the manor adjacent to Darlaston, Meaford. These lands were held by the Benedictine Abbey of St Remy at Rheims and this entry (with Hamstall Ridware) says ‘Earl Algar gave these two lands to St Remy’s’.<sup>402</sup> From other sources we know that Earl Ælfgar granted the land in 1061 when his son Burchard died in Rheims whilst travelling through there.<sup>403</sup>

Of the remains of Wulfhad we are told in a ME poem that he was canonised in the twelfth century.<sup>404</sup> However, the *passio* suggests a date from the tenth century.<sup>405</sup> This *passio* ‘enjoyed a respectable degree of currency’ during the middle ages.<sup>406</sup> There do not appear to have been any competing claims for the stories of these two saints. A deed from the late twelfth century of Petronilla de Darlaston assigned half a virgate and toft, and croft, and meadow land in Darlaston:

‘that Ewlfus held and half an acre which was part of the said half virgate of land saving an annual rent of 2s to Burton Abbey. I have sworn before my loyal men on the high altar and the relics of St Wulfhad placed there never to break this gift to the canons’.<sup>407</sup>

We know, then, that the relics of Wulfhad were at Stone at this date and that later, during the reign of Edward II (1312), the priory was granted a license to acquire lands ‘on account of the devotion which the king bears to St Wulfhad whose body rests in the church of the priory at Stone’.<sup>408</sup> They could, however, have arrived there in the twelfth century at the foundation of the priory. The rhyming verses that hung at the priory tells us that Robert, Lord Stafford was encouraged:

‘to restore and helpe Saint Wulfad’s house again

<sup>400</sup> S. 1536.

<sup>401</sup> J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book: Staffordshire* (Chichester, 1976), 4:6.

<sup>402</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 5: 1-2.

<sup>403</sup> J. L. Kirby, ‘The Priory of Lapley’, in *VCH Staffordshire*, 3 (1970), p. 340.

<sup>404</sup> Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem’, p. 316.

<sup>405</sup> *Passio* to be found in Mellows, *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, pp. 140-159.

<sup>406</sup> Rumble, ‘Ad Lapidem’, p. 312.

<sup>407</sup> This appears in Wrottesley, *Stone Chartulary*, p.8 although the text quoted does not appear there and only in P. Morgan’s unpublished notes, numbered 15.

<sup>408</sup> J. Dickinson, ‘The priory of Stone’, in M. Greenslade (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 3 (1970), p. 243.

And make canons there is steed of nuns that  
Enysan had slayne'<sup>409</sup>

A highly important piece of information is that Kenilworth Priory was granted 'the church of St Wulfhad of Stone' ('*concedimus in elemosinam Bernardo priori de Kenillwude et canonicis suis ecclesiam Sancti Wlfadi de Stanis*') by Enisan son of Ernald who held Walton from Robert de Stafford in 1086.<sup>410</sup> What is clear is that there was already a church at Stone dedicated to St Wulfhad prior to the foundation of the Augustinian priory. Thus we cannot simply allocate the association with Stone and Wulfhad to the foundation of the priory, there must have been a connection before this. Soon after the foundation of the priory, the church is referred to as St Mary and St Wulfhad ('*Ecclesie Sancte Marie et Sancti Wlfadi de Stanes*').<sup>411</sup> Although a little complex, it is possible to take this story further back again. A later verse was said to have hung in the priory refectory until the Reformation which read:

'That two nunns and one preest lived in this place  
The which were slayne by one Enysan  
That came over with William the Conqueror then  
This Enysan slue the nuns and priest alsoe,  
Because his sister should have this church thoe:  
But for that offence he did saint Wolfade  
His sister soon died, and himself great vengeance had'.<sup>412</sup>

Enysan is the Ensan that granted the land in 1130. He was the son of Ernald who held Walton at Domesday.<sup>413</sup> The Pipe Roll of 1130 records that '*Ernaldus fiius Enisand debet x marcas ut habeat pacem de hominibus quos interfeci*', Ernald son of Enias paid

<sup>409</sup> Wrottesley, *Stone Chartulary*, p. 1. There were two tablets, probably of wood, one of a hundred and sixty-two lines commemorating the founding of the priory, and the other of three hundred and eighty-two lines long concerning Wulfhad and Ruffin. For a discussion see G. Gerould, 'Legend of St Wulfhad and St Ruffin at Stone Priory', in *Proceedings of Modern Language Association of America*, 32 (1917), pp. 323-327.

<sup>410</sup> The deed is in R. Eyton, *The Staffordshire Chartulary*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 2 part I (Birmingham, 1881), pp. 204-205.

<sup>411</sup> Eyton, 'Staffordshire chartulary' p. 236.

<sup>412</sup> Wrottesley, *Stone Chartulary*, p.1 from Dugdales, *Monasticon*, vi (i), pp. 230-231 (1661)

<sup>413</sup> Dickinson, 'Priory of Stone' p. 240, and Eyton, 'Staffordshire chartulary' p. 202.

10 marcs to have the peace of the men whom he killed'.<sup>414</sup> So, it might be possible to trace the church at least back to the period immediately after the Conquest and possibly before. The conflict between the major landowner and the church suggests that this was not a foundation of the family of Ernald.

It is interesting that Stone does not appear in Domesday but Walton does. Walton is held by Ernald and a priest is given. Although by no means certain, this priest may have served at St Wulfhad's in Stone. Walton is a place-name that is often found in association with ecclesiastical centres that were founded prior to the Conquest and are often early foundations.<sup>415</sup> Walton may have been the secular centre whilst Stone was ecclesiastical. The following addition occurs in the Domesday entry for Walton, 'Aki a free man held it, he gave 1 carucate of this land to his sister'.<sup>416</sup> It is proposed that this pre-Conquest grant may have been to a hermitage, which later became the nunnery whose nuns are referred to in the tablet in Stone priory 'slayne by one Enysan'.<sup>417</sup> This supports the idea that 'this was a gift to some small community of nuns or possibly a hermitage'.<sup>418</sup> Certainly there is plenty of room for scepticism here. The men killed by Ernald may not be related to the nuns and priest killed by Enysan, and, Alki's sister may not have had anything to do with a nunnery.<sup>419</sup> Despite this, the evidence here shows that there was a secure memory of Wulfhad in Staffordshire and in particular in the area around Stone, and that the landscape served as a mnemonic tool for preserving the story. The dating of some of the place-names puts them within a generation of the foundation of the priory at Stone. As discussed, for the name to percolate down to a field-name in this time-frame would have been a swift dissemination of the cult, if we follow Rumble's suggestion that the cult did not arrive in Staffordshire until the establishment of the priory. We also know that the hillfort, or the area around the hillfort seems to have taken on the nomenclature associated with Wulfhere quite early. Stone appears to have had a church, and possibly have been a minster site, prior to the coming of the priory and, most importantly, we know that the

<sup>414</sup> R. Eyton, *The Staffordshire Pipe Rolls of 31 Hen. I (A.D. 1130)*, in *Collections for a History of Staffordshire*, 1 (Birmingham, 1880), p. 3.

<sup>415</sup> M. Blake, '*W(e)alh tūn*: balancing the probabilities', in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds), *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, 2012).

<sup>416</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 11.8.

<sup>417</sup> Eyton, 'Staffordshire chartulary' p. 200.

<sup>418</sup> Dickinson, 'Priory of Stone', p. 240.

<sup>419</sup> A. Sargent, personal comment.

church there was dedicated to Wulfhad (presumably with relics). There are, then, clear indications of a pre-Conquest cult at Stone associated with Wulfhad.

Does this indicate, then, that Wulfhad and Ruffin were killed at Stone (Staffordshire)? This is probably not a question we can answer. Rumble matches up two diverging ‘historical’ sources, deeming them to be of greater value than the evidence of a cult at Stone but still having to do plenty of gymnastics to get the idea to work. Innes asks us to consider that,

‘Precisely because narrating is not “telling things as they really were”, but involves organising them to fit a preconceived scheme, the study of narrative... invites us to relate them to the wider cultural world’.<sup>420</sup>

The question then might not be the right one. Perhaps we should instead ask, did people in the early medieval period in Stone believe that Wulfhad, Ruffin and Wulfhere had lived out the drama as set out in the *passio* in and around Stone? In Staffordshire the answer is emphatically ‘yes’ and there is enough evidence to suggest (if not more) that this story is at home in Staffordshire as much as, if not more than, in Hampshire, and, that here we see another layer of stories being written into, and acted out onto, the landscape of Staffordshire by successive generations throughout the early medieval period.

### **Beorhthelm**

Beorhthelm is a saint associated with Ilam (Staffordshire) and Bartholmley (a Cheshire parish with townships in Staffordshire), and the Æthelflaedian burh of Stafford. His name is to be found in a variety of spellings: *Beorhthelm*, *Bertelin*, *Bertolin*, *Batholomew Bettelin*, *Bertram* etc. This is not unusual for early medieval saints whose names changed as they were passed down the ages. It is however, indicative of the problems we face, for Beorhthelm can be a difficult figure to locate securely. So much so, that Thacker tells us of his *Vita* that the ‘legend is worthless’ which at ‘most preserves a tradition that Bertelin was a Mercian prince’.<sup>421</sup> As with the life of Modwenna there is a sense of being underwhelmed, yet the cult is seen as being genuine.<sup>422</sup> Beorhthelm was the son of Mercian parents and, although he is not known

<sup>420</sup> Innes, ‘Using the past’, p. 5.

<sup>421</sup> Thacker, ‘Kings’, pp. 1-25.

<sup>422</sup> Thacker, ‘Kings’ p. 18.

of from historical sources, his story conforms to the format found with other Mercian saints, that is, being a martyr of royal stock. He is first recorded in the mid-twelfth century in Hugh Candidus' list of resting places where we are told that '*Et in Stefford sanctus Berthelmus martyr*'. His inclusion in the list shows that, at least by this time, a shrine at Stafford was well known enough for it to have come to his attention. In it he is described as a martyr although his *vita* does not refer to any martyrdom.<sup>423</sup> This *vita* first comes to light in 1516 in an edition of *Nova Legenda Angliae* by Wynkyn de Worde.<sup>424</sup> We can be confident that this work conflates at least two lives, the first section confusing Beorhthelm with *Beccel* found in Felix's life of Guthlac at Crowland. In the *vita* we learn that Beorhthelm is of royal lineage who leaves home to 'avoid contamination by the vices of his father's house'.<sup>425</sup> Having travelled to Ireland he fell for an Irish princess whom he abducted and brought back, pregnant, to England. There we are told she and their new born child were subsequently attacked and eaten by wild beasts. After these events Beorhthelm turned to a life of contemplation and through his prayers performed many miracles. At this point the story moves to Crowland and takes on aspects of Felix's *vita* of Guthlac and in particular an individual named Beccel:

'Now there was a certain cleric called Beccel, who volunteered his services to Guthlac',<sup>426</sup>

This Beccel went on to plot to kill Guthlac in order to usurp his position. Guthlac, aware of the danger, persuaded Beccel to eschew this action and to see the error of his ways, to cast aside the 'ancient foe' that was in his 'foolish breast'. Beccel re-entered Felix's story at the time of Guthlac's death as a witness, for 'at that time there was a brother called Beccel living with him, and it is from this account that we have written this description of the death of Guthlac'.<sup>427</sup> This Beccel is said to have a tomb at Crowland that was later destroyed by a Viking raid in 871.<sup>428</sup> In Wynkyn de Worde's *vita* his association with Stafford came about after the death of Guthlac, when Beorhthelm returned to his father and asked for an island hermitage to live on and was

<sup>423</sup> Mellows, *Chronicle of Hugh Candidus*, p. 61.

<sup>424</sup> A. Oswald, 'The Church of St Bertelin at Stafford and its Cross, Excavation Report (Birmingham, 1955), and see Ilam in *CRSBI* <http://www.crsbi.ac.uk/site/536/> (01/08/2013), p. 7, and C. Horstmann (ed.), *Nova Legenda Anglie*, 1 (Oxford, 1901), pp. 162-167.

<sup>425</sup> Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. 162.

<sup>426</sup> B. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac* (1956, Cambridge, 2007 edn), chapter xxxv, p. 111-113.

<sup>427</sup> '*Habitabat ergo cum eo sub illo tempore unus frater, Beccel nomine, cuius relatione haec de obitu viri Dei Guthlaci descripsimus*', Colgrave, *Felix's Life*, chapter 1, pp. 152-153.

<sup>428</sup> Oswald, 'Church of St Bertelin', p. 6.

granted a 'small island called by the ancients Bethnei, by moderns Stafford'.<sup>429</sup> Some years later a usurper to his father's kingdom wanted to take *Bethenei* from him. Challenged about the ownership of the island and deserted by his friends, God sent Beorhthelm help in the form of a little man who defeated the king's champion (an Ethiopian giant) in a judicial duel. His rights to *Bethnei* established, Beorhthelm decided to retreat to the mountains to avoid his growing fame and it is here that he died on the ninth of September.<sup>430</sup> Plot mentions that the 'desert mountainous places' where Beorhthelm is said to have gone after Stafford might be associated with the district around Ilam where a well, an ash, and a tomb were all associated with the saint.<sup>431</sup> A tomb to a 'Bertram' is to be found in the church of Holy Cross at Ilam which is usually interpreted as belonging to Beorhthelm. Plot says of the ash:

'tis certain the common people superstitiously believe, that its very dangerous to break a bough from it, so great a care has St Bertram of his ash to this day. And yet they have not so much a legend amongst them, either of this saints miracles or what he was; onely that he was founder of their church, where they shew you his monument'.<sup>432</sup>

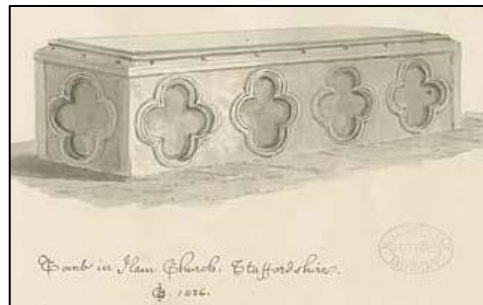


Figure 32: Tomb at Ilam, 1826.<sup>433</sup>

The tomb at Ilam is hog-backed and protected by a rectangular monument with quatrefoil openings which are now open but may have been glazed as in figure 33. The

<sup>429</sup> 'Annuit rex eius petitionem, breuemque concessit insulam ab antiquis Bethnei nominatam, a modernis vero Stafford cui largam libentius dedisset regionem', C. Horstmann (ed.), *Nova Legenda Anglie*, 1 (Oxford, 1901), pp. 162-167.

<sup>430</sup> This summary is taken from Oswald, 'Church of St Bertelin', pp. 6-7.

<sup>431</sup> R. Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (Oxford 1686, Pocket Plot edn, Barlaston, 2009), chapter 10, 34; p. 409.

<sup>432</sup> Plot, *Natural history*, chapter 6, 19, p. 207.

<sup>433</sup> WSL, SV-V.6b



tomb and covering are not of the same date, the hogback being twelfth century and the cover possibly mid-thirteenth century.<sup>434</sup>



Figure 33: St Bertram's tomb, Ilam.

The font at the church seemingly depicts episodes of the life of Beorhthelm such as the eloping couple, Bertram's wife in labour, and the wolves devouring the mother and baby. It is thought to be date from the twelfth century.<sup>435</sup>



Figure 34: Font, Ilam. Panel 1, Beorhthelm and wife.

The spring at Ilam, referred to by Plot, is likely to be the Rivers Hamps and Manifold which re-emerge at Ilam having run underground for some distance and which on occasion leave the river beds totally dry. This is an occurrence likely to have attracted

<sup>434</sup> J. Crook, *English Medieval Shrines* (Woodbridge, 2011), p. 242.

<sup>435</sup> Pearson and Baxter, *Ilam*.

myths, and the religious or mystically minded. Plot, himself is sometimes described as ‘credulous’, although in this instance he seems to have proceeded with some caution and the association with Ilam is worth consideration.<sup>436</sup>

The place-name *Bethenei* where Beorhthelm is said to have lived has similarities with ‘Broadeye’ which may be a possible alternative name for Stafford.<sup>437</sup> The town was surrounded by marshland (much of it now drained), hence the ‘broad’ or ‘wide’ *ēg* OE ‘island’ is a suitable description. This second element is repeated in *Bethenei*, the first element possibly an OE personal name. Horovitz suggests *Betti* and he dismisses any connection with Beorhthelm since ‘such a name could not in philological terms have any association with Bertelin’.<sup>438</sup> At Stafford, Beorhthelm’s cult was to be found in a chapel attached to a minster church, St Mary’s, a church that retained its status as a royal free chapel throughout the medieval period. St Mary’s was a collegiate church attached to the borough of Stafford with a large parish. The church of St Bertelin’s was situated at the west end of the later St Mary’s. We first hear of the dedication to Mary in 1203 and it is possible that St Mary’s took over the parochial responsibility of the earlier St Bertelin’s before the Conquest.<sup>439</sup> St Bertelin’s is never shown to have had a separate incumbent, or advowson, or to have been classed as a dependent chapel of St Mary’s. It was served by priests from the collegiate church of St Mary’s, and Thacker proposes that St Mary’s and St Bertelin’s were one and the same thing.<sup>440</sup> However, St Bertelin’s does seem to have retained some independence. The chapels of Tixall, Ingestre and Creswell were part of the liberty and later subsumed into the parish of the college of St Mary’s, but it is worth noting that as late as the 1420s it was asserted that they buried their dead at St Bertelin’s rather than at St Mary’s church.<sup>441</sup> That burial rights were being claimed for St Bertelin’s is an indication of some residual status. Burials continued at St Bertelin’s into the sixteenth century and a guild associated with the church also continued until the dissolution of the college in 1548. William Lone’s will of the 1550s specified that he ‘be buried in St Bartram’s nere to my father.’<sup>442</sup> At

<sup>436</sup> Greenslade, *Staffordshire Historians*, p.59.

<sup>437</sup> Now associated with a corner of Stafford, Horovitz, *Place-Names*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>438</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 41.

<sup>439</sup> Oswald, ‘Church of St Bertelin’, p. 9.

<sup>440</sup> Thacker, ‘Kings’, p. 19.

<sup>441</sup> A. Evans, ‘Stafford, St Mary’, in R. Pugh (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 3 (1970), p. 306.

<sup>442</sup> G. Mander, *A Register of Stafford and Other Local Wills*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1926 (Highgate, 1928), p.3.

this point the chapel became the school house and later a chamber house and was eventually demolished in 1801.<sup>443</sup>

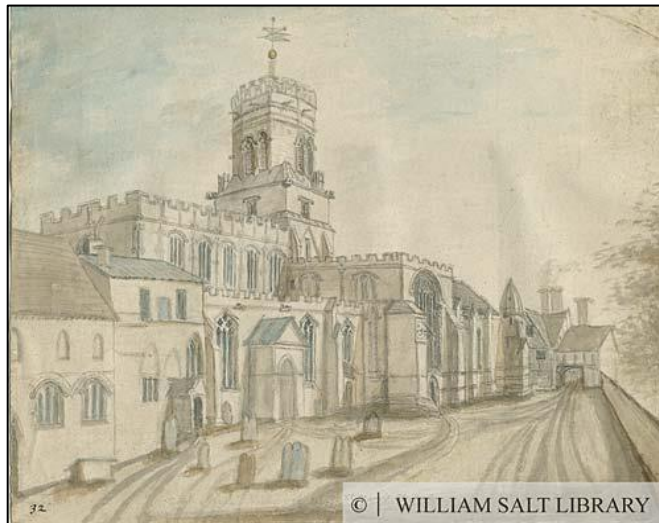


Figure 35: St Mary's Church Stafford showing St Bertelin's before demolition<sup>444</sup>

The site was excavated in the 1950s.<sup>445</sup> Of the archaeological remains of St Bertelin's church Oswald suggests that:

‘as a first stage we may assume an enclosure marked by a standing cross of timber and used for services and for burials. Later a small timber church was erected in the enclosure... The first stage at Stafford must be pre-burh. The building of the wooden church may also be pre-Danish of the seventh, eighth or early ninth century, but is more likely in view of the late date of the stone church to be of the time of the Saxon re-conquest of the early tenth century’.<sup>446</sup>

Apart from Ilam and Stafford, the third place associated with the saint is Barthomley, an ancient parish on the Cheshire border (in Pirehill Hundred). Here the church is dedicated to St Bertoline. It was here according to the *vita* that Beorhthelm performed a miracle, taunting the devil by turning bread to stone. These stones can ‘still be seen at a place called Bertelmesley’.<sup>447</sup>

<sup>443</sup> Oswald, ‘Church of St Bertelin’, p. 10.

<sup>444</sup> WSL, SV-IX.48a.

<sup>445</sup> Oswald, ‘Church of St Bertelin’.

<sup>446</sup> Oswald, ‘Church of St Bertelin’, pp. 26-17.

<sup>447</sup> Oswald, ‘Church of St Bertelin’, p. 7, from Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, pp. 162-167.

The associations with Beorhthelm are very difficult to untangle, at best we can attempt to line up the possibilities and suggest a likely sequence. The archaeological remains of St Bertelin's chapel at Stafford have been open to some interpretation but it was apparently a pre-Conquest foundation with a nominal dating of pre-1000.<sup>448</sup> This structure 'became unstable and started to subside' and in the fourteenth century a supporting wall was built. Greater improvements to, and investment in, the building were made with a clerestory and south aisle added in the fourteenth or fifteenth century.<sup>449</sup> The earliest archaeological evidence is the wooden cross or tree-trunk burial which was found in the centre of what was a wooden church. This church was later replaced. The dating for this cross, is debated: Oswald the excavator suggests a pre-Æthelflaedian date whilst Carver is keen for it to date from after the foundation of the burh which, if correct, would fit into his wider thesis of the burh of Stafford being a new tenth-century foundation and military in inception.<sup>450</sup>

'The options are to accept the ninth to eleventh-century date for the coffin/cross and timber building... or accept the twelfth-century date... either are possible'.<sup>451</sup>

Others such as Thacker support Oswald, who believes that the cult of St Beorhthelm was established in Stafford prior to the establishment of the burh by Æthelflaed in 913.<sup>452</sup> We also know that Æthelflaed built a burh at Runcorn in 915 and that there, like at Stafford, the church was a minster which later became an Augustinian priory.<sup>453</sup> Its early dedication was also to Beorhthelm (Bertelin) and St Mary. Thacker points out the similarities between this dedication and that at Stafford, although he proposes a single dedication to Beorhthelm to which St Mary is later added. This he sees as being part of a deliberate act of promoting Mercian cults at the newly founded burhs 'presumably to render West Saxon rule and reorganisation more acceptable'.<sup>454</sup>

The association at Ilam and the fact that we have a second tomb connected with the saint (still extant) adds an intriguing complication to this story. Does Ilam's claim pre- or post-date that of Stafford? The saint's resting place is known to be at Stafford as

<sup>448</sup> Oswald, 'Church of St Bertelin', pp. 26-27.

<sup>449</sup> Oswald, 'Church of St Bertelin', p. 20.

<sup>450</sup> M. Carver, *The Birth of a Borough: An Archaeological Study of Anglo-Saxon Stafford* (Woodbridge, 2010), p. 27.

<sup>451</sup> Carver, *Birth of a Borough*, p. 27.

<sup>452</sup> Thacker, 'Kings', p. 19.

<sup>453</sup> ASC, p. 99.

<sup>454</sup> Thacker, 'Kings', p. 19.

attested by Hugh Candidus in around 1175. The *vita* specifically locates the cult at Stafford and neither it nor Hugh Candidus mentions Ilam. That there is no entry for Ilam is indicative of the weakness of that association. It is surely telling that Ilam lacks a specific reference in the *vita* when we know that the tomb now found there was in existence at the time the life was written down, and, when Barthomley's much weaker association (it has no tomb) is mentioned. Of the tomb at Ilam Crook says that 'it presumably owes its survival to the fact that this was a very local cult' ... 'and to the fact that it is not evidently a shrine'.<sup>455</sup>

The possibility of a cross or tree-trunk burial at St Bertelin's in Stafford is intriguing since we have seen that the church at Ilam contains a saint's tomb dedicated to the Holy Cross. At Stafford we find that 'two robbers fled the church of Holy Cross of Stafford' in 1227-28.<sup>456</sup> It is not known which church this refers to but cases of sanctuary are known at St Mary's, St Chad's and Austin Friars. Oswald suggests it may have been an alternative name for St Bertelin's with his patronal festival on the ninth of September becoming confused with that of the Holy Cross on the fourteenth of September.<sup>457</sup> If the church in Stafford also carried that name then the case for the misreading of the saint's day twice in different locations might seem less plausible. We know that there were payments to keepers of the light of the high cross in 1411-12, and these have been interpreted (but it is not certainly known) as 'probably forerunners of the wardens of the rood guild in St Mary's which existed by 1476'.<sup>458</sup> Plot refers to an ash tree at Ilam, associated with the cult of Beorhthelm. This is suggestive of a holy tree or rood, and one reading of the place-name Ilam is that it contains OE *ig* 'yew tree'.<sup>459</sup> The cross is often called rood in OE as in the poem *The Dream of the Rood* and scenes from this poem, for example, can be found on the Ruthwell Cross. In the poem the poet comes across a beautiful tree which had been the cross on which Christ was crucified. It is possible that the cult of Beorhthelm was associated with the 'rood' in its widest interpretation. From the *vita* we know that after his death miracles are said to have occurred at Stafford:

<sup>455</sup> Crook, *English Medieval Shrines*, p. 243.

<sup>456</sup> G. Wrottesley, *Suits Affecting Staffordshire Tenants Taken From the Plea Rolls in the Reign of Henry III*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 4 (London, 1883), p. 73.

<sup>457</sup> Oswald, 'Church of St Bertelin', p. 10. He in fact takes his reasoning from a footnote on page 9 (n. 15).

<sup>458</sup> M. Greenslade, D. Johnson, C. Currie (eds), *VCH Staffordshire*, 4 (1979, London, 1982 edn), pp. 240-241.

<sup>459</sup> Horowitz, *Place-Names*, p. 335.

*‘Quod dominus noster in vita sua mirabiliter monstravit, et post obitum suum valde mirabilius, crebris choruscantibus miraculis locum quem moderni Stafford nuncupant’*

‘Since our lord in his extraordinary life, and after his death, showed, with very wonderful radiant miracles of the modern place which they called Stafford’.

The miracles were varied and occurred because of the love of Saint Bertelin, *‘quia claudis gressum, mutis loquelam, surdis auditum, cecis visum, et aliis languoribus’* (because the lame walked, the mute spoke, the deaf heard, the blind saw, and other ailments). The *vita* tells us that these miracles continued *‘donee quidam in ecclesia sua commiserat homicidium’* (until one had committed murder in his church).<sup>460</sup> This information is important because it tells us that there was either a gap in activity or a decline in the church’s status or efficacy. This decline is matched in the archaeological evidence across the town.<sup>461</sup>

Then, in 1386 we have the miracle of Willmot a cordwainer (*cortuarii*), a blind man led to the altar at St Bertelin’s chapel, where he received his sight as high mass was being said by the priest John Crostys.<sup>462</sup> The date of the miracle is specific in the *vita* *‘anno domini millesimo tricentesimo octogesimosexto’*. The miracle of Willmot is written in the past tense, with the accuracy of the date suggesting a past that cannot be classified as ‘recent’ but which is not so distant as to lose this detail. The *vita* and the entry in Hugh Candidus seem to indicate a continuation of a cult but one that, by the fourteenth century, was in decline, a condition which is substantiated by the archaeological report for the period which indicates that the old church was in need of reinforcement due to subsidence.<sup>463</sup> Carver goes further and suggests ‘a refoundation from scratch seems likely’.<sup>464</sup> The miracle of Willmot and the writing of the *vita* itself suggest a renewed interest and investment in the saint, as does the new clerestory and south aisle. It is thus possible that the cult was asserted (or re-asserted) in the late

<sup>460</sup> Horstmann, *Nova Legenda Anglie*, p. 167.

<sup>461</sup> Carver, *Birth of a Borough*, p.122.

<sup>462</sup> Oswald interprets this as ‘cook’. There was a guild of shoemakers in Stafford by at least the fifteenth century. Oswald, ‘Church of St Bertelin’, p. 7.

<sup>463</sup> Oswald, ‘Church of St Bertelin’, p. 20.

<sup>464</sup> Carver, *Birth of a Borough*, p 29.

fourteenth or early fifteenth century at Stafford. At Ilam we have the hog-back tomb dated to the twelfth century, and the cover to the thirteenth.

This major investment made no impact on Hugh Candidus' list or the *vita* and suggests that we may have someone else remembered by these structures. Is it possible that what we have here is a 'forgotten' Bertram who was re-remembered as Bertelin? This re-remembering may have been connected to a re-*vitalised* cult at Stafford, a way of making sense of the past? What we do have, is a suggested chronology for different Beorhthelms, a fourteenth-century establishment of the character we know from the *vita*, the pre-conquest cult at Stafford, and a re-invented or re-invigorated Æthelflaedian cult associated with the founding of the burh of Stafford. This cult is doubly important because it is with the establishment of the burh at Stafford that the region is shired and so the county itself is established. Alongside this we get the formal division of the shire into hundreds and so the formation of Pirehill. Æthelflaed and Beorhthelm go hand-in-hand in forming a totally new identity, that of Staffordshire. The cult at Bartholmley may possibly be one that grew out of a local tradition, a story that entered the *vita* when it was written up in the fourteenth century. This is followed by the events of the thirteenth century and the 'invention' of the cult at Ilam, possibly re-using the tomb of an unknown or lost saint (Bertram?) of Ilam.

Beorhthelm in his various guises remains an elusive and frustrating figure for the historian of the early medieval period. It is, however, quite possible that this very trait made him especially useful to people of the early middle ages and beyond, being an adaptable character who could be used in a variety of ways as a tool to help people explain their lives and surroundings. Apart from this important role, we can be fairly confident that his cult was active within the burh that Æthelflaed established. We may conceivably never be able to untangle Beorhthelm's story to form any satisfactory understanding of a 'real' person and it is only with the merging of the stories of Beccel, Bertram and Bertelin in the fifteenth century that Beorhthelm is invented.

### **Using the dead: their power and their memory**

Charter S.223 (AD 884 x 901) offers us the opportunity to examine some of the motivations and concerns Æthelred and Æthelflaed may have had when establishing

religious foundations across Mercia. The charter is a grant of rights to the church of St Peter at Worcester, granting privileges to the cathedral community there as part of the establishment of the newly fortified burh at Worcester. We can imagine similar processes at Gloucester, Chester, Stafford and Tamworth. The charter appears primarily concerned with establishing financial agreements that will stabilise both burh and church. However, phrases used in the opening section ‘evoke an intimate, emotional relationship’ and refer to love and friendship ‘embracing God, St Peter, Werferth, the Worcester community and Æthelred and Æthelflaed’.<sup>465</sup> It is also very much to do with memory, telling us that the agreement is made so ‘that their memory may be the more firmly observed in that place forever’, memory that was to be continuously refreshed through observance of a series of rituals:

‘both during their life and after their death; i.e. at every matins and at every vespers and at every tierce, the psalm De profundis as long as they live, and after their death Laudate Dominum; and every Saturday in St Peter’s church thirty psalms and a mass for them, both for them living and also departed’.

Thompson calls this a ‘lavish amount of spiritual attention’ and compares this to a less fruitful arrangement that Charles the Bold made in 867. The Æthelflaed and Æthelred agreement she proposes was ‘represented as loving and reciprocal’.<sup>466</sup> The power of the dead was by this time well established and prayers for the dead had a long tradition. Bishop Weferth had translated the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great as part of Alfred’s programme of educational reform. This text includes passages on the fate of the soul such as that in book four, chapter 25. Gregory tells the tale of a good priest who gave prayers to a spirit that helped him with his clothes each day and:

‘The good Priest all the week following gave himself to tears for him, and daily offered up the holy sacrifice: and afterward returning to the bath, found him not there: whereby it appeareth what great profit the souls receive by the sacrifice of the holy oblation, seeing the spirits of them that be dead desire it of the living,

<sup>465</sup> D. Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, 1: c. 500-1042 (1955, London, 1979 edn), p. 540 (no. 99), and Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 19.

<sup>466</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 19.



and give certain tokens to let us understand how that by means thereof they have received absolution'.<sup>467</sup>

We see in this the power of the prayer to help the dead, but also the dead still inhabiting the land, in need of support and assistance. *Dialogues* is a fundamental text through which people in the early medieval period understood the fate of the soul. The vulnerability of the dead and the importance of prayers to their journey are stressed in the *Fates of the Apostles*:

‘How I shall need friends, more gentle on the journey, when I must all alone seek out my long home, the unknown place, and leave my body behind, this share of earth, plunder of battle, for the pleasure of worms’.<sup>468</sup>

Thus the prayers that Æthelred and Æthelflaed desired were to help them in the afterlife, but they too could intercede on behalf of the living. A dispute over land at Sodbury (Gloucestershire), heard before Æthelred and Æthelflaed, stresses the importance of the dead and the role that they played in Mercian society, highlighting ideas of the dead current in Mercia at that time.<sup>469</sup>

‘Now Eastmund before he died gave command in the name of the living God, that the man who succeeded to the estate should succeed thereto on the condition laid down by Bishop Milred; but if he were so presumptuous as to violate it, he should know that he would be found guilty before God's throne at the Great Judgment. Then after Eastmund's death, his family robbed of this very estate both the spirits of the departed, and also the bishop and the church of Worcester. And Bishop Heaberht often brought this to remembrance and even asked for the estate, and so afterwards did Bishop Alhhun, very often, as long as he lived, and I too, Bishop Werferth, have often demanded its restoration; but we could not obtain any justice until Æthelred became lord of the Mercian...

<sup>467</sup> P. Warner (trans.) and E. Gardner (ed.), *Gregory the Great, Dialogues*, Book 4 (London, 1911), [http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory\\_04\\_dialogues\\_book4.htm#C55](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory_04_dialogues_book4.htm#C55) (01/08/2013), pp. 177-258.

<sup>468</sup> G. Krapp (ed.), *The Vercelli Book*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 2 (London, 1932).

<sup>469</sup> For a detailed discussion see Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 22.

May God Almighty preserve both in this life and in the life to come, those who consent that this agreement shall endure to all eternity. And the names which are written below are those of the men who were present and witnessed this agreement'.<sup>470</sup>

The family are seen to not only have stolen from the bishop and the Worcester community but also from the dead themselves. The dead are vulnerable and exposed, having lost out on the prayers of the holy community at Worcester. This shows not only the importance of prayer, but also of memory and of the ancestor. In hearing this plea Æthelred and Æthelflaed would have acted as mediators in a dispute concerned with how the dead could play a part in how agreements were understood. It was in essence about how the ancestors' wishes were to be considered, respected and obeyed. It is only in this instance, where a long-standing dispute was brought before Æthelred and Æthelflaed, and where we have been fortunate to have the record survive, that we can glimpse the importance of the dead in resolving such disputes. These dead are not recently lost, Bishop Milred died c.775 and this case is being heard in the 890s, 'long dead but they have not been forgotten, and the ordinary dead need to be understood for the extraordinary dead, like Oswald, to be put in context'.<sup>471</sup> Indeed, we may argue rather that Æthelflaed's dealings with the powerful dead, such as Oswald and her own death and burial, are important because they help us to understand the ordinary dead and the continued importance of the ancestor. The dead in this period continued to be forces to be negotiated with, just as they were in the period of barrow burials. They could intercede on your behalf, but also required support and needed to be cared for on their journey through the afterlife. Their stories continued to be told, their causes could be heard in court, and their remains could verify truths. Their bones were important relics that were shifted around the countryside, 'rescued' even from 'heathens'. The same process can be seen with the swift removal of Æthelflaed's body from Tamworth to Gloucester, it was, as Thompson has pointed out, 'true of saints...and perhaps also of herself'.<sup>472</sup>

<sup>470</sup> XV. MSS. (a) Brit. Mus. MS. Cott. Tib. A. xin.pp. 25-27 and 57-59, from F. Harmer (ed.) *Selected English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914).

<sup>471</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p.23.

<sup>472</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 25.

Henry of Huntingdon (c.1088–c.1154) is perhaps our earliest example of how Æthelflaed herself entered the narrative of the past. Henry offers us the opportunity to see how the memory of a hero may have been remembered. It is, as we might expect, a selective and at times, imaginary, narrative. These characteristics are highlighted by factual inaccuracies, such as when he states that Æthelred was Æthelflaed's father rather than her husband, and Aelfwyn her sister not daughter.<sup>473</sup> These mistakes mean that we must treat the evidence with caution, but it is the memory of Æthelflaed that Henry is interested in and alludes to, a memory of Æthelflaed that was current in the first half of the twelfth century with its roots in the tenth century.

‘This princess is said to have been so powerful that she was sometimes called not only lady, or queen, but also in deference to her excellence and majesty. Some have thought and said that if she had not been suddenly snatched away by death, she would have surpassed the most valiant men. The memory of so much eminence would supply materials for endless song’<sup>474</sup>

Henry also includes in this section ‘a short tribute in verse’, which ‘points to a pre-existent Latin text’.

‘Heroic Elflede! Great in martial fame  
A man in valour, woman though in name;  
Thee warlike hosts, thee, nature too obey’d,  
Conqu’ror o’er both, though born by sex a maid,  
Chang’d by thy name, such honour triumphs bring,  
A queen by title, but in deeds a king.  
Heroes before the Mercian heroine quail’d  
Ceasar himself to win such glort fail’d’.<sup>475</sup>

We are unable to date the verses in order to see how long they had already survived by Henry's time, but they do tell us that the memory of Æthelflaed survived. Here Æthelflaed's military conquests capture the imagination, Æthelflaed as warrior and

<sup>473</sup> Szarmach, ‘Aethelflead’, p. 122, and T. Forester (ed.), *The Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon* (London, 1853), pp. 167-168.

<sup>474</sup> Forester, *Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, p. 168.

<sup>475</sup> Forester, *Chronicle of Henry of Huntingdon*, p. 168.

Æthelflaed as *male* percolate these lines.<sup>476</sup> Stories and memories as conveyed through poetic lines such as these fit into a wider early medieval English and European epitaphic tradition, literary yes, but a tradition that included practices that are touched upon elsewhere in this study such as the erecting of stone funerary monuments and the building of churches as memorial strategies.<sup>477</sup> In fact, Æthelflaed had all the makings of a Mercian saint, but the political and religious landscape had changed since the seventh and eighth centuries. What is more, the stories of Æthelflaed and the saints she was associated with show us how memory and identity were worked and woven and reworked and retold throughout the period. Memory was a shared experience, it was not a process of exact recollection. Rather, fragments of recollected facts ‘are put together... often in a simplified form, according to pre-existing patterns’, so it was a ‘creative activity in which the past is constantly updated according to the requirements of the present’.<sup>478</sup>

The themes of this chapter link back to the previous one, connecting landscape, story-telling, and the employment of the past and the dead for the living. It also links the next phase of this thesis, the use of stone monuments, the creation of religious houses and the use of landscape to express these ideas. This chapter in particular highlights Pirehill with its own ecology of sainthood, it has shown how Pirehill was inscribed with the stories of sainthood, promoted by social elites and religious leaders but also hinting at story telling bubbling up from beneath. It is a landscape that demonstrates how people in the tenth and eleventh centuries remembered the dead and articulated these stories and how this was expressed locally.

<sup>476</sup> Bradshaw repeats this theme in the sixteenth century:

*After the deth of her husband Ethelrede  
She ruled the realme of mercelande manfully,  
Buylded churches / and townes repared in dede,  
As Staforde / Warwike / Thomwort / and Shirisbury’*

<sup>477</sup> C. Clarke, *Writing Power in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 55. For a wider discussion see chapter 2, ‘Sites of economy: power and reckoning in the poetic epitaphs of the Anglo-Saxon chronicle’, pp. 44-79.

<sup>478</sup> C. Cubbitt, ‘Memory and narrative in the cult of saints’, in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Use of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), p.31.

# CHAPTER THREE: PUBLIC AND PERMANENT STATEMENTS: THE 'RICKETY ARCHED FRAMES' OF STAFFORDSHIRE

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The stone sculpture of Staffordshire has, with the odd exception, been largely neglected within the wider debates concerning the early medieval period. The corpus is seen as separate from those examples found in more westerly or southerly midland counties. Staffordshire examples have continually been seen as being the tail-end of a northern, Scandinavian influenced process. This chapter aims to examine and challenge that idea and suggests that the very categorisation of these monuments as being *not* of a West Midlands tradition has led to an over emphasis on this Scandinavian link. Furthermore, it is proposed here that many of these stone sculptures may mark a process of tenth-century establishment of thegny residences across the research area and that it is possible that this dating can be refined to a period roughly between 920 and 950. The analysis of what, on the whole, appear to be church-yard monuments from across Staffordshire forms the basis of this chapter. Examples of these monuments can be found across the county, with a numerical concentration in the north. Generally, the stone sculpture of Staffordshire does not find itself at the forefront of art, historical or archaeological discussions on the early medieval period, either for its stylistic merit or its quantity.



Figure 36: Places with Mercian sculpture discussed by Cramp<sup>479</sup>

Cramp, for example, in her study of Mercian sculpture talks of the ‘debased derivatives’ and ‘the rickety arched frames and the insubstantial paired figures’, that ‘continue in the Staffordshire/Cheshire series in the tenth century’.<sup>480</sup> Despite the stone sculpture of Staffordshire not quite making it into national discussions, it is proposed here that monuments such as these can make an important contribution to a local study of the type which frames this thesis, and that this in turn can inform wider debates. The importance of these monuments in a Staffordshire context is clear: outside of the burhs at Stafford and Tamworth we have very few perceptible remains for the pre-Conquest period. In Pirehill, apart from the landscape itself (and two charters), the only tangible material evidence we have from the early medieval period are a few archaeological remains and fragments of stone sculpture that survive at Chebsey, Chesterton, Eccleshall and Stoke.

In part, this chapter follows the pattern set out by the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture (CASSS)* whose volume on Staffordshire is eagerly awaited.<sup>481</sup> However, a detailed catalogue of the sculpture in the manner of a *CASSS* volume seems unnecessary given its approaching publication.<sup>482</sup> The corpus has also been the subject of a Ph.D. thesis by Sidebottom, and a comprehensive discussion about the styles of each piece can be found there. In anticipation of the *CASSS* volume for Staffordshire, Sidebottom’s

<sup>479</sup> Cramp, ‘Schools of Mercian Sculpture’, p. 193.

<sup>480</sup> R. Cramp, ‘Schools of Mercian Sculpture’, in A. Dornier (ed.), *Mercian Studies* (Leicester, 1977), p. 224.

<sup>481</sup> Expected title and date of publication is said to be J. Hawkes and P. Sidebottom, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume XIII, Derbyshire and Staffordshire* (Oxford, 2017)

<sup>482</sup> I have not had access to the text prior to publication although the authors have kindly shared with me some dating information.

references to numbered individual pieces and motifs have been used for consistency.<sup>483</sup> See Appendix 1 with photographs of all of the major pieces that form the corpus from the county along with drawings of the motifs found.

The study of these monuments which attracts amongst others, the archaeologist and in particular the art historian is not without its tensions:

‘For the art historian it is the ‘cavalier’ approach of the connoisseur, and recognition of the intrinsically archaeological nature of the study that are at issue, while for the archaeologist, style analysis is considered unreliable because it is deemed inherently art historical and thus subjective and unscientific’.<sup>484</sup>

Nor is the Corpus project without its critics; Orton has criticised the project for a perceived overemphasis on the ‘somewhat restricted idea of style’ and on ‘seeing and describing similarities of form’.<sup>485</sup> This, he proposes, inhibits ‘the production of knowledge because it tended to restrict what could be seen and said, named and described, to a limited taxonomic area of visibility and cognition’.<sup>486</sup> This desire to categorise and group poses challenges, especially when we consider the geographical interpretation that this approach can, in some ways, insist upon.<sup>487</sup> Sidebottom’s research area was a loosely defined ‘north midlands’ rather than Staffordshire alone. The wider geographical remit of his study can help combat the rather more narrow focus of a study such as this one, of a single geographical unit. Also, given that Staffordshire was either not formed, or at the very most was in the process of being formed when some of these monuments were erected, his wider perspective may prove to be useful. However, this ‘north midlands’ emphasis chosen by Sidebottom may also

<sup>483</sup> P. Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’ (unpub. Ph. D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1994). It is my understanding that Sidebottom will contribute to the CASSS volume. No information for a publication date is currently available <http://www.ascorpus.ac.uk/index.php>

<sup>484</sup> J. Hawkes, ‘Studying Early Christian sculpture in England and Ireland: The object of art history or archaeology?’, in J. Graham-Campbell and M. Ryan (eds), *Anglo-Saxon/Irish relations before the Vikings* (Oxford, 2009), p. 397.

<sup>485</sup> F. Orton, ‘Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments: some strictures on similarity, some questions of history’, in C. Karkov and F. Orton (eds), *Theorizing Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* (Morgantown, 2003), p. 65.

<sup>486</sup> Orton, ‘Rethinking the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Monuments’, p. 66. Bailey has responded to this critique, stating that the aim of the Corpus is to draw together information, its purpose ‘is primarily to describe and illustrate... It has always been recognised that the discussion sections in the Corpus were the least important part of the work’. R. Bailey, ‘Innocent from the Great Offence’, in C. Karkov and F. Orton (eds), *Theorizing Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* (Morgantown, 2003), p. 96.

<sup>487</sup> Contact has been made with the CASSS team who have indicated that the current proposal is a Derbyshire and Staffordshire volume. Certainly the most recent volume of the corpus, *The West Midlands*, 10, follows this pattern with the very briefest chapter on ‘Conclusions’, although it does include very detailed discussions on the wider repertoire, geology and imagery. R. Bryant, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: The Western Midlands*, 10 (Oxford, 2012), pp. 116-119.

have its drawbacks. Stylistically it may be a reasonable understanding of a geographically coherent group, although this in itself may be misleading. For landscape historians it poses challenges, some of which are helpful in forcing us to look further afield, and some of which are less so and which can be contested. For example, Sidebottom's thesis takes in parts of Yorkshire but omits the major Staffordshire monument at Wolverhampton; Sidebottom's almost deterministic understanding of the landscape of the early medieval period is carried forward into the Corpus volumes themselves where, for example, Staffordshire is not included in the 'Western Midlands' volume, and so is not studied alongside the collections from those counties it is perhaps most often associated with, such as Shropshire.<sup>488</sup> It is submitted here that this decision leads us in our thinking and associations to link North Staffordshire with the Viking north, which is not something that other sources necessarily do.

The usefulness of stone sculpture to the historian of Staffordshire in the early medieval period is hampered by a lack of supporting evidence: we have no written histories that tell us when a particular sculpture was erected; archaeological evidence has not revealed any dates for these stones in the county; and nor do we have any inscriptions that tell us who erected these monuments, when they were erected, and for what purpose. None record a known historical person or commemorate a known historic event. Nor can we date them with any certainty since, 'so far no analytical method has been devised to date carved stone in absolute terms'.<sup>489</sup> It is indicative of the problems we face when interpreting material culture that major monuments such as the cross at Wolverhampton St Peter's still arouse our interest and yet steadfastly remain monuments on which scholars fail to agree. As long ago as 1872 a discussion was held in Wolverhampton which raised various possibilities about the origins of its cross, suggesting that the monument was a Danish column erected after a great victory, or a Saxon column, or possibly one that had religious significance. It was also mooted that it was erected to act simply as a landmark whilst another contributor in the same proceedings suggested that the column was in fact Norman in origin and of the twelfth century.<sup>490</sup> It is surely a marker of the difficulties of using stone sculpture that nearly

<sup>488</sup> Bryant, CASSS.

<sup>489</sup> R. Cramp. *Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament, A General Introduction to the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*. (1984, Oxford, 1991), p. xlvii.

<sup>490</sup> *Proceedings of the Congress*, Journal of the BAA, 28 (London, 1872), pp. 96-120.



150 years later there are still conflicting views concerning this monument. Here the aim is to see how, if taken as a whole the Staffordshire corpus can, as it has been said of other stone monuments, ‘make significant contributions to much wider agendas’.<sup>491</sup> It is the purpose of this chapter to look at the surviving stone sculpture of Staffordshire to see what it can tell us about the people who lived there during the early medieval period and the landscape they inhabited.

### Provenance

One of the major obstacles to a full understanding of stone sculpture is that we can seldom be certain of whether or not a particular piece of sculpture is still to be found where it was originally erected.<sup>492</sup> Undoubtedly those pieces of sculpture that we find embedded in later church walls have certainly moved from their original locations and we may surmise that, like at St Oswald’s Gloucester, they may pre-date the stone church or an earlier structure, or at least be contemporaries of the earliest structure. Examples such as this are not unusual, since ‘most Anglo-Saxon sculpture is strictly speaking, unprovenanced’.<sup>493</sup> In Staffordshire, *Ilam 5* is said to have been found in a cottage wall near the churchyard, and the relationship with the churchyard is thus assumed. At Sandbach (Cheshire, five miles from the Staffordshire border) we know that monuments have been subject to several major upheavals, iconoclasts were charged with destroying early medieval stone sculpture in the region in 1604 and this seems unlikely to be an isolated case. These monuments were subject to more upheaval in subsequent centuries, until eventually they found themselves in their current (and unusual) position in the market place in the town.<sup>494</sup> Although an exact provenance is uncertain, most Staffordshire sculpture is still to be found within the context of church grounds. Bailey argues that this provenance separates the Staffordshire sculpture from the examples found in Cheshire and Derbyshire.<sup>495</sup> One exception is the Chesterton (Pirehill) monument which was found in 1958 being used as a feeding trough.<sup>496</sup> We

<sup>491</sup> P. Everson and D. Stocker, *Erratics and Enterprise: Lincolnshire grave-covers in Norwich and Thetford and some implications for urban development in the tenth century*. Draft copy, shown to me in January 2015, for publication in BAA Conference Transactions.

<sup>492</sup> St Mark’s in Lincoln is a scarce example of a pre-Conquest monument proven to be *in situ*. We can seldom be so secure about the Staffordshire examples. P. Everson and D. Stocker, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: Lincolnshire*, 5 (Oxford, 1999), pp. 209-210. See also R. Bailey, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: Cheshire*, IX (Oxford, 2010), p. 36.

<sup>493</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 145.

<sup>494</sup> J. Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses, Signs and Significance in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 20-29.

<sup>495</sup> R. Bailey, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture: Cheshire*, IX (Oxford, 2010), p. 36.

<sup>496</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 239.

also have records of monuments being moved, such as the Tatenhill sculpture which was taken to Rolleston in 1897, and we know that the Stoke on Trent monument was used as a door lintel in the church before being set up by Lynam.<sup>497</sup> On the other hand the Wolverhampton cross was examined in 1998 and, although there was conflicting evidence, it was said to still sit on its original stone base.<sup>498</sup>

The absence of stone sculpture from large parts of the county is a factor that can also lead the discussion and, as ever, this absence is problematic. For instance, much has been made of the northern distribution of the remaining examples.<sup>499</sup> This deficiency may in part be explained by factors such as the actions of iconoclasts, the re-use of the stone as building material, even as a trough for watering animals in the case of the Chesterton example. Another possibility is that the lack of monuments further south in the county may lie in the use of wooden monuments.<sup>500</sup> We know that burials have been found for the early medieval period that indicates that they once had stone or wooden markers which have since disappeared.<sup>501</sup> Another factor may have been the ravages of the industrial age which in Staffordshire were particularly acute, especially across the Black Country and the Potteries, and which must have taken a toll. The effects of the rebuilding of churches over several generations may have been the biggest contributing factor, although conversely may also be the reason for much of the remaining corpus surviving. This distribution pattern is one we shall return to, but we can say that on the whole where we find a stone monument, within a church setting, we can be quietly confident that it is associated with that place, ‘acknowledging their general immobility, such objects have rarely been disassociated from their original context; as such they are important records of local and regional taste’.<sup>502</sup> It may be judiciously argued that ordinarily these monuments were to be associated with burials or at least, memorial strategies to individuals or wider kinship groups.

<sup>497</sup> C. Lynam, ‘The ancient churchyard-crosses of Staffordshire’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 33 (1877), p. 436.

<sup>498</sup> D. Horovitz, *Notes and Materials on the Battle of Tettenhall 910 A.D. and Other Researches* (Brewood, 2010), n. 1584, pp. 312-313.

<sup>499</sup> P. Sidebottom, ‘The north-western frontier of Viking Mercia: the evidence from stone monuments’, *West Midlands Archaeology*, 39 (1996), pp. 3-15.

<sup>500</sup> At Yeavinger a single post or pillar was planted into a large bronze-age barrow, and, another post erected in the square enclosure within the settlement was aligned to this post with the earliest phase buildings following this alignment.

<sup>501</sup> See St Peter’s, Barton on Humber, and see Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, p. 71, for evidence of wooden markers at St Marks, Lincoln.

<sup>502</sup> M. Reed, ‘Approaching pre-Conquest stone sculpture: historiography and theory’, in M. Reed (ed.), *New Voices on Early Medieval Sculpture in Britain and Ireland*, BAR, British Series 544 (Oxford, 2011), pp. 1-12.

## Production

Evidence for the actual production of these monuments is not strong. Collingwood described what he understood as schools of stone sculpture in Northumbria, expanding upon this by saying that Ripon ‘seems to have been a great centre of monument carving’, indicating that he perceived a school to mean also a workshop, a central place of production.<sup>503</sup> As this idea developed we get in effect a scholarly construction that sees different design elements as signifying different schools. This interpretation has been taken forward and stone sculpture is frequently said to have been created in a ‘workshop’, often understood to have been based at a monastic centre.<sup>504</sup> This idea, and in particular the monastic connection, has remained a persistent one. Blair has stated that ‘the decoration and format of memorial sculpture show continuities across the Viking age which suggest that established (monastic?) workshops simply went on working for new patrons’.<sup>505</sup> In addition to proposing where these monuments were made, minster-centric views of production submit that stone sculpture was controlled by the church. This is perfectly feasible but it may underestimate secular influences and other possibilities. There is certainly a suggestion at least, of something vernacular about many (but by no means all) churchyard crosses. The inscriptions are often in OE or Norse and not invariably in Latin, and there is no archaeological or written evidence for schools of masons although masons must have been present at monastic sites for repairs, rebuilding and expansion work.<sup>506</sup> Another challenge to the notion of a central school is that although monuments may share motifs it is rare for them to have the same design.<sup>507</sup> None of these reasons wholly rule out the possibility of central schools of sculpture based at ecclesiastical sites, but they do raise important questions which in part might be answered by seeking out those who commissioned these pieces of work.

The only monument to have been excavated *in situ* in England with an associated burial is *Lincoln, St Mark 18*. Here the stone was found placed over the chest of a mature man. The sculpture may have served as a marker to this one

<sup>503</sup> W. Collingwood, *Northumbrian Crosses of the Pre-Norman Age* (1927, Lampeter, 1989) p. 107 and pp. 69-81.

<sup>504</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, pp. 19-33.

<sup>505</sup> J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 321.

<sup>506</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 20. There is one surviving cross, that of Gautr’s Cross of Michael on the Isle of Man which, in addition to carrying the name of the patron, also carries the inscription ‘Gautr made this [cross] and all in Man’, L. Kopár, *Gods and Settlers, Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout, Belgium, 2012), p. 202.

<sup>507</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 21.

individual but there is also the intriguing possibility that it may have been associated with a wider kinship group, as ‘there were three burials below the grave-marker, which might be taken to represent three generations’.<sup>508</sup> In a similar vein, though further afield, the symbols found on Pictish monuments are said to have conveyed a relationship between the deceased and the living, and that these monuments expressed a range of links and interconnecting expressions of identity. It is apparent that these stones were not solely used to mark the burial of an individual but also marked kinship groups and cemeteries; the symbols they carried were expressions of group identities for the living as well as the deceased and could be used to commemorate more than one person.<sup>509</sup> It does not seem unreasonable to propose that the stone sculpture of Staffordshire, likewise, marks the burials of individuals as well as acting as memorials to wider kinship groups.

It is evident that some of the standing crosses were created for a secular clientele and, this given; we can assume that the cost of the material, transport and craftsmanship would have limited this creation to relatively wealthy groups of society.<sup>510</sup> Many stone sculptures would have looked very different from the shattered worn greying fragments seen today. They would have been less weathered, and rising to their full height many would have been painted and inset with metal and paste-glass. Upon viewing these monuments the early medieval audience would have brought with them their own set of insights and beliefs to interpret them, some of this symbolism found on the local sculpture also represents ideas about protecting the body and soul of the dead. Thompson has argued that:

‘Anglo-Saxon texts and images attest to a heightened awareness that the body, living and dead, is threatened with being eaten at every stage of its existence before the Last Judgement, after which the damned body will continue to be devoured in perpetuity’.<sup>511</sup>

<sup>508</sup> Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, 5, pp. 209-210. In several instances early medieval grave slabs from Hartlepool and Billingham dated to the seventh and eighth centuries, for example, have been shown to indicate inscriptions to both male and female burials. C. Karkov, ‘Naming and Renaming’, in C. Karkov and F. Orton (eds), *Theorizing Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* (Morgantown, 2003), p. 33.

<sup>509</sup> H. Williams, ‘Depicting the dead: commemoration through cists, cairns and cymbols in early medieval Britain’, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 17 (2007), pp. 145-164.

<sup>510</sup> J. Lang, *CASSS: Northern Yorkshire*, 6 (Oxford, 2002), p. 19.

<sup>511</sup> V. Thompson, *Death and Dying in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (2004, Woodbridge, 2012 edn), p. 132.

The intellectual elite of the church were ‘as well-versed in the multivalent approaches to text and image as their modern counterparts, if not more so’.<sup>512</sup> Symbols such as those represented by some of the interlacing of the dragons on *Alstonefield 3* represent ‘powerful creatures who live in burial mounds and guard treasure... they move their powers across with them so they now live on the grave and guard the treasure of salvation rather than the transient, corrupting riches of silver and gold’.<sup>513</sup> Thus we can see how the imagery on these monuments was not merely decorative but was there to protect the soul and the body of the person or people it meant to commemorate.

### **Staffordshire corpus<sup>514</sup>**

Instances of early medieval stone sculpture in Staffordshire can be found at the following sites, with some having multiple examples: Alstonefield (Totmonslow), Chebsey (Pirehill), Checkley (Totmonslow), Chesterton (Pirehill), Eccleshall (Pirehill), Ilam (Totmonslow), Leek (Totmonslow), Lichfield (Offlow), Stoke (Pirehill), Tatenhill (Offlow) and Wolverhampton (Cuttlestone).<sup>515</sup>

<sup>512</sup> J. Hawkes, ‘Reading stone’, in C. Karkov and F. Orton (eds), *Theorizing Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* (Morgantown, 2003), pp. 25-26.

<sup>513</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 162, but especially chapter 5 ‘The Gravestone, the Grave and the Wyrn’, pp. 132-169. Described as going from ‘dragon heads to strands’. Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 216.

<sup>514</sup> The images for this section have been drawn by C. Rayner for this thesis

<sup>515</sup> At Stafford a burnt wooden cross was found in the former chapel of St Bertelin. It has been interpreted as a (early medieval) wooden standing cross, taken down at the time of the erection of a church on the site. However, it seems that the cross was likely to have been a wooden coffin, possible twelfth century in date. See A. Dodd, J. Goodwin, S. Griffiths, A. Norton, C. Poole and S. Teague, *Excavations at Tipping Street, Stafford, 2009-10*: Transactions of Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society, 47 (Stafford, 2014), p. 5.

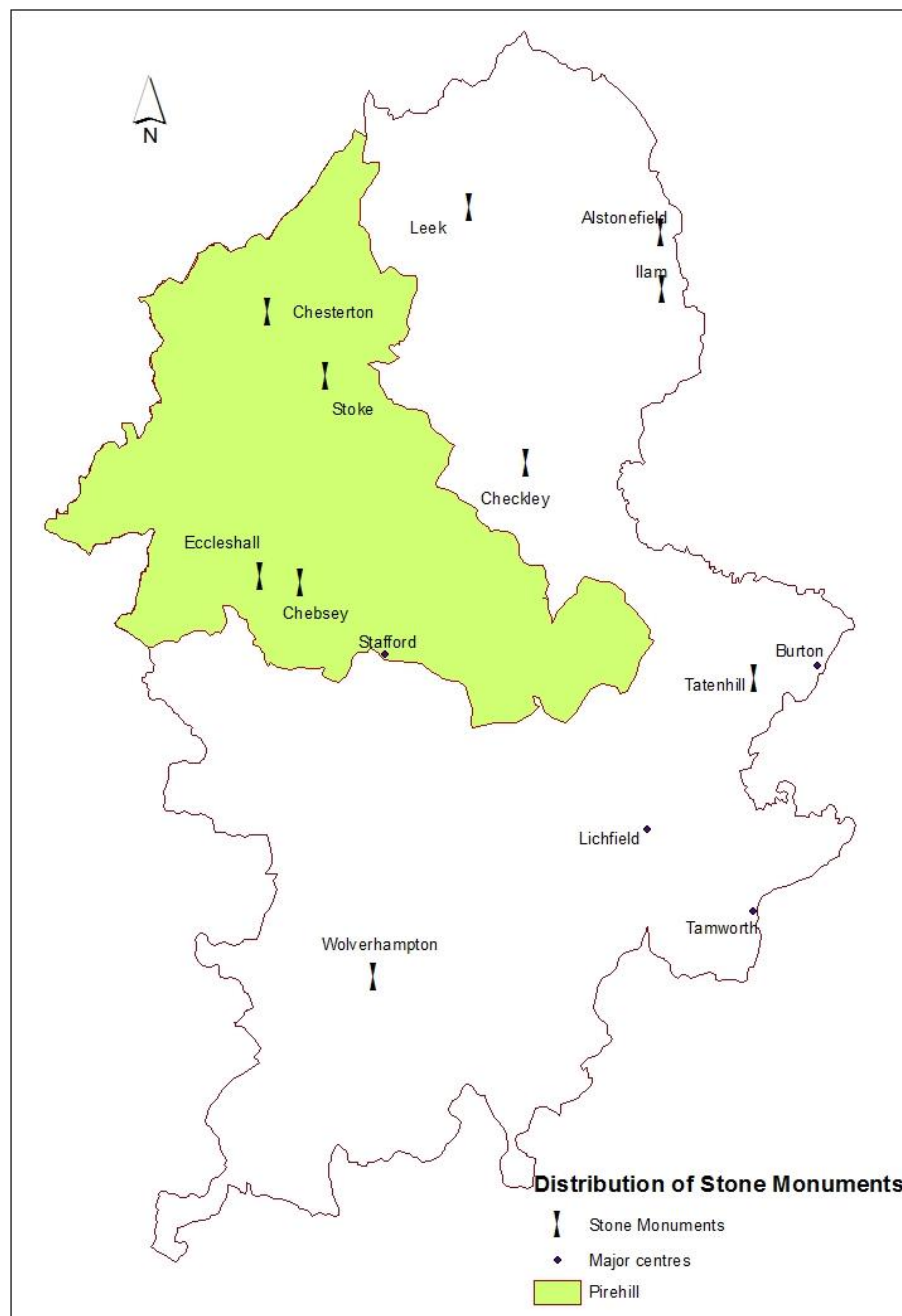


Figure 37: Staffordshire places with stone sculpture.

Pirehill has four locations with stone sculpture, equating to 27 % of the places with remaining monuments in the county, the same figure as Totmonslow hundred in the Peak region. There are only solitary examples of sculpture at Chebsey, Chesterton and Stoke, and possibly four fragments at Eccleshall. Checkley on the other hand has three specimens, Ilam six, Leek six and Alstonefield at least 16. So whilst actual *numbers* of

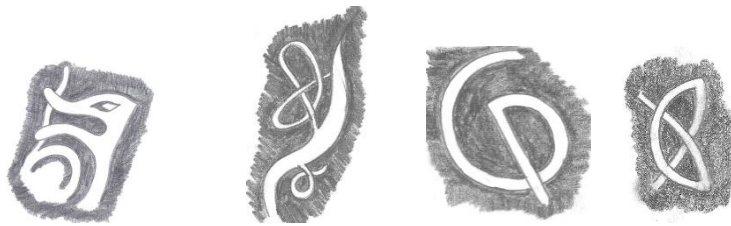
monuments found is dominated by the numbers found in the Staffordshire Moorlands, in terms of geographical distribution, 70 % of *places* with monuments are outside this area.

Sidebottom proposes that the Staffordshire examples fall within the following regional schools. These are summarised below and illustrated with the attributes that are identified by Sidebottom.<sup>516</sup>

### **South-Western Region School**

The western limit of this group Sidebottom suggests is Sandbach. It does not extend north beyond the River Dane (the county boundary). The main influence of the group is along the Peak and River Trent. He does not give a southern edge to the group since his research area is limited.

Attributes:



Ribbon Beast    Thick stem    A1    E1

Staffordshire places mentioned as being part of this group are Alstonefield, Chebsey (with some reservations), Checkley, Chesterton, Eccleshall, Ilam, Leek and Tatenhill.

He proposes a further sub- division.

### **West Sub-School**

Attributes:



E1a    D1    Side shrouded figure    Skirted figure

<sup>516</sup> Taken from Sidebottom, 'Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture', p. 77-123.

In this group are *Alstonefield 10 and 16, Checkley 2, Chesterton, Eccleshall 4, Leek 1 and 5*

### **South Sub-School**

There are no Staffordshire places in this sub-school.

### **Dove Valley School**

In addition to these Sidebottom introduces the Dove Valley School which he tells us appears to be a small local school operating within the sphere of the South-western Regional School.

Attributes:



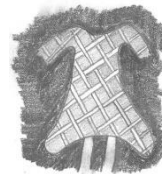
E1 + 1



Raised arm figure



Clergy figure

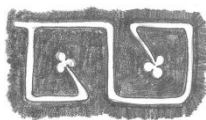


Plaited body figure

Produced from Triassic sandstone, in this group are found *Alstonefield 4 and 16, Checkley 1 and 2, Ilam 2 and 5, Leek 2*. It is suggested that Chebsey could be included in this group although the evidence is weak.

### **North-Western Regional School**

Attributes:



S4, key



L1



USL

In this group are *Alstonefield 5, 6, 7, 8 and 15, Ilam 3, Leek 3, 4 and 6, and Stoke on Trent*.

This group contains most of the round-shafted monuments in the area although Sidebottom rejects the suggestion that these form a school in themselves. Tentatively added to this school is the example from Chebsey.



Given that we might have these stylistic groupings, it prompts the question of what they represent and has the evidence from Staffordshire shed any light on how, if they do represent schools, they operated? It has been submitted that these monuments were provided via a quarry-based ‘commercial’ operation and that the pieces were sent out as finished items, ‘as transporting rough blocks of stone is wasteful in terms of time and effort’.<sup>517</sup> In Lincolnshire the evidence seems to suggest that waterways were the preferred method of transporting stone.<sup>518</sup> However, in Staffordshire as far back as the 1870s, Lynam was suggesting local rather than central production when he noted that the church crosses at Checkley, Ilam and Leek were all ‘of millstone-grit, the only local material which could have resisted the action of the atmosphere for anything like the period that it has done’.<sup>519</sup> Similarly, Sidebottom proposes local production and sought out the nearest local source of stone that matched each of the monuments in his study area.<sup>520</sup> Furthermore, the stylistic evidence may indicate that the work was carried out locally, given that there are so many subtle variations in motifs. The combinations of these motifs may also reveal that the work was not carried out by itinerant masons but rather by local craftsmen, perhaps working to a template.<sup>521</sup> The unfinished *Alstonefield 10* suggests work being carried out *in situ*.<sup>522</sup> Alstonefield, high up in the Staffordshire Moorlands is not accessible by river and remains a difficult place to get to, and this would surely have only been compounded during the early medieval period. An additional monument at Alstonefield (*Alstonefield 15*) is another piece of unfinished work along with a potential third fragment (*Alstonefield 14*).<sup>523</sup> Furthermore, Sidebottom proposes that *Alstonefield 10* and *15* differ stylistically to each other suggesting that the work of two ‘schools’ were being produced locally, the impression of local production is strengthened by the use of local millstone grit in the production of Alstonefield sculpture. The abandonment of these pieces may seem puzzling but it may be that, at least in the case of *Alstonefield 15*, this was because a mistake was made and so it was set to one side.<sup>524</sup>

<sup>517</sup> Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, 5, p. 69.

<sup>518</sup> Lang, *CASSS*: 6, p. 19 and p. 32.

<sup>519</sup> Lynam, ‘Ancient churchyard-crosses’, p. 438.

<sup>520</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, Appendix 3a. p. 215 and given in Appendix 1 here.

<sup>521</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 28.

<sup>522</sup> T. Pape, ‘The round-shafted pre-Norman crosses of the North Staffordshire area’, *North Staffordshire Field Club Transactions*, 80 (1945-6), p. 29.

<sup>523</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 136.

<sup>524</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 134-7.

If these monuments were being produced locally then who was carrying out the work? The most likely scenario was that they were either produced by local craftsmen under the direction of a central agency, by itinerant craftsmen under the direction of a central agency, or by itinerant craftsmen employed locally. The possibility of a central ‘workshop’ roughly shaping stones and sending them with craftsmen to be finished locally is also a possibility. We know for instance that the stone for the Lichfield Angel was transported over some distance. Sidebottom’s research has shown that there are local sources of stone at each of the sites with stone monuments. He dismisses the idea that these monuments may have been produced locally with no involvement from a central agency because the monuments demonstrate that they share a vocabulary across the study area.<sup>525</sup> The answer seems to be that the work was carried out locally and that local stone was used and that the repeated motifs, found across the region, suggest some central agency. There remains the possibility that this ‘agency’ was quite loose and that the driving force of elite fashion is underplayed in some discussions.

Of initial concern to the earliest scholars of the Staffordshire monuments were basic questions about the nature of the monuments, what they were for, and what they commemorated. In the seventeenth century Robert Plot saw these as Danish monuments. He wrote that:

‘the tall pyramidal stones, such as those in the church yards of Leek, Draycot and Chebsey, which I took indeed at first to be only the epistylia of so many crosses, till coming to Ilam and finding two in the same church-yard, and three close together at Checkley, I began to think they must have some other origin, and that most probably they might be funeral monuments of the dead’.<sup>526</sup>

Lynam, in his illustrated review, advocated that the crosses were either memorials or ‘marked the first station of the intended church’.<sup>527</sup> He seems to have been the first to attempt to categorise the stone crosses of Staffordshire and to put this in writing.<sup>528</sup>

<sup>525</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 141-2.

<sup>526</sup> R. Plot, *The Natural History of Staffordshire* (1686, Oxford; Pocket Plot edn, Barlaston, 2009), chapter 10, 63, p. 432.

<sup>527</sup> Lynam, ‘Ancient churchyard-crosses’, p. 439.

<sup>528</sup> He came up with four categories:

Kendrick later defined a group of crosses that he labelled ‘round-shafts of north Mercia’. Kendrick’s interest in these monuments was minimal, referred to ‘not because they are of great importance in themselves, but because they are not well known and because one or two of them are beautiful’.<sup>529</sup> These ‘Peak crosses’ he identified as being in two groups, ‘Peak decorated’ and ‘Peak plain’.<sup>530</sup> Sidebottom found that most, but not all, of the round-shafted monuments in the area belonged to the ‘North-Western Regional School’, and so rejected the idea that these were a class in themselves as suggested by Lynam, Kendrick and Pape, instead preferring to classify stone sculpture by other criteria.<sup>531</sup> Although this ‘Peak’ division was dependent upon form in the first instance, the ‘Peak’ label seems to have stayed with the Staffordshire monuments as has, to some degree, Plot’s definition of the monuments as ‘Danish’.<sup>532</sup> Beyond the example at Wolverhampton the main corpus of churchyard stone sculpture in Staffordshire is to be found in the northern half of the county, consequently leading to their broad categorisation as ‘Peak crosses’, although this classification stretches the geography of that meaning on what is a stylistic understanding.<sup>533</sup>

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1. **Rectangular pillars** that taper upwards such as those at Checkley, Ilam and Leek. This category is distinguished from the second by ‘the presence in the carvings of numberless figures and the repetition of circles filled with knot work. In every case the whole shaft is enriched from top to bottom’. These he felt were either ‘special memorials, or marked the first station of the intended church’.
  2. A ‘**rudely cylindrical**’ shaft with a band, above which the shaft becomes rectangular. Such As the example found at Leek, Ilam and Chebsey. He included the fragment at Stoke. This second category was distinguished in the ‘dual form of shaft, the absence of figures and the introduction of rude foliage’.<sup>528</sup> These he thought were Norman preaching crosses.
  3. The **Wolverhampton Cross**, cylindrical enriched ‘by carvings of extreme artistic merit’. By putting this monument in a class of its own, Lynam emphasises the problems scholars have had placing this monument into the wider corpus.
  4. **Later Medieval Monuments:** This class of cross contains one at Rocester, Blithfield and Biddulph. These were not according to Lynam from the early medieval period which is in line with current thinking.

Lynam, ‘Ancient churchyard-crosses’, pp. 432-440.

<sup>529</sup> Into this category he added what are now understood to be post-Conquest examples, a cross base at Penn and the Bushbury Cross. T. Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art* (London 1949), pp. 68-76.

<sup>530</sup> ‘Peak decorated could be subdivided into two further categories, being ‘Ilam type’ and ‘Leek type’, with the Ilam type dating to a period after the Leek type. Other Staffordshire crosses such as those at Checkley are described in a chapter entitled ‘Danish Mercia and Anglian styles’. The Checkley crosses he dates to the eleventh century. Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art*, pp. 77-82.

<sup>531</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 114. His detailed analysis worked on the premise that schools of sculpture can be identified by grouping together monuments that share certain attributes (a single attribute shared could be by preference of an individual patron or mason), and to classify an attribute as belonging to a school it needed to be accompanied by another that was also common throughout the group. Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’, p. 71.

<sup>532</sup> This division of crosses by form was taken up by Pape who wrote two papers on the subject, *The Round-Shafted Pre-Norman Crosses of the North Staffordshire area*, and T. Pape, ‘The rectangular-shafted pre-Norman crosses of North Staffordshire’, *North Staffordshire Field Club Transactions*, 80 (1946-7). Into his ‘Rectangular-shafted crosses’ he put several of the fragments at Alstonefield, the Checkley examples, and others at Eccleshall, Ilam, Leek and Rolleston. He does not offer any subdivision of this group. This he dates to ‘within the century preceding the Norman Conquest’.

<sup>533</sup> These did not feature in Cramp’s analysis’, who, in her overview of Mercian sculpture tells us: ‘we will however, leave out of the discussion the pieces which belong with the later Staffordshire/Derbyshire group with debased

## Dating

In terms of dating, Mercian sculpture does not appear until the late eighth or early ninth century. The suggestion is that friezes and panels, such as the one found at Lichfield, had ‘primacy’ over other forms such as stone crosses, pushing the dates for these to a later period.<sup>534</sup> In Northumbria Anglo-Scandinavian stylistic forms are used to date sculptures as either pre- or post-Viking (c.880) but in Mercia this problem is accentuated by the fact that forms and styles have been difficult to identify. Despite this, the period around 880 is often used as a watershed date and the rather later development of the genre in Mercia would push much of the sculpture in Staffordshire into the tenth century.<sup>535</sup> To summarise, we can suggest that Staffordshire monuments were produced locally and that the wider geographical distribution of stone monuments in the county, although ‘northern’ to some extent, has not been fully appreciated, being overshadowed to some degree by the sheer quantity on fragments found at places like Alstonefield and Leek. In addition, we can push the dating of many of the Staffordshire monuments some time towards the second quarter of the tenth century.<sup>536</sup>

## Regional influences

Little is established about the early medieval history of Mercian Sandbach (Cheshire) apart from the survival of several pieces of stone sculpture.<sup>537</sup> What is known is that it lies some five miles from the current county boundary with Staffordshire, and lay within the early medieval diocese of Lichfield. The prestige and quality of the monuments at Sandbach has led to the proposal that they may have had an ‘impact on subsequent developments in sculptural activity in the region’.<sup>538</sup> These crosses at Sandbach come out of a period when:

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Anglian vinescroll and interlace or Anglo-Viking patterns such as the ring chain’. Cramp, ‘Schools of Mercian Sculpture’, p. 218.

<sup>534</sup> Cramp, ‘Schools of Mercian Sculpture’, p. 194, Kendrick, *Late Saxon and Viking Art*. It is admitted that stylistic dating is highly problematic.

<sup>535</sup> Suggestions have been made that the round-shafted crosses of Staffordshire may have influenced others outside the region, such as the Welsh cross Llandysilio yn Iâl, better known as the ‘Pillar of Eliseg’, which is unique amongst the Welsh corpus in being round shafted, however this has been rejected as the inscription on the Pillar of Eliseg suggests a date towards the first half of the ninth century. N. Edwards, *A Corpus of Early Medieval inscribed stones and stone sculpture in Wales*, 3 vols (Cardiff, 2013), 3, pp. 328-335.

<sup>536</sup> The exceptions being Lichfield, and possibly Wolverhampton and Eccleshall as described later.

<sup>537</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, pp. 15-20.

<sup>538</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 141.

‘the continuing aspirations of the senior clergy in the region in the decade after Lichfield lost its archdiocesan status, and that specific, prestigious, Carolingian images of ecclesiastical authority were being invoked as part of that agenda’.<sup>539</sup>

Likewise it has been suggested that the cross at Wolverhampton, although seemingly unique and difficult to place and having ‘no obvious copies’, also had an influence upon the form of the ‘crude round shafts of the West Midlands’.<sup>540</sup> At places such as Sandbach, stone sculpture was displayed at an important centre over a period that lasted longer than a single generation. Initially there were two to three substantial and important pieces:

‘which in turn inspired the production of a series of elaborate funerary monuments of different types, carved, presumably, for a number of eminent members of the local community who wished to mark their burials in a particularly prominent manner’.<sup>541</sup>

The five other monuments found at Sandbach church, which seem to be a response to the earlier pieces have tapering square shafts, and are said to be of a later period than the larger fragments in the market-place there.<sup>542</sup> This may indicate a degree of elite, secular emulation and emphasises how difficult it can be to differentiate between secular and ecclesiastical elites. Hawkes argues that the audience that these high-status monuments were aimed at were a ‘small group of highly literate men and women who would have been able to interpret them’. Whilst the detail of the sculpture was clearly of great importance to the people who had cause to have these stones made, and to many of the intended audience, it should not be forgotten that a large permanent monument in a prominent place was also a bold landscape statement. The connotations of the symbols and figures would have been lost to much of the audience (although by no means all) and some of the details may even have been hidden from view by the

<sup>539</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 145.

<sup>540</sup> R. Cramp, ‘Anglo-Saxon sculpture of the Reform period’, in D. Parsons (ed.), *Tenth Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London, 1975), p. 189.

<sup>541</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 127.

<sup>542</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 125.

coverings of colour and ornamentation.<sup>543</sup> Of the everyday meetings with early medieval monuments the implication is that the less educated, when encountering these monuments, would have understood them, at the very least as indicators of power and wealth.<sup>544</sup> In the words of Hawkes, a stone cross ‘is, and always has been, a public monument, something accessible for all to see’.<sup>545</sup> The high visibility of a cross in the landscape, possibly painted and with metal and glass adornments, may have been its primary function, a bold colourful sign in the landscape. Paint and metalworking would have presented a much brighter bolder image than the one we are offered within churchyards today.<sup>546</sup> Whilst we must acknowledge that many stone carvings were modest in nature we can also see that in some ways these crosses might be viewed as marking the Church coming out of its enclosure, beyond the confines of its buildings, and displaying the high-status metalwork, the gem encrusted and highly decorated style of its church interiors, bibles, and paraphernalia to the outside world. The cross itself became the symbol of the love of Christ, propagated by writers such as Augustine and Jerome, and the motif was taken up and disseminated in the eighth and ninth centuries by Bede and Alcuin.<sup>547</sup> The Church by use of its sign, the Cross, made an enduring monumental statement in the landscape, ‘permanently visible for all to see, in large-scale glorious glittering technicolour’.<sup>548</sup> The iconography of some stones elsewhere, it has been proposed, indicated not only that they may have marked a burial ground but that, in addition, the shafts with the presence of an evangelist or apostle imply that they may also have had a non-funerary function, being used for liturgical or preaching purposes.<sup>549</sup>

The Mercian crosses at Sandbach, differ in their use of iconography from other high-status monuments such as the so-called preaching cross at Ruthwell, since they (particularly the North cross) used less overt monastic symbolism. The symbolism of

<sup>543</sup> Hawkes, ‘Reading stone’, pp. 26-29.

<sup>544</sup> Karkov, ‘Naming and Renaming’, n. 5, p. 32.

<sup>545</sup> Hawkes, ‘Reading stone’, p. 25.

<sup>546</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 146.

<sup>547</sup> Hawkes, ‘Reading stone’, p. 18.

<sup>548</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 147.

<sup>549</sup> The impressive size, prominence and associated cost suggests this, as does the fact that it stands close to the centre of the graveyard, south of the church, and in line with the chancel arch. A ‘further layer of significance is the boundary generated by this relationship, between the clergy and/or patron to the east and the parishioners to the west’, dividing parishioners and clergy along an east-west axis. The severe weathering on the west face suggests it has occupied the same position for a considerable time. It is possible that this type of stone marker can be suggested for examples at Ilam. Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, p. 70 and pp. 113-115.

the Sandbach crosses provide a declaration of the power and authority the Church in Mercia in the ninth century, 'a statement that might well have had more relevance in a wider diocesan setting, than that of a 'private' ecclesiastical community'.<sup>550</sup> Images such as the Adoration of the Magi (the first manifestation of God through Christ) and the Crucifixion were both moments in the tale of Christ of witness and adoration, suitable images for stone sculpture such as on the example at Sandbach. The Crucifixion scene had its own powerful narrative and informed the symbol of the cross itself. The Adoration of the Magi was palpably a moment when Christ was first revealed as the son of God and revealed to gentiles at that.<sup>551</sup>

The first reference to the figures found on some of the bases of the crosses in Staffordshire is by Robert Plot who describes the examples at Checkley:

'The inhabitants reporting them the memorials of 3 bishops slain in a battle fought here about ¼ of a mile E.N.E. from the church, in a place still called *Naked Fields*, for that the bodies lay there naked and unburied for some time after the fight; what ground for this tradition I cannot find, but that they were funeral monuments, and of Danish original, I am fully confirmed'.<sup>552</sup>

Regionally imagery can be found at Bakewell and Hope (both Derbyshire) and also on the so-called Calvary Stone at Leek (*Leek 1*), a figure in profile carrying a cross, interspersed with pellets.

<sup>550</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, pp. 147-148.

<sup>551</sup> Hawkes, 'Reading stone', p. 17.

<sup>552</sup> Plot, *Natural History*, chapter 10, 63, p. 432.



Figure 38: Leek 1.

Apart from examples at Sandbach, the Calvary sequence represented at Leek is atypical, the frequency of single profile figures bearing staff-crosses being ‘very rare’, with most cross-bearing figures represented with a staff-cross held across the body which is forward-facing, as in the example at Chesterton.<sup>553</sup>

<sup>553</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 140.





Figure 39: Chesterton, skirted figure.

The mirroring of these symbolically important scenes in rare instances at a local level is an indication of the styles and formats of these significant symbolic motifs cascading down through the upper reaches of early medieval Staffordshire society.

Many of these figures occur in small arched niches, each set above another with ‘haphazardly placed pellets’.<sup>554</sup> Lang suggests that the motifs on the rectangular shafts found at Leek are a feature of the north midlands and that they are skeuomorphic in that they may derive from ‘metal appliqué attached to wooden poles... in the manner of the Irish crozier shrines’.<sup>555</sup> These pellets can also be found specifically on *Alstonefield 16*, *Checkley 1* and 2, *Leek 1*, and *Ilam 3*. These pellets or skeuomorphic nails replicate the small metal points holding objects together such as book covers and other metalwork objects. The use of doll-like figures ‘with the distinctive profile face who wear skirts with sharply drooping corners’, in sculpture across Derbyshire (e.g. Norbury) and in Staffordshire (e.g. *Alstonefield 16* and *Eccleshall 4*) in the ninth and tenth centuries strengthen the stylistic links to the important centre at Sandbach. The plait-work figures such as those on *Checkley 1* and *Ilam 5* do differ slightly from the Sandbach examples (*Sandbach 7*).

<sup>554</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 141.

<sup>555</sup> Lang, *CASSS*: 6, p. 29.



Figure 40: Checkley 1 plaitwork figures in arched niches.

The Staffordshire group show the entire body ‘composed of a figure-of-eight pattern that ends recognisably, in a skirt from which the legs emerge’ whilst the Sandbach skirt example is three-quarter length.<sup>556</sup> The evidence suggests that the idea of a school of sculpture may be a much looser concept than a centre for production, and as a term it may in fact mask a series of complexities. For example, if we are to infer places of production from the surviving corpus and from this, ethnic influences, then the examples from Alstonefield offer a very complex picture, featuring in every one of Sidebottom’s schools.<sup>557</sup> Whilst not ruling out Scandinavian cultural impact and motifs on the monuments in Staffordshire, these instances of staff-bearing figures in profile seem to suggest an influence by the sculpture at Sandbach on the north midlands. This adds a persuasive suggestion of a Mercian influence upon the stone sculpture across the region. Thus it might be possible to see multiple levels of influence upon the monuments of Staffordshire from wider Mercia, from Sandbach and those examples south of the Trent, for instance Wolverhampton as well as cultural impact of people such as Æthelred and Æthelflaed. This presents a more complex picture but overall reveals something about early medieval society in Staffordshire

<sup>556</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 125.

<sup>557</sup> Alstonefield has by far the greatest number of surviving pieces. Had more survived from elsewhere a more complex picture may have enforced this idea.

## Stone sculpture and identity

By far the most impressive early medieval column in Staffordshire is that found at St Peter's Wolverhampton.

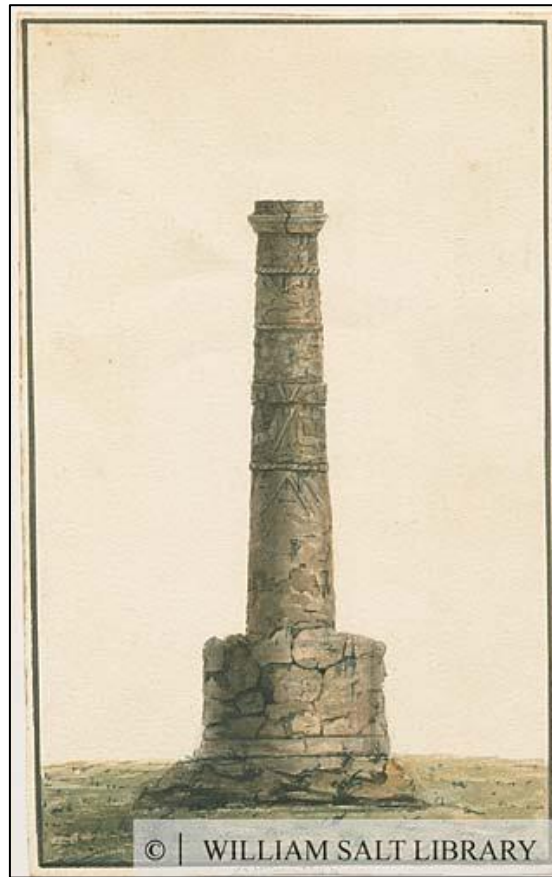


Figure 41: Wolverhampton cross at St Peter's.<sup>558</sup>

Stone sculpture can be difficult to date and this example is no exception. Dating can be attempted via stylistic means, but this brings its own set of complexities. The column is now badly worn by weathering and pollution. As discussed in some detail in chapter five, Wolverhampton is intrinsically linked to Wulfrun and the founding of a religious house there. It also lay at the heart of an important set of landholdings for the family *Wulf*. The column itself is of 'classical appearance' and may be a re-used Roman column, its diameter said to match that of two columns found amongst the extensive remains found at Wroxeter (Shropshire).<sup>559</sup> The monument carried at one time a cross

<sup>558</sup> SV-XII.108a.

<sup>559</sup> H. Steele, 'A photographic survey of the pre-Conquest carved stone crosses of Staffordshire', *North Staffordshire Field Club Transactions*, 82 (1947-48), p. 125.

head.<sup>560</sup> It is mainly decorated with plant ornament exhibiting a heavy Carolingian influence. In contrast, the birds and beasts in the lozenges and roundels and ‘the manner in which they are left free of a camouflaging growth of plant scroll is more like English work of the ninth century’.<sup>561</sup> It has been described as ‘the finest example’ of the Anglo-Carolingian style, a ‘tenth-century successor to the Breedon friezes’.<sup>562</sup> In some ways the column seems to stand apart from the corpus, both locally and nationally, and in whatever period, ‘it has no obvious copies’.<sup>563</sup> The unique quality of the column means that a confused narrative has become attached to it. Options on dating range from the seventh to the twelfth centuries, but a majority of commentators suggest the ninth century.<sup>564</sup> The forthcoming Corpus volume suggest a date of the tenth century, possibly earlier:

‘If it can be dated to the earlier tenth century this might have coincided with the original or early period of that foundation, while a later tenth-century date would perhaps coincide with a possible ‘re-foundation’ in the later tenth century’.<sup>565</sup>

As to its purpose, ‘the fact that it stands in its original setting certainly indicates that it was purposely set up as a highly impressive sculptural monument marking the ecclesiastical foundation in the vicinity’.<sup>566</sup> The presence of vine and plant scroll is suggestive that the monument carried some theological meaning.<sup>567</sup> However, the monument does not seem to convey the same sort of direct ecclesiastical message as the

<sup>560</sup> Kendrick suggests that it was made in the mid-ninth century. T. Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art to AD 900* (1938, London, 1972 edn), p. 192. Cramp on the other hand suggests a tenth-century date, with the possibility of it being ninth. Cramp, ‘Anglo-Saxon sculpture of the Reform period’, p. 189.

<sup>561</sup> Cramp, ‘Anglo-Saxon sculpture of the Reform period’, p. 188.

<sup>562</sup> R. Jewell, ‘*Classicism of Southumbrian Sculpture*’, in M. Brown and C. Farr (eds), *Mercia, an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London, 2001), p. 262. Kendrick on the other hand thought it ‘unquestionably the noblest monument that has come down to us from the pre-Alfredian sculptures of the West Saxon supremacy’, dating it to the ninth century. Kendrick, *Anglo-Saxon Art*, p. 192.

<sup>563</sup> Cramp, ‘Anglo-Saxon sculpture of the Reform period’, pp. 188-189.

<sup>564</sup> This confusion is one of the reasons it did not feature in Sidebottom’s thesis from which it is excluded. His own view is that the Wolverhampton column is of a much later post-Conquest date (personal comment), and Sidebottom, ‘North-western frontier of Viking Mercia’, pp. 3-15. A detailed gathering of the various musings upon the column ranging can be found in ‘Appendix VI: The Wolverhampton cross-shaft’, Horovitz, *Notes and Materials on the Battle of Tettenhall* with a table summary on p. 324.

<sup>565</sup> My thanks to J. Hawkes for sharing the draft section on Wolverhampton from, J. Hawkes and P. Sidebottom, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume XIII, Derbyshire and Staffordshire* (Oxford, 2017)

<sup>566</sup> J. Hawkes and P. Sidebottom, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume XIII*

<sup>567</sup> Cramp, *Grammar of Anglo-Saxon Ornament*, p. XXIV.

example at Sandbach.<sup>568</sup> Given the dating, might the monument mark the founding of the religious house, in the ninth century, prior to a possible re-founding of the house by Wulfrun? According to Cramp, ‘we have no evidence that crosses were set up at the foundation of monasteries save for those, usually with inscriptions, which are associated with monastic burial grounds’.<sup>569</sup> It is conceivable that the Wolverhampton cross is of this type, another understanding could be that the Wolverhampton cross pre-dates the founding of the religious house. There is evidence elsewhere of large monuments pre-dating major religious foundations. For example, the sculpture found at the site of St Oswald’s, Gloucester (founded by Æthelred and Æthelflaed at the end of the ninth century) certainly pre-dated the foundation, as testified to by the fact that some of it was re-used in the foundations of the church. This reuse also indicates that this type of monument was favoured by the leading families of Mercia prior to the fashion for creating religious houses. It is possible that the Gloucester monument stood only for a single generation, perhaps destroyed during the overwintering of a Danish army in 877-8.<sup>570</sup> We lack supporting evidence, but such a scenario may be postulated too at Wolverhampton. The site could have been an important family burial ground prior to the founding of the ecclesiastical centre, and we have seen elsewhere in this study (see chapter five) that the family of Wulfrun seem to have had a stronghold in this part of west Staffordshire. But, we should not discount the possibility that the monument we see now may have been handed down and interpreted over several generations.<sup>571</sup> There is a mention of a stone at Wolverhampton, the ‘Byrngythe stane’ in the charter from King Æthelred to Wulfrun in 985 (S.860), which maps the bounds of *Heantune* (Wolverhampton).<sup>572</sup> Whilst we do not know where this stone was, nor necessarily what it was, there is at least a suggestion that a monument, made of stone of some sort, was present in Wolverhampton prior to the confirmation of the lands to Wulfrun. It is proposed here that this fits within a discernible pattern of, initially, a monumental stone

<sup>568</sup> Horovitz has suggested that the nature of the sculpture at Wolverhampton, the lack of any overt religious imagery and the lack of any human figures, may have been one of the reasons it escaped the interests of the iconoclasts. Horovitz, *Notes and Materials on the Battle of Tettenhall*, p. 338.

<sup>569</sup> Cramp, ‘Anglo-Saxon sculpture of the Reform period’, p. 188.

<sup>570</sup> Bryant, CASSS, pp. 105-107.

<sup>571</sup> The Ruthwell cross for example was ‘certainly begun in the eighth century but possibly augmented in the ninth and perhaps later’. Karkov, ‘Naming and Renaming’, p. 35.

<sup>572</sup> A search for Byrngythe reveals that there are no references to a name with this spelling in PASE. There are, however, two people mentioned by the name of Beorngyth, firstly an Abbess, possibly of Bath mentioned in charters of around AD 680 and a nun to whom Aldhelm Abbot of Malmesbury, and bishop of Sherborne in the early eighth century, dedicated his poem on virginity, which was composed sometime in the later seventh, early eighth century <http://www.pase.ac.uk/index.html> (21/02/2015).

sculpture acting as a memorial to individuals or groups of family members followed by the establishment of a religious house or church. This model begins with the social elites, such as Æthelred and Æthelflaed the overlords of Mercia, and then copied locally by the likes of Wulfrun. As we will see, it would later be emulated lower down the social order as the thegnly class begin to emerge, gaining a grip on their land and developing memorial strategies aping those of the great lords of Mercia and beyond.

Before we move on to the main corpus we should consider the influence of perhaps the best known piece of early medieval sculpture, and one of the most important archaeological finds of recent years from Staffordshire, the Lichfield Angel.<sup>573</sup> It was discovered in 2003 and consists of three fragments of a panel depicting a bas-relief image of an angel. The angel itself is made of oolitic limestone from Ancaster (Lincolnshire). Although it may be a re-used piece of Roman stone, like the Wolverhampton column, those who have studied it suggest that ‘on balance, it is more likely that the shrine block was quarried at Ancaster in the late eighth century and was transported tortuously by water to a workshop at or near Lichfield, where it was carved and perhaps painted before being set up in the cathedral’.<sup>574</sup> The angel probably formed part of a shrine chest, ‘to encase, in a newly fashionable style, St Chad’s humble wooden *theca*’ and survived a relatively short time to be broken up and buried ‘no later than the tenth century’.<sup>575</sup>

<sup>573</sup> The contention being that the *Staffordshire Hoard* has yet to reveal anything tangible about Staffordshire in the early medieval period.

<sup>574</sup> W. Rodwell, J. Hawkes, E. Howe, and R. Cramp, ‘The Lichfield Angel: A spectacular Anglo-Saxon painted sculpture’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, 88 (2008), p. 58.

<sup>575</sup> Rodwell, Hawkes, Howe, and Cramp, *Lichfield Angel*, p. 56 and p. 74.



Figure 42: Lichfield Angel.

Impressive as the angel is, it is in some respects unrepresentative of the wider surviving corpus. This fragment is of the highest status, and, dating to when Mercia and Offa were at their most politically powerful, it was commissioned for a tomb *inside* the most important ecclesiastical building of the period, unlike the majority of stone monuments that survive in Staffordshire, which were created to be placed in prominent positions *outside*. The angel dates to the period that ‘saw the temporary elevation of Lichfield to archiepiscopal status under Offa and Coenwulf at the turn of the ninth century (787-802), and so comes from a period several generations before those other monuments.’<sup>576</sup> Its discovery provides a reminder that stone monuments in Mercia, and in Staffordshire in particular, may have existed in greater numbers and quality than had previously been thought, and, affords ‘a glimpse of the theological and visually sophisticated ecclesiastical culture that flourished at Lichfield at the turn of the ninth century’.<sup>577</sup> Because the status, location, and recent work carried out on the Lichfield Angel set it apart from the wider corpus of stone sculpture from the county it is not studied in any

<sup>576</sup> Rodwell, Hawkes, Howe, and Cramp, *Lichfield Angel*, p. 66.

<sup>577</sup> Rodwell, Hawkes, Howe, and Cramp, *Lichfield Angel*, p. 33. It is possible that some of the examples at Eccleshall, another episcopal estate, may possibly be from a frieze of some kind but the fragments are difficult to interpret.

great detail here, as it is so unlike the remaining corpus of stone sculpture from Staffordshire, in style, form, and date. Beyond this early example at Lichfield, the Wolverhampton column and the fragments at Eccleshall, the monuments in Staffordshire seem to be found away from elite sites.

### **Memorialisation and manorialisation**

Like the Angel at Lichfield the monuments at Sandbach were constructed at a time when the See at Lichfield was at its most confident. This flourishing of these very public visual arts was seemingly recognised across the region. Hawkes has suggested that the

‘monuments in modern-day Derbyshire and Staffordshire do seem to demonstrate an awareness of the distinctive decorative features of the Sandbach monuments, both iconographically and stylistically’.<sup>578</sup>

Instances of stone sculpture in Staffordshire and especially Pirehill provide a useful testing ground for the general consensus that the Staffordshire monuments belong to the tail end of Scandinavian settlement, with the examples being that bit further west, along with the column at Wolverhampton further south. The pieces found at the church of the episcopal estate at Eccleshall are fragmentary and difficult to date. But they do include two interesting fragments, one piece (*Eccleshall 3*) with unidentified figures, possibly depicts Adam and Eve and another, and (*Eccleshall 4*) has a skirted figure. The pieces may reflect a pattern seen at Sandbach and exhibit a ninth-century episcopal influence. Hawkes dates the first of these to the ninth century and the second to the late ninth or possibly early tenth centuries.<sup>579</sup> Although we lack secure diagnostic evidence, there is surely some significance that each of these west Mercian episcopal sites, Lichfield, Eccleshall and Sandbach, contain monuments where so little has survived and we can at least suggest that they played a role in the dissemination of the use of stone sculpture as a memorial strategy.

<sup>578</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 139.

<sup>579</sup> J. Hawkes and P. Sidebottom, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume XIII*



The example found at Stoke is difficult to categorise, since the evidence for the place is scarce. We have no charters and it is only mentioned in passing in the Domesday Book with Caverswall, which means they have to be treated together. A certain Wulfgeat (who shares the personal name element *Wulf* with the wider kinship group of Wulfrun, discussed in chapter five), held Checkley at the Great Survey. It has three fine early medieval monuments and he held lordship over a series of other lands including Caverswall. At the time of Domesday, Caverswall held ‘half of Stoke church’.<sup>580</sup> The example found at Stoke is given as belonging to Sidebottom’s North-Western Regional School along with *Alstonefield 5, 6, 7, 8 and 15, Ilam 3, Leek 3, 4 and 6*. This grouping contains most of the round-shafted monuments in the area and includes motifs such as Scroll type S4, key, fret or line pattern, L1, irregular line motif, and USL (see appendix). That the church at Stoke was shared by the manor at Caverswall suggests that, at that time at least, the church was shared across at least two manors, possibly belonging to the wider kinship group of Wulfgeat. It is of more than a little passing interest that a Wulfgeat also held Checkley, given that there are three surviving monuments there. Where stone monuments are associated with burials and churchyards, we can be confident that the churches at which stone sculpture has been found were churches with some status, since churches with a lower status did not have the right to burials.<sup>581</sup> In Lincolnshire it has been proposed that ‘it is conceivable that the monuments belong to the parochial church founders themselves and are overt signs of those foundations’.<sup>582</sup>

The Chesterton monument is a rectangular-sectioned shaft which has a rare example of the Calvary scene, as at Leek, with a single profile figure bearing a cross. Sidebottom places this monument in his South Western Region School along with Checkley, Eccleshall, Ilam, Leek and Tatenhill, a group whose influence extended to Sandbach. He included it within a subset of this school, the West sub-school, in which were the Staffordshire examples of *Alstonefield 10 and 16, Checkley 2, Eccleshall 4, Leek 1 and Leek 5*. The school included the following attributes: E1a knotwork, D1 knotwork, side shrouded figure, skirted figure. Found in the 1950s its provenance is uncertain, but it is an important monument because Chesterton did not have a medieval

<sup>580</sup> J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book: Staffordshire* (Chichester, 1976), 11:36, 17:19.

<sup>581</sup> Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, p. 75.

<sup>582</sup> Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, pp. 75-79.

parish. If, as suggested in chapter four, Chesterton was a thegnly residence that did not have a church, a stone church, or a church that was eventually upgraded to parochial status, what this shaft might capture is the first phase of elite emulation. Lang has suggested that stone crosses may well have been found with timber churches, prior to the period when stone churches were becoming the norm and reflect the growth of manorial churches.<sup>583</sup> At Chesterton we might suggest a local family adopting a memorial strategy of stone sculpture, copying elite families (such as the family of Wulfrun) but that the manor never attained, possibly because of the nearby foundation of a post-Conquest castle, parochial status.

The Scandinavian influence on this corpus is stressed by Sidebottom who at Ilam for example, sees an unusual coincidence of ON place-names and stone sculpture, and believes that this is supported by other place-names in the area. He goes on to tentatively date the sculpture to the period when Norse settlers were under pressure from the re-conquest of the region by the English, and may have needed to display their acceptance of Christianity in a very public manner. The ‘West sub-division of the South-Western Regional School’, to which the Chesterton example and that of Eccleshall are, according to Sidebottom, ‘coterminous with Viking settlers... who regarded themselves as ‘Viking Mercians’. The example at Chebsey, it is said, belongs to a school that seems to ‘represent a Hiberno-Norse settlement group, chiefly confined to the southern Pennines’.<sup>584</sup> Despite this, the evidence for Scandinavian settlement in Staffordshire, let alone Pirehill further west, is far from compelling. For example, it is questionable whether any evidence for the episcopal estate of Eccleshall being a Norse settlement exists. Whilst the instances of ON place-names may be ‘rather more widespread’ than previously thought, these are often found in minor names, the street names of Tamworth (Aldergate, Ellergate, Gumpegate and Gungate) being the main exceptions and ‘only a single *by* place-name (Threvesby) has been traced in the county, and that only in a single reference’.<sup>585</sup> Near Eccleshall we find Chebsey, a manor closely associated with the establishment of a burh at Stafford founded in 913. The manor of Chebsey fits within the dating framework given by Sidebottom, although the likelihood of this being an area of Norse settlement seems improbable. Firstly there is

<sup>583</sup> Lang, *CASSS*: 6, p. 8.

<sup>584</sup> Sidebottom, ‘Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture’ p. 178, pp. 183-184, p. 190.

<sup>585</sup> D. Horowitz, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* (Brewood, 2005), p. 50.

very little place-name evidence to support this theory. In addition, the estate is known to have held land within the burh at Domesday (see chapter four) and if the dating of the sculpture by Sidebottom is after the 920s, Chebsey, existing in the shadow of the burh as a Norse influence is a remote possibility. That is not to say that a piece of stone sculpture could not incorporate Norse elements; indeed on the edge of Mercia such cultural influences might seem almost inevitable. Rather, it is the proposition that, when found, such elements imply Norse settlement that is challenged here. Indeed the attribution of such labels ‘imply an exclusive link between a mode of material culture and an ethnic category imposed by modern historians, which need not correspond to the complex and fluid nature of social groupings’.<sup>586</sup>

## Discussion

Rather than showing evidence of Viking settlement in Staffordshire it is proposed here that the Pirehill monuments at Chebsey, Stoke, and Chesterton indicate a relationship between a growing thegnly class in Staffordshire and these monuments. Through the embracing of commemorative sculpture the great lords of Mercia can be seen to be adopting memorial strategies via elite families such as that of Æthelred and Æthelflaed. We have seen in a previous chapter that their foundation at St Oswald’s was preceded by what seems to have been a cemetery with stone monuments. This practice was taken up a little later by the family *Wulf*, by Wulfrun and Wulfric Spot at Wolverhampton, possibly at Ilam (and the cult of Beorhthelm) and the foundation at Burton.

<sup>586</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 148.

Family of Æthelred and Æthelflaed	Wulfrun and Wulfric Spot	Thegnly estate
Stone monuments at later site of St Oswalds, Gloucester.	Stone monument at later site of St Peters, Wolverhampton	Stone monument (possibly with wooden church)
Building of St Oswalds church, Gloucester. Later family mausoleum.	Foundation of St Peters, Wolverhampton	
Founding of various high-status religious houses across Mercia.	Family mausoleum for Wulfrun's husband and daughter and later Wulfrun?	Foundation of thegnly church at Chebsey
	Foundation of Burton Abbey, burial place of Wulfric Spot and his wife	

Figure 43: Monumental strategies.

The proposal here is that this was followed by another development phase at places like Chebsey, Stoke, and Chesterton and that these monuments fit within a wider framework of the development of manorial churches. For example, at Raunds (Northamptonshire) a ‘founders grave’ was located to the south-east of the church which was marked by a carved stone decorated with interlace. The ‘church and church yard were a later addition to the late Saxon manorial holding’ and a mid-tenth-century date has been proposed for the development of the cemetery and church, ‘perhaps within a couple of decades of the establishment of the late Saxon manor’.<sup>587</sup> The chronology suggested for Staffordshire follows, to some extent, the pattern found at Raunds: a manorial complex, and elite burial with a stone monument followed by a phase 1 church (possibly of wood), and then a second phase late Saxon or post-Conquest stone church that becomes the centre for a parish. We have already noted that Checkley and Stoke later came under the influence of Wulfgeat and, although tentative, the linking of a kinship *Wulf* name element and several of these sites is interesting given the survival rate of stone monuments. Although not conclusive, these patterns of land holding suggest not a series of northern Viking attempts to prove their Christian credentials by erecting overtly Christian symbols (crosses) decorated with their own cultural signifiers, but

<sup>587</sup> M. Audouy and A. Chapman, *Raunds, the Origin and Growth of a Midland Village A.D. 450-1500. Excavations in North Raunds, Northamptonshire 1977-87* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 84-87.

rather we have key estates being held at various points by the most powerful kinship group of the tenth century. That is not to say that they were responsible for the erection of the monuments (they may have been) but we can surmise that throughout this period they were places of some status. It has been noted elsewhere in this study how land holdings were fluid, places to be bartered and exchanged. As the families holding these estates, or their retainers who held them as payments for services rendered, they invested in these lands, in their cults and estates. They also followed the latest vogues of the period, here one of stone sculpture, signifying their presence in the landscape, as Thompson explained:

‘Even pieces whose images of human figures which look mildly comic to our ill-informed eyes represent effort, investment and the desire to make a public and permanent statement, and they embody profound truths about how these people wanted to be remembered’.<sup>588</sup>

This style, as at Sandbach, had been taken up by local elites and spread across the region. From Eccleshall to Chesterton, Stoke and Chebsey in Pirehill, and beyond to Checkley and Ilam.

In terms of dating most commentators suggest a tenth-century date for the majority of the Staffordshire corpus and it is difficult to disagree with this general consensus. It is in the interpretation of what this means that we may perceive differing interpretations. Cramp puts forward that the crosses of Staffordshire can be linked to a variety of influences and that these date to the tenth century. She concludes that the crosses of the Midlands and Northumbria become merely folk art divisible into small regional groups to which it would be inappropriate to apply any wide-reaching socio-political label.<sup>589</sup> Sidebottom is in some ways in agreement with Pape who thought that the Staffordshire corpus was to be found on the borders of English Mercia and Viking Mercia and ‘represent the triumph of Christianity over pagan worship of the Viking invaders’.<sup>590</sup> Pape advocates a period dating to 950-975 for the examples at Leek and Stoke, which were later followed by Ilam with ‘the latest period for the North

<sup>588</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 6.

<sup>589</sup> Cramp, ‘Schools of Mercian Sculpture’, p. 231.

<sup>590</sup> Pape, *Rectangular-Shafted Pre-Norman Crosses*, p. 51.

Staffordshire round-shafted crosses'... 'represented by the four upper parts at Alstonefield'.<sup>591</sup> Sidebottom, however, has proposed an earlier and narrower chronology, dating the monuments to the period after 920, 'whatever motives lay behind the erection of the sculpture, a likely dating horizon for most of its production is between c.920 (the period of English re-conquest) and 950', the re-organisation of the newly conquered lands by the English.<sup>592</sup> The forthcoming corpus volume broadly dates the stone sculpture of Staffordshire all to the late ninth to tenth centuries apart from *Leek 3* which is mid ninth and the dating of the Wolverhampton cross which we have already discussed.<sup>593</sup> If we accept this dating, and there are good reasons to do so, then we can move onto a wider discussion.

It is perhaps noteworthy that no sculpture has been found at any of the estates of Burton apart from at Ilam, which was granted away by Wulfric Spot, nor at Burton itself. Alstonefield produced numerous stone monuments. It was a manor that was 'according to the Burton Cartulary, the offspring of Ilam', possibly a manorial breakaway.<sup>594</sup> It may be that by the time the house at Burton had come into being the fashion for monumental sculpture had died out, as suggested by the fact that we know that Wulfric was, along with his wife, buried within the church built there rather than in the churchyard.<sup>595</sup> So we find at local centres across northern Staffordshire that these monuments were influenced stylistically from various cultural nodes, indicative of the turbulent ninth and tenth centuries. From all this we can propose a model illustrating how a memorial culture was developed within the research area. We have seen the influence of the Church on the monuments of Staffordshire as elsewhere in the country.<sup>596</sup> This period was followed by a more outward looking expression of the Church's ambitions and a significant cultural shift, taking the cross outside the confines of ecclesiastical centres and, indeed, the cross being taken out of this environment altogether by local elites. The display of crosses at centres like Sandbach were a major statement about place, and locating oneself within the cultural world of the eighth to

<sup>591</sup> Pape, *Round-Shafted Pre-Norman Crosses*, p. 48.

<sup>592</sup> Sidebottom, 'Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture', p. 185-186.

<sup>593</sup> J. Hawkes and P. Sidebottom, *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, Volume XIII*

<sup>594</sup> Wedgwood, 'Early Staffordshire History', p. 198.

<sup>595</sup> Sidebottom, 'Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture', p. 160-165.

<sup>596</sup> For example from Sandbach and Lichfield. For examples of this process elsewhere see E. Cambridge, 'The Early church in County Durham: a Reassessment', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 137 (1984), pp. 65-85.

tenth centuries ‘through the production of permanent, large-scale and very public sculptured monuments, they sought, deliberately and unequivocally, to disseminate an image of themselves as intellectually and politically central and pivotal to their world’.<sup>597</sup> The spread of this regional cultural influence saw new memorial strategies being created, initially via the Church, which should be understood alongside the practices of secular elites, who both founded and established religious centres as well as copied the practices of ecclesiastical elites. We should perhaps also remember that in many instances these ‘ecclesiastical’ and ‘secular’ elites were social equivalents, often coming from similar backgrounds or the same families. And, although it can be difficult, as at Sandbach, to untangle the influences across the region, we gradually see the use of these monuments and the creation of sacred spaces under lay patronage, and, a development phase can be postulated along the lines of those at Raunds.

This background of cultural and stylistic influences was brought into focus by the political turbulence across Mercia and beyond due to the pressures of Viking raids. Throughout this period there is also a corresponding social shift with a growth in thegny lordship. Consequently we see an equivalent shift in influence from the highest echelons of society, such as Æthelred and Æthelflaed buried at St Oswald’s in Gloucester, towards local elites such as Wulfrun, her husband and daughter, who were likewise buried at their minster church at Wolverhampton, and her son Wulfric and his wife buried within the church at Burton. These church burials had been preceded a generation earlier by a fashion for burials and markers in the form of stone sculpture as at St Oswald’s, Gloucester, and possibly at St Peter’s, Wolverhampton. This was imitated further down the social scale as a lower rank of landholders began to follow this elite fashion, to say something about themselves, their families and their new estates, influenced by the style and practices from the across the region. This Staffordshire evidence fits with Blair’s more general observance.

‘It looks as though stone monuments in local churchyards may largely commemorate the manorial family (or families, where lordship was divided): the

<sup>597</sup> Hawkes, *Sandbach Crosses*, p. 148.

quantity of material is rarely enough to suggest that a larger social group was involved'.<sup>598</sup>

We can assume a time lapse before local lords were able to follow such practices and that what followed was a reaction against this imitation by the upper levels of that society as they then moved towards burial in their own monastic foundations, their souls and bodies no longer protected by the symbolic imagery of the stone but by the prayers of monks.

We see in the next chapter the growth of thegny estates across Staffordshire, particularly in Pirehill, in the period around the ninth and tenth centuries. The disruption that came about in the late ninth and early tenth century from the instability of Viking raids led to a fragmentation of land ownership or at least a weakening overlordship. This in turn led to a weakening of the grip that the local elites had on the land, leading in some places to smaller landholders gaining more control over their holdings and subsequently investing in them. Gradually, the thegny class began to emulate these elites and their practices, and created their own manorial strategies, with stone monuments, burial grounds and eventually stone churches that, in effect, became ecclesiastical centres in a secular space. Stone monuments seem to have been the initial markers of a special or sacred space, and these graveyard markers 'may have often preceded the building of propriety churches'.<sup>599</sup>

The surviving stone sculptures of Staffordshire are to be found on the edge of the West Midlands, and as the CASSS volumes identify, they latch onto a corpus that is northern in style. However, it is proposed here that they belong firmly within that West Midlands tradition. The families are Mercian (where identified) and the cultural movement is south to north rather than reverse. If we show more caution in using material culture to define ethnicity, which in itself 'may only be a question of allegiance', then we might see this as a cultural phenomenon that fits into wider

<sup>598</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 470.

<sup>599</sup> Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, p. 201.



practices of memorialisation and manorialisation and, if developed further, may be seen as being part of a process of the development of England.<sup>600</sup>

Elsewhere it has been argued that during the tenth and eleventh centuries the Church attempted to limit lay burials in churches, in a period ‘which is reflected in the explosion in the use of monuments’.<sup>601</sup> This practice of using stone sculpture seems to mark a short period in the development of thegnly residences and of the putative parochial system. It was short lived and soon out of fashion, but these lay burials mark a change in cultural practices. Whilst not discounting the possibility that these northern stones mark a cultural zone, it is suggested here that they mark a tenth-century phenomenon, that is, the establishment of thegnly residences and these monuments indicate new or re-established settlements ‘in more distinct areas or on the more marginal land’.<sup>602</sup> The reclaiming of the north it seems went hand-in-hand with the establishment of new administrative boundaries, the promotion of cults, the development of new estates and the anchoring of new elites in thegnly residences. The brief taste for funerary stone sculpture seems to have coincided with this process, and it is this pattern that we see revealing itself as the tide of history moved on. These sculptures represent English rather than Norse activities. Culturally they aspire to the artistic norms of the very brief period in which they were created. They are a product of their time and as such mark a very important moment in the history of Staffordshire and of the creation of England, and, come from a very Western Midlands tradition. The ‘rickety arched frames’ of places such as Checkley, Chebsey, Chesterton and Stoke mark the high-tide of a particular moment when a new, thegnly, class confidently expressed ownership of their new estates by adopting new memorial strategies. Perhaps less than a century later these lords, and the fashions they followed, had moved on, leaving the monuments stranded in the church-yards where we find them today.

<sup>600</sup> Thompson, *Death and Dying*, p. 148.

<sup>601</sup> Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, 5, p. 71.

<sup>602</sup> Everson and Stocker, *CASSS*, p. 79.

# CHAPTER FOUR: THE THEGNLY MOMENT: AN ANATOMY OF ESTATE CENTRES

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It is generally accepted that from the eighth century onwards the landscape of England became more organised and increasingly structured. This reorganization came out of the emergence of new kingdoms across the country (of varying sizes) and their need to consolidate power, achieved in part by subdividing territories. This was realised by increasingly binding a warrior elite to land tenure and, so the theory goes, adding stability to these emerging polities.<sup>603</sup> As the process developed, yet more estates were handed over to local elites to maintain in return for dynastic loyalty.<sup>604</sup> These elites began, by the mid-ninth century, to rely increasingly on their retainers who were likewise rewarded with smaller estates, and so, it is argued, smaller high-status estates arose.<sup>605</sup> We begin to detect this class through the grants and leases of the period. Grants are seen across the social spectrum whilst all known leases which survive are leases of Church property. This may well have something to do with the survival of ecclesiastical records but also because it was canonically forbidden to alienate the possessions of the Church.<sup>606</sup> Regionally it is generally understood that ‘the geographical distribution of known settlements remains uneven’: ‘few have been recognised, for example, in the Mercian heartland of the West Midlands’.<sup>607</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to challenge this perception and to see if this process can be ascertained in Pirehill. That is, identify thegnly lordship and seek to understand how that might have expressed itself in the landscape. In order to do this it is necessary to set out the approach taken and for a general discussion concerning the development of landholding in the early medieval period.

<sup>603</sup> J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage: Anglo-Saxon defence in the Viking Age* (Leiden, 2013), p. 43.

<sup>604</sup> See G. Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2004).

<sup>605</sup> See R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (London, 1997), pp. 153-177.

<sup>606</sup> Leases for several lives (generally three) were devices used to circumnavigate this and it can be seen how over a prolonged period this might potentially lead to the fragmentation of individual Church estates. Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>607</sup> H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2012), p. 2.

## Background: multiple estates

The multiple estate model, developed in the 1970s, proposed that the earliest larger manors were self-reliant, containing within them specialised units that provided the necessities to run the estate which was dependent upon a central place.<sup>608</sup> These holdings may have been built upon pre-existing manors of British origin, as has been suggested for the episcopal estates at Lichfield and Eccleshall.<sup>609</sup>

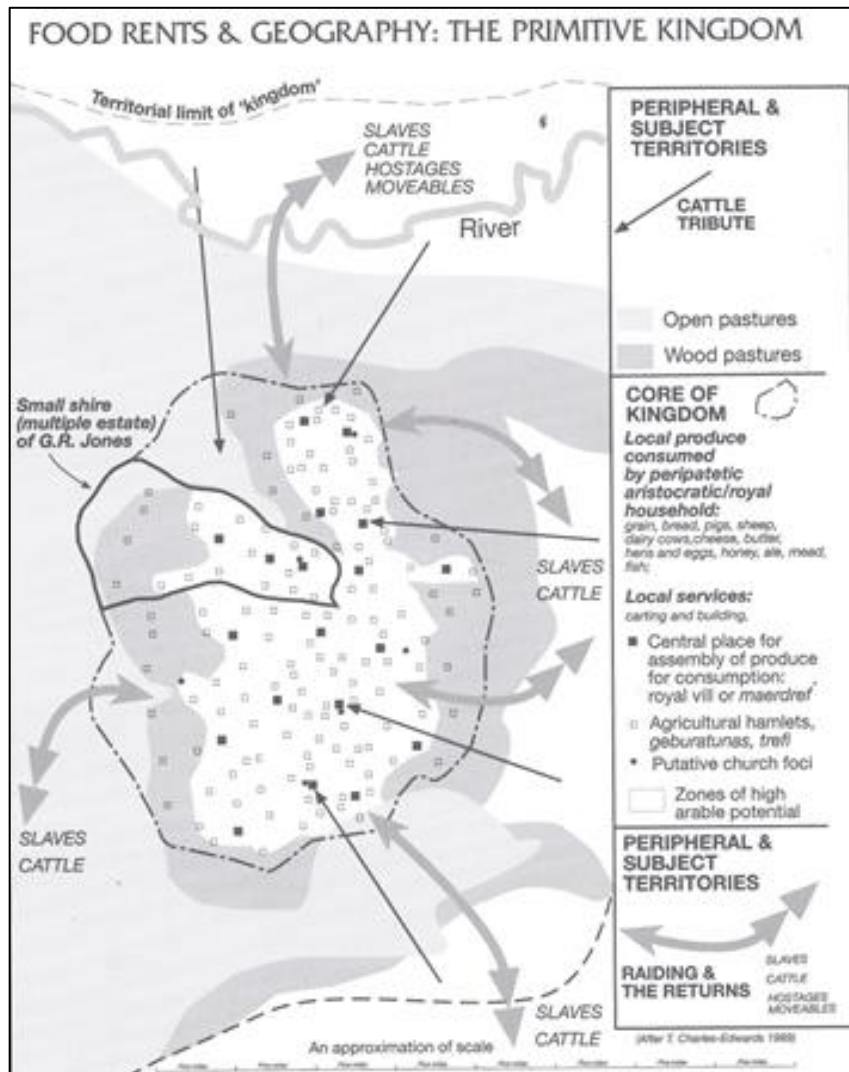


Figure 44: Roberts' food rents and geography, the primitive kingdom.<sup>610</sup>

<sup>608</sup> G. Jones, 'Multiple Estates and Early Settlement', in P. Sawyer (ed.) *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976), pp. 15-40. See also Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 11-14.

<sup>609</sup> S. Bassett, 'Medieval Lichfield: a topographical review', *Transactions of the South Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 22 (1981), pp. 114-115.

<sup>610</sup> B. Roberts, *Landscapes, Documents and Maps: Villages in Northern England and Beyond AD 900-1250* (Oxford, 2008), p. 165.

However, the archaeological evidence has not always supported this hypothesis and any synthesis, for example, between Roman or British estates and, later parish boundaries are difficult to prove. Even in places that indicate the possibility of continuity, and have been heavily researched and excavated such as Wharram Percy, evidence of this has been difficult to find.<sup>611</sup> The multiple estate model proposes that food and rents would have been extracted from outlying areas to the centre as described by Roberts.

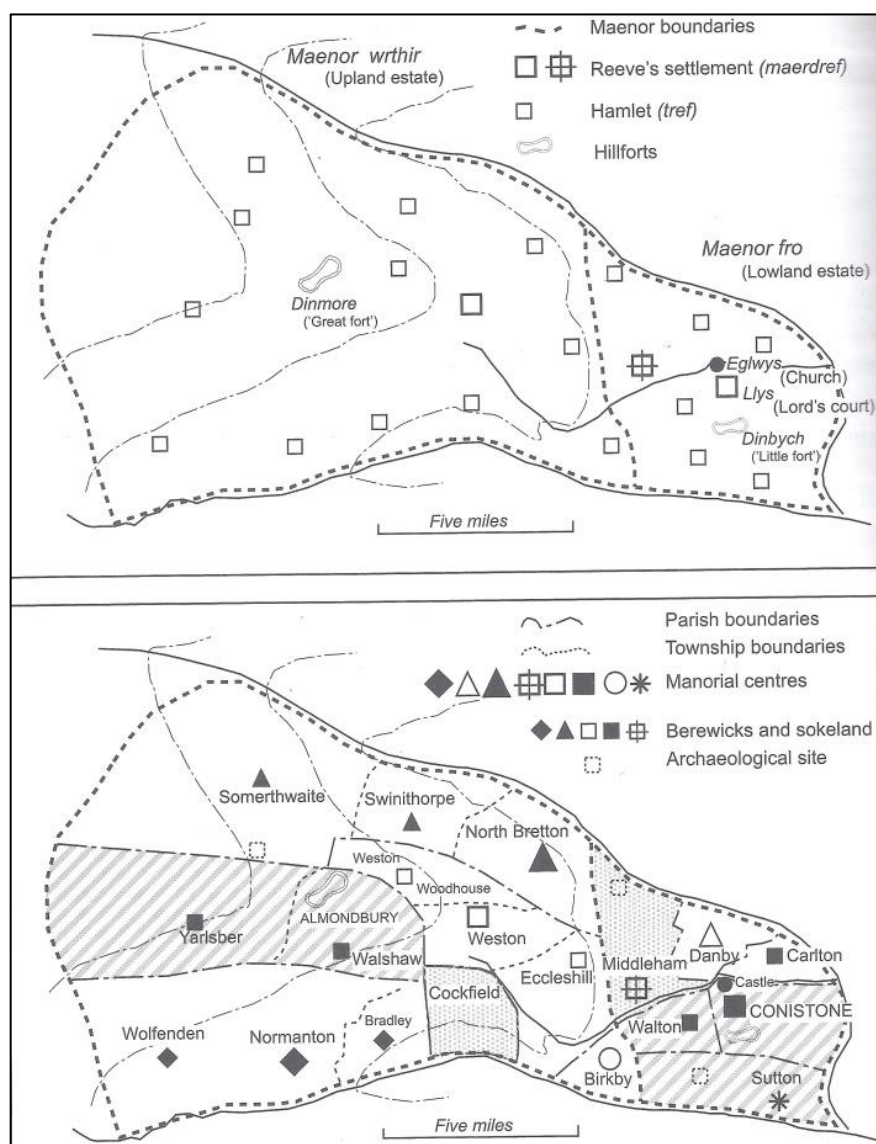


Figure 45: Roberts' and Wrathmell's multiple estate model.<sup>612</sup>

<sup>611</sup> R. Jones and M. Page, *Medieval Villages in an English Landscape* (Macclesfield, 2006), p. 227, and S. Wrathmall, 'Early Anglo-Saxon grazing', in S. Wrathmall, *A History of Wharram Percy and its Neighbours*, York Archaeological Publications, 15 (York, 2012), p. 82.

<sup>612</sup> Roberts, *Landscapes, Documents and Maps*, p. 164.

Great lords and their retinues will have also travelled from one property to another, peripatetic in effect, an itinerant court for at least some part of the year. Each holding supported the lord and their entourage but might also make suitable arrangements for renders to be sent to a centre, or from estate to estate. Thus places such as Cheswardine, OE *cese* 'cheese' + *worth*, the 'cheese making enclosure or farm', might have been a specialised centre that would send a food rent to a manorial centre, in this instance Eccleshall.<sup>613</sup>

This type of arrangement did not necessarily encourage maximum productivity and it may be that a rationalisation of resources and production was one of the prompts for the growth of smaller estates.<sup>614</sup> The next phase in the development of the rural economy followed what was a wider European trend from the ninth century onwards, a process whereby parcels of estates fragmented away from the larger estates, perhaps allocated to sons, given as marriage gifts, granted to retainers and increasingly granted to the Church. Again Roberts has described this, shown in figure 44. Blair has summarised the process thus:

'Big, multi-vill estates broke up into smaller, more tightly focused ones, intensified manorial exploitation gradually replaced food-render regimes; farmsteads coalesced into villages; systems of common agriculture developed; and peasants felt a heavier hand of lordship'.<sup>615</sup>

This development was seen across Europe and was accompanied by a dramatic growth in groups of small landowners.<sup>616</sup> The rule of thumb seems to be that the ninth century saw the start of the fragmentation of these large multiple estates and that this continued into the eleventh century.<sup>617</sup> This process can be identified through the holdings of the family of the Mercian earl Leofric who held fragmented estates holdings at Domesday across Staffordshire and beyond.<sup>618</sup>

<sup>613</sup> D. Horowitz, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* (Brewood, 2005), p. 190. Cheswardine, in Pirehill at Domesday and part of the Eccleshall estate, is now in Shropshire.

<sup>614</sup> In some parts of the country nucleation may also have been a factor, C. Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages* (London, 2003), p. 29.

<sup>615</sup> J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 370.

<sup>616</sup> Dyer, *Making a Living*, p. 30.

<sup>617</sup> Jones and Page, *Medieval Villages*, p. 64.

<sup>618</sup> P. Stafford, *The East Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1985), pp. 32-33. Hunt found good evidence of these post-Conquest estates being built upon pre-Conquest foundations, an indication that post-Conquest sources

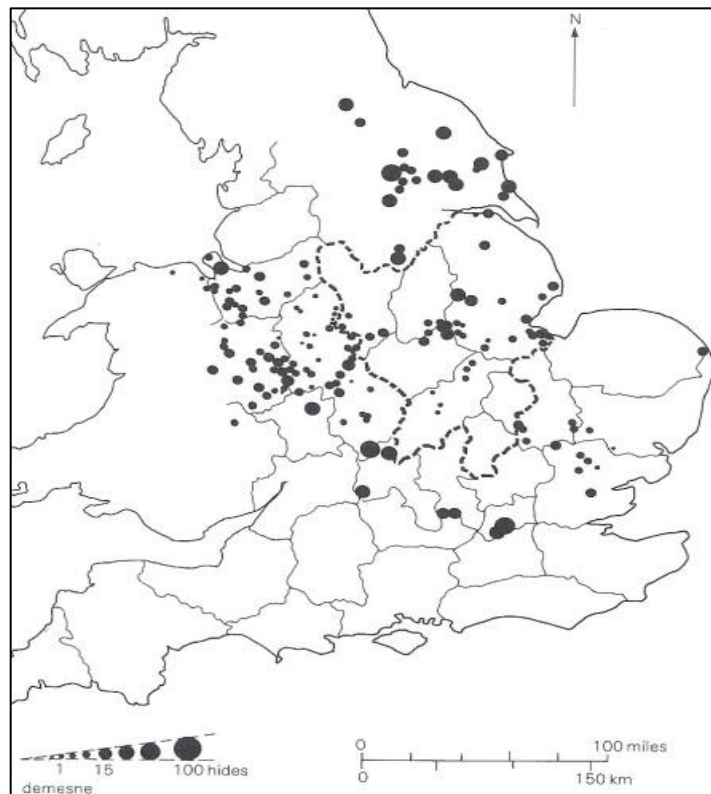


Figure 46: Lands of the Leofric family at Domesday.<sup>619</sup>

However, holdings may have split or expanded to take in further resources depending on the pressures on the estate and its lords. Discussing the Danelaw, Hadley writes:

‘The political background of the tenth century provides a convincing context for the creation of some of the large sokes; the annexation of disparate pieces of sokeland to a single estate centre would have substantially increased the value of that estate centre and would have made a very handsome reward for loyal service’.<sup>620</sup>

This is exemplified by the grant to Wulfsige *Maurus* (the Black) who in 942 was granted estates based upon Burton in Staffordshire, of which she says:

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may assist us. J. Hunt, *Land Tenure and Lordship in Tenth and Eleventh Century Staffordshire*, Staffordshire Studies, 4 (Keele, 1991-92), pp. 1-20.

<sup>619</sup> Stafford, *East Midlands*, p. 33.

<sup>620</sup> D. Hadley, ‘Multiple estates and the origins of the manorial structure of the northern Danelaw’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22.1 (1996), p. 7.

‘there is little reason to believe that they were dependant members of a single estate...the grant can be seen as the creation of a new multi-vill estate by the amalgamation of a number of separate small estates’.<sup>621</sup>

This serves as another reminder of the perils of viewing this development in a too deterministic and linear manner. No matter how tempting it is, the manors revealed by Domesday Book a little over a century later cannot all be seen as belonging to ancient estates and many must be the product of more recent changes. There was an active market in land in the period prior to the Conquest as numerous charters show but we should also consider that even the most powerful landholding families may have held land less securely than was once thought. As Baxter and Blair note, ‘there seems to have been a category of estates specifically reserved for the use of earls, and the majority of these were temporary loans held with office’.<sup>622</sup> Although hard to quantify, the disruptive effects of invasion, associated social collapse and resistance to that change, should be acknowledged.

### **Thegns and their estates**

As already alluded to, the growth of these smaller estates went in tandem with the evolution of a class of individuals that were granted land for the services they gave. There had long been a tradition of conferring land for military purposes, as a reward or with associated dues, but we begin to see the expansion of such practices for more bureaucratic services. Thus minor royal officials can be observed developing close associations with relatively small estates across the country becoming, in effect, residential local lords established in local communities. The will of Leofgifu (S.1521, AD 1035 x 1044) granted land in Essex and Suffolk and shows this growing class of specialist servant:

‘and I grant to Godric, my reeve at Waldingfield, the thirty acres which I have let to him. And the estate at Lawford to Æthelric my household chaplain and Ælfric (and) my servants who will serve me best. And Æthelric the priest is to

<sup>621</sup> Hadley, ‘Multiple estates’, p. 7.

<sup>622</sup> S. Baxter and J. Blair, ‘Land tenure and royal patronage in the early English kingdom: a model and a case study’, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 28 (2006), p. 20.

have one hide at Forendale. And I desire that all my men shall be free, in the household, and on the estate, for my sake and for those who begot me'.<sup>623</sup>

Godric was seemingly already resident at Waldingfield when the will confirmed the land to him. Likewise, in his will, Wulfric Spot (S.906, S.1536) confirmed a grant of land in Pirehill 'to my servant Wulfgar the estate at Balterley just as his father acquired it for him', suggesting that the position of a retainer might be hereditary.<sup>624</sup> The wills of the period show that thegns might have received land as a gift but also via inheritance, purchase or lease.<sup>625</sup> The growing numbers of local lords is reflected in the increasing numbers of charters and grants, but also in the numbers of buildings, halls and churches to be found from the ninth century onwards.<sup>626</sup>

In the eleventh-century legal text the *Gepyncðo*, thegnly status, was understood to have been reached once a man had acquired 'five hides of land of his own, a church, and a kitchen, a bell-house and a gatehouse, a seat and special office in the king's hall'.<sup>627</sup> This new class can be detected at several levels. For example, Wulfstan of Dalham (Suffolk), an agent of King Edgar held as much as 138 hides across numerous important estates with several churches.<sup>628</sup> There were, however, several ranks of the thegnly class, lords of a middling rank whose significance was local rather than regional, or others much lower down the hierarchy whose exact status is even harder to grasp, such as the nine thegns who, pre-Conquest, held Weston under Lizard (Staffordshire, the *west tūn*).<sup>629</sup> The manor at Weston had originally been formed out of the episcopal estate at Brewood.<sup>630</sup> This instance demonstrates that status could be shared, and to have come from rights as well as possessions, such as the right to carry arms or attend court. Lords of these smaller units of land were less likely to have been able to live off

<sup>623</sup> D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 77-78.

<sup>624</sup> Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, p. 49.

<sup>625</sup> L. Tollerton, *Wills and Will Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (York, 2011), p. 145. The conferring of land, to 'book' land, may also have granted away any later hereditary claims a family or kinship group may have had upon that land upon the death of the grantor, although there is a suggestion that only acquired land, not hereditary lands, could be transferred by charter.

<sup>626</sup> C. Lewis, P. Mitchell-Fox and C. Dyer, *Village, Hamlet and Fields: Changing Medieval Settlements in Central England* (1997, Macclesfield, 2001 edn), p. 87.

<sup>627</sup> D. Whitelock (ed. and trans.), *English Historical Documents*, 1: c. 500-1042 (1955, London, 1979 edn), p. 468 (no. 51). Here 'gatehouse' has been used instead of 'castlegate' as used by more recent scholars.

<sup>628</sup> Faith, *English Peasantry*, p. 155.

<sup>629</sup> This example was pointed out to me by A. Sargent: J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book: Staffordshire* (Chichester, 1976), 14:1.

<sup>630</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, pp. 569-570.



food renders and so it is more probable that they would have had a larger portion of land held in demesne.<sup>631</sup> Certainly not every manor would have the full range of resources and the sharing of certain assets between manors is reflected in the detached portions of later parishes such as those seen in Colton and Colwich.<sup>632</sup>

The findings of the Whittlewood Project (Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire) suggested that during the second half of the ninth century, there was a ‘village moment’ when nucleation took place at pre-village nuclei.<sup>633</sup> Nucleation in Staffordshire did not take place in a similar fashion. However, we can attribute to this process the growth in manorial complexes and churches, of which the desire to own was ‘ubiquitous across early medieval Europe’, and which ‘was now focused at a much more local level’.<sup>634</sup> At Raunds Furnell (Northamptonshire) the first burials in the churchyard occurred in the mid-tenth century. The suggestion there is that the church and churchyard were added ‘within a couple of decades of the establishment of the late Saxon manor’.<sup>635</sup> Traces of this ‘upgraded’ thegnly status can perhaps best be seen at Goltho (Lincs). Here,

‘Low status domestic settlement was superseded by the building of a new residential complex comprising successive halls and their attendant buildings around a courtyard area. From at least the tenth century, the main complex of buildings lay within a sub-rectangular enclosure, although the parish church lay outside the defensive circuit’.<sup>636</sup>

It is these rights and possessions and the internal investment in the manor that are crucial to identifying this group. The lord’s hall with its complex of buildings being one of the main signifiers of status, an outward symbol and statement of class, and although the full impact of manorial culture was to come, it is in the later early medieval period that we can identify its inception. Central places are mentioned in the

<sup>631</sup> Faith, *English Peasantry*, pp. 169-170.

<sup>632</sup> A. Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England: Life and Landscape* (Stroud, 1999), p. 84. The shared first element OE *col* ‘charcoal’ suggests a possible earlier relationship.

<sup>633</sup> Jones and Page, *Medieval Villages*, p. 101.

<sup>634</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 370.

<sup>635</sup> M. Audouy and A. Chapman, *Raunds, the Origin and Growth of a Midland Village A.D. 450-1500. Excavations in North Raunds, Northamptonshire 1977-87* (Oxford, 2009), p. 85.

<sup>636</sup> Reynolds, *Later Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 129.

documentation of the period, the will of Wulfwaru (S.1538) dating to 984x1001 decreed to her son Wulfmær, and Ælfwaru, her daughter that:

‘7 dælon hi þæt **heafodbotl** him betweonan’.

‘And they are to share the principal residence between them’.<sup>637</sup>

These centres with their halls, domestic living quarters, kitchens, sheds for specialised activities such as metal-working and weaving should be viewed as pre-Conquest entities and not simply as precursors to later developments. The legal text, the *Northleoda Laga*, a mid-ninth-century legal text informs us of the potential thegn that:

‘...if he prospers so that he possess a helmet and a coat of mail and a gold plated sword, if he has not the land he is a *ceorl* all the same’.<sup>638</sup>

Land qualification, church and hall went together, symbiotic symbols of authority and status, a topographical expression of power.

### **Methodology: an anatomy of a thegnly estate centre in Staffordshire**

These smaller thegnly units often remain elusive and difficult to define, but on the whole what is meant is a single estate confined to a specific location and one which will have had (for part of the year at least) a resident lord. This land unit is generally understood to have been large enough to have supported an extended family and peasantry and would, in many cases, become the manorial and parish structures that shaped the landscape for centuries to come.<sup>639</sup> These lords would have received land from royal or aristocratic landholders or from the Church.<sup>640</sup>

As with other aspects of this study, the focal point remains Pirehill Hundred but examples will be drawn from across Staffordshire and beyond to provide further context. Thegnly manors are often smaller units than the larger estates from which they

<sup>637</sup> Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp. 62-65.

<sup>638</sup> Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, p. 469 (no. 51b).

<sup>639</sup> On the use of maps as evidence for earlier settlement patterns see Roberts, *Landscapes, Documents and Maps*, pp. 124-150.

<sup>640</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 370, and Faith, *English Peasantry*, p. 155.

fragmented, such as the large ecclesiastical estate at Eccleshall or that attached to the *burh* of Stafford; these multiple estates are sometimes called ‘small shires’.<sup>641</sup> It is not the purpose of this section to reconstruct the great estates of Staffordshire, although they will be referred to in places.<sup>642</sup> And when we do, we should be mindful of over simplification. As Hadley has warned:

‘Through the apparent belief in a simple organisational past, the conflation of evidence and the insistence that everywhere between the estate centre and its furthest flung outlier must once have pertained to that estate, attempts to reconstruct early territorial organisation are prone to the projection of estates that may never have existed’.<sup>643</sup>

<sup>641</sup> Roberts, *Landscapes, Documents and Maps*, p. 152.

<sup>642</sup> For a Staffordshire example of reconstructing estates see Basset, *Medieval Lichfield*, pp. 93-121.

<sup>643</sup> Hadley, *Multiple estates*, p. 12.

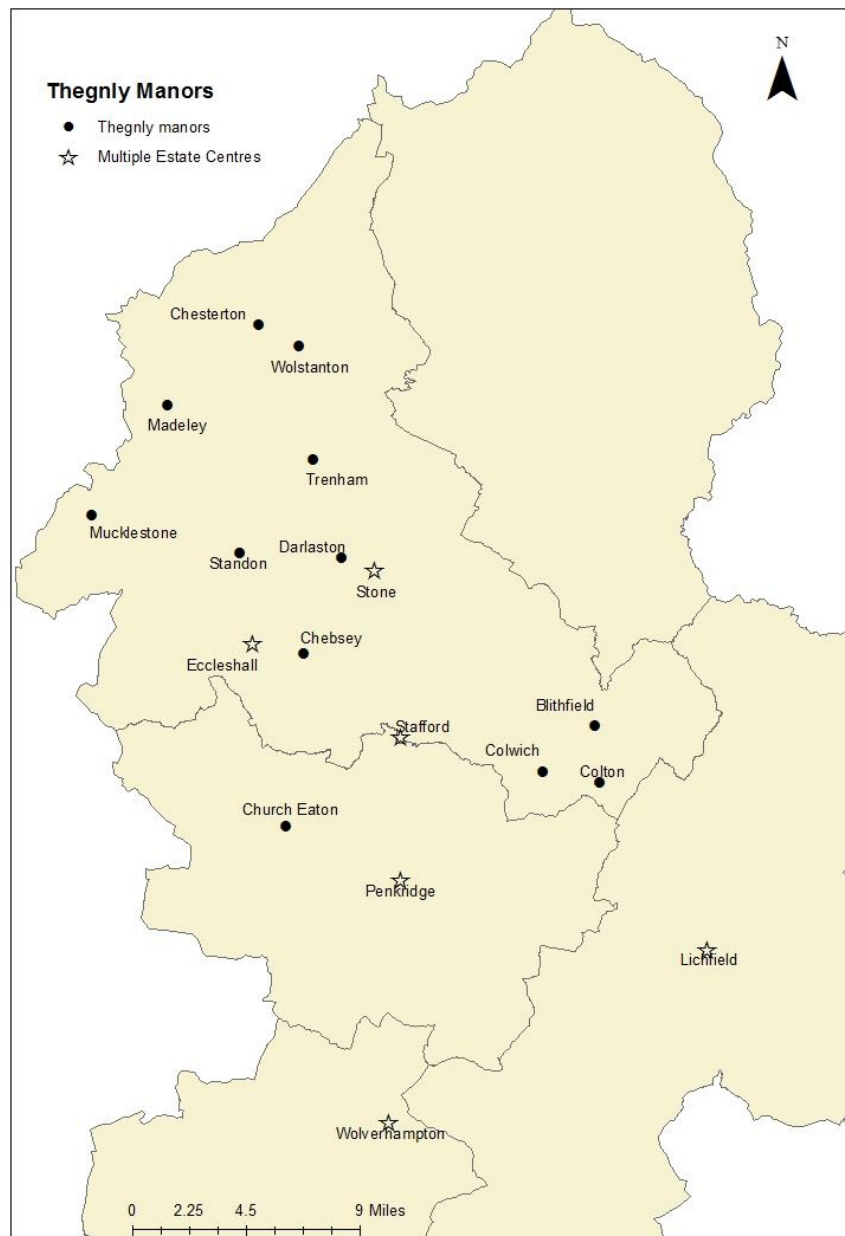


Figure 47: Thegnly estates mentioned in the text.

Thegnly holdings do not survive in the written record as well as the larger estates and where they do survive the main sources for their reconstruction are boundary clauses. Even for those estates for which we have boundary clauses (we have only two for Pirehill) these can be unsatisfactory since, by definition, they describe the edges of places not centres. The intention here is to look at the shape and form of these centres, the landscape morphology of thegnly estates, and to see if the shape and location can elucidate something about its early medieval past. This in turn may help to identify

such centres where the documentary evidence is lacking. Here the aim is to suggest a series of signifiers that *could* indicate a thegnly estate, what we might call the anatomy of a thegnly residence. This is not without problems but follows a methodological approach taken by others, such as Beresford, who in his seminal work on urban history gathered in ‘symptoms’ when evidence was scarce.<sup>644</sup> The proposal is that if enough of these ‘symptoms’ can be identified at a given site then this will be the best evidence we can have, short of excavation, for smaller estates. It must be admitted that exact chronologies are beyond us. Even with the helping hand of archaeology this is often problematic, settlements yield few datable finds and little stratigraphy.<sup>645</sup> Foundation moments often remain out of reach, settlements being ‘part of an ongoing continuum of *being*’ and are ‘rarely susceptible to the label of a single date’.<sup>646</sup> To complicate matters further there was, inevitably, over time, a wide divergence in the way land was held and how estates grew. This diversity and complexity is not one we should underestimate. An estate may have evolved over a period of time from the holdings of the great lords such as the King, Church or the Earls of Mercia or emerged as a local lord’s estate. Some may have exchanged between all of these and the progression was not always linear. Land for example could be granted back to the Church. The mid-eleventh-century will of Brihtmær of Gracechurch (London) granted land back to Christ Church, Canterbury, after the death of his wife, Eadgifu, and his sons.<sup>647</sup> Were we only to have the Domesday testimony for Darlaston then it would look like a church estate, and yet the charter and place-name evidence suggest several changes of hands in just over a century. This can be seen elsewhere; Flixborough (Lincolnshire), which ‘was an aristocratic estate centre marked by conspicuous consumption, it became monastic... it then became “secularized” in the late ninth and early tenth centuries’.<sup>648</sup> Nor will all estates have a direct trajectory from secular estate centre to manor and thence to parish. The evidence from Chesterton suggests that some will diverge from this unrealistically

<sup>644</sup> ‘When symptoms, rather than evidences, are in question there is room for disagreement between historians of towns, and it cannot be expected that all the towns on the Gazetteers will be accepted as plantations by all critical readers’. M. Beresford, *The Towns of the Middle Ages* (London, 1967), p. 380.

<sup>645</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements*, p. 3.

<sup>646</sup> Roberts, *Landscapes, Documents and Maps*, p. 122.

<sup>647</sup> S.1234, reference from Tollerton, *Wills and Will Making*, p. 142. The conferring of land, to ‘book’ land, may also have granted away any later hereditary claims a family or kinship group may have had upon that land upon the death of the grantor, although there is a suggestion that only acquired land, not hereditary lands, could be transferred by charter.

<sup>648</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements*, p. 100.

simplistic route. Given these complexities it has to be admitted that thoughts about early medieval place can seem very nebulous.

In order to explain the evidence of this period some historians, notably Chris Wickham, have even used examples that are ‘frankly speculative, indeed partially invented’.<sup>649</sup> Wickham uses his invented village of ‘Malling’ to test hypotheses and to set out the parameters of his discussion.<sup>650</sup> This paper aims likewise to set out the parameters of what might have been possible, even probable in some instances, but freely admits that each individual case (as with Beresford’s examples) is seldom proven beyond all doubt. Identifying the status of a settlement is ‘extremely difficult in practice’.<sup>651</sup> Likewise identifying a ‘thegnly moment’ in Staffordshire can, at best, be a series of reasoned proposals without the support of archaeological investigation.<sup>652</sup> Despite this there are causes to be optimistic. These propositions may only be just that, but they offer an opportunity to suggest a typology or anatomy of estate centres in Pirehill; a working hypothesis to say something about a place for which there is little archaeological evidence. The methodology for this research is set out below, touching upon how ‘place’ has been defined within the study and then working through the ‘symptoms’. These ‘symptoms’ begin with our written sources, the Domesday Survey and the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*. This is preceded by a brief discussion concerning developments of local churches, which it will be argued are one of our major indicators of thegnly status. The discussion will then move on to place-names with a particular emphasis on OE *tūn*. There then follows a series of case studies based upon analysis of the landscape of the sites flagged up by this evidence. The landscape summary concerns the morphology of estate centres and proposes that during this period these centres sought out watery edges, suggesting that water and watery landscapes (including meadow lands, rivers, flood plains etc.) are an integral ‘symptom’.

<sup>649</sup> C. Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean 400-800* (Oxford, 2005), p. 386.

<sup>650</sup> Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages*, pp. 428-434

<sup>651</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>652</sup> P. Everson and D. Stocker, *Wharram before the village moment*, in Wrathmall (ed.), *History of Wharram Percy*, pp. 64-172.

### **Defining the landscape: townships**

The definition of place, where something is and what it is, is an important and occasionally overlooked aspect of landscape studies. In this study the landscape division that will be used will be the parish, but with a particular emphasis on the subdivision of the parish, the township. Townships were the fundamental level at which local communities organised themselves and acted as basic units of governance.<sup>653</sup> The creation of these units can be attributed to the seventh to tenth centuries. Wrathmall used nineteenth-century township boundaries as part of his analysis of Wharram Percy and he suggests that ‘enough early 19<sup>th</sup>-century township boundaries follow courses established in the 7<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> centuries’ to make this a feasible prospect. He observed that,

‘though doubts about the simplicity, uniformity and universality of multiple estates may be well-founded, there seems to be a broader consensus on the antiquity of the building blocks of those estates, the vill or township units. Dawn Hadley for example has accepted that their origins are to be found long before their names are first recorded in Domesday Book, and has also accepted the need to use post-medieval evidence to recover their boundaries’.<sup>654</sup>

This study has used the township as the common element to describe places cartographically, that is to say, rather than have the single fixed data point for a place-name or place-name element they are interpreted as being attached to the township associated with that place-name, Wrathmall described their origins:

‘a community of some kind (large or small) was first named, and only later provided with a territory delineated by the known township boundaries. Alternatively, it may be that a community with a territory demarcated by the known township boundaries was at a later stage in its existence provided with the place-names which it now bears’.<sup>655</sup>

<sup>653</sup> A. Williams, ‘A Bell-house and a burh-geat: Lordly residences in England before the Norman Conquest’, in *Medieval Knighthood*, 4 (Woodbridge, 1992), p.240.

<sup>654</sup> S. Wrathmall, ‘Resettlement of the Wolds’, in S. Wrathmall, *A History of Wharram Percy and its Neighbours*, York Archaeological Publications, 15 (York, 2012), pp. 99- 101.

<sup>655</sup> Wrathmall, ‘Resettlement of the Wolds’, p. 102.

The advantage to this is that whilst a settlement may migrate over time the township boundary does seem to have been remarkably stable.

### **Ecclesiastical developments**

By the eleventh century we can see evidence of the growth in numbers of priests in the locality and a corresponding increase in burials at manorial churches, demonstrating both a greater importance being stressed upon local churches (and status for the thegnly class), and with that parochial independence.<sup>656</sup> But it would be a mistake to think of the growth of churches as a solely 'seigneurial' phenomenon. Minster churches that administered to large *parochia* also built churches or chapels within their jurisdictions.<sup>657</sup> Just as the Church, kings and nobles founded minster churches, so lesser lords later followed the fashion, a flourishing that has been described as being like 'mushrooms in the night'.<sup>658</sup> The aristocracy were still willing to invest in minsters such as the case of Wulfrun at Wolverhampton in the 990s and Wulfric Spot's Benedictine foundation at Burton. The evidence in wills of the period indicates that the old minsters were still the focal point to which piety and gifts were directed.<sup>659</sup> By the 940s, however, churches founded by local lords were in ascendancy.<sup>660</sup> It is a period when newly promoted lords focused inwardly and began to express their own identity, building manors to live in and churches to serve them, thus the development of local churches is fundamentally tied in with the growth of local lords and local communities, and the creation of the manor is central to understanding this creation of a sense of identity and belonging, as Faith has remarked:

'Without his defensible seigneurial centre, with its hall large enough to house under its roof his household and his followers, we could not recognize the medieval seigneur, and he certainly would not have been able to recognise himself'.<sup>661</sup>

<sup>656</sup> J. Blair (ed.), *Minsters and Parish Churches: The Local Church in Transition, 950-1200* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 7-8.

<sup>657</sup> J. Blair, 'Local churches in Domesday book and before', in J. Holt (ed.), *Domesday Studies* (Woodbridge, 1987), p. 271.

<sup>658</sup> R. Morris, *Churches in the Landscape* (London, 1989), pp. 140-167.

<sup>659</sup> Blair, *Domesday Studies*, p. 269.

<sup>660</sup> J. Blair, 'Secular Minster Churches in Domesday Book', in P. Sawyer (ed.), *Domesday Book a Reassessment* (London, 1985), p. 117.

<sup>661</sup> Faith, *English Peasantry*, p. 163.



We can be fairly certain that for the West Midlands as a whole, most ecclesiastical buildings would have been wooden at this date.<sup>662</sup> Subsequent rebuilding and continuous use has left little opportunity to identify them via archaeological means. Martin suggests that, when looking for manorial complexes, we should look for an enclosure, the ‘modest Late Saxon hall enclosures of one and two acres... were considered *burhs* by their owners, often abutting churchyards with private chapels’.<sup>663</sup> The difference between these foundations, apart from size and status, is that the manorial church seldom leaves a record of endowments before the eleventh century.<sup>664</sup> Thus we are left with Domesday and the *Taxatio* as indicators of status.

### **The Domesday Survey evidence**

The Domesday Survey is often the first port of call for research into the early medieval landscape:

‘The vast majority of rural settlements occupied in the British Isles during the Middle Ages first appeared in the landscape long before their earliest recorded documentation: for England the first significant historical horizon is Domesday’.<sup>665</sup>

For Staffordshire the survey shows a series of major landholders for the period before the Conquest. They include the King and the Church (Bishop at Lichfield). In addition, five earls are mentioned--Leofric, Ælfgar, Edwin, Morcar and Harold--who along with Godiva formed a family group. Harold, later King of England held land at Kings Bromley (Offlow Hundred), presumably given to him as part of his marriage to Ælfgar’s daughter. This estate seems to have been an important centre as it was where Leofric is said to have died in 1057.<sup>666</sup> Ælfgar, Leofric’s son, had withdrawn from active role at court by 1062, his sons were Edwin and Morcar. Morcar became Earl of

<sup>662</sup> Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, p. 102.

<sup>663</sup> E. Martin, ‘Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex: Medieval Rural Settlement in Greater East Anglia’, in N. Christie and P. Stamper (eds), *Medieval Rural Settlement, Britain and Ireland, AD 800-1600* (Oxford, 2012), p. 233.

<sup>664</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 372.

<sup>665</sup> G. Thomas, ‘The Prehistory of Medieval Farms and Villages: From Saxons to Scandinavians’, in Christie and Stamper (eds), *Medieval Rural Settlement*, p. 43.

<sup>666</sup> ‘Earl Leofric, that praiseworthy man of excellent memory, son of earl Leofwine, died at a good age in his township called Bromley’ (in propria uilla que dicitur *Bromleaga*), R. Darlington and P. McGurk, *Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1995), 2, pp. 582-583.

Northumbria and held but one estate in Staffordshire, that of Rolleston (Offlow Hundred), given in the survey as having a priest.<sup>667</sup> Earl Edwin occurs once as the previous owner of Bradley (Cuttlestone Hundred) whilst his father the previous Earl of Mercia is given 28 times. This anomaly has been explained by the suggestion that the ‘treachery’ of Earl Edwin led to him being expunged from the record.<sup>668</sup> Baxter and Blair suggest that some estates were reserved by the king as comital manors and as such could revert back to the king if someone fell out of favour rather than being kept in the hands of the family.<sup>669</sup> The Domesday Survey reveals that this family, the Earls of Mercia, as we might expect, held land that stretched across the whole of the region and beyond.

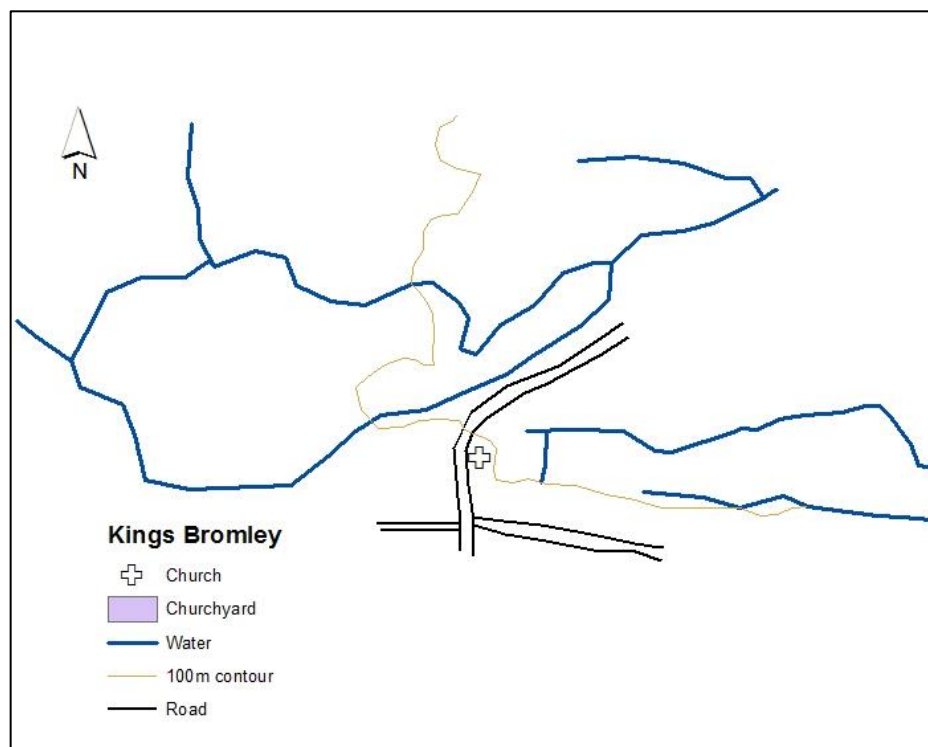


Figure 48: The manorial centre at Kings Bromley.

In the Survey potential thegnly estates can be implied if manors were independent entities and not part of multiple estates. This impression is emphasised if they were also held freely and had a priest or church. As such they show signs of fitting into the process described above. In addition the indications are that ‘at least three

<sup>667</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 10:3.

<sup>668</sup> C. Slade, ‘The Staffordshire Domesday’, in L. Midgley (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 6 (1958, London, reprint 1985), p. 6.

<sup>669</sup> Baxter and Blair, *Land tenure*, pp. 19-46.

quarters of all local churches were standing before the end of the eleventh century'.<sup>670</sup> Therefore we can be fairly confident that the presence of a priest or church can be a helpful diagnostic tool for researching early manors. Of those manors in the Domesday Survey that are given as having priests, the bishop held Eccleshall and (Great) Haywood (both Pirehill) and given as being held by 'St Chad'.<sup>671</sup> The bishop also held Baswich and Brewood (both in Cuttlestone). Fauld (Offlow) is given as being held by St Werburg's of Chester which had an earlier association with Hanbury (and Fauld).<sup>672</sup> Other large religious foundations are also mentioned, the canons at Lichfield (Offlow) and the collegiate church at Stafford (Pirehill), where the 'priests' of the borough are identified as owning 14 properties.<sup>673</sup> At the collegiate church at Penkridge nine clerics are given, and in Gnosall clerics are also remarked on.<sup>674</sup> Other collegiate churches are also revealed at Wolverhampton (with canons), and Tettenhall, which was held by the king and given in alms to Wolverhampton.<sup>675</sup> These churches were all Royal Free Chapels, a term coined in the thirteenth century and one which designated them as high-status churches. Royal Free Chapels have often been proposed as prime candidates for establishments that began life as minsters in the early medieval period. They frequently shown signs of some wealth by the time of Domesday with at least some liberty from episcopal interference (often carried forward into the Middle Ages). In effect it would appear that they were royal minsters. By no means all Royal Free Chapels had parochial responsibilities or rights, but of the 22 that did in England, a high concentration (Wolverhampton, Penkridge, Stafford, Tettenhall and Gnosall) are to be found in central Staffordshire.<sup>676</sup>

Other religious houses are recorded in Staffordshire at Domesday with priests also given. At Trentham (Pirehill), a manor held by the King, no previous owner is

<sup>670</sup> Morris, *Churches in the Landscape*, p. 147.

<sup>671</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 2:5; 2:10.

<sup>672</sup> The transfer of St Wærburh's relics, but may also refer to the later interim transfer of the bishop's see from Lichfield to Chester. Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 2:2.

<sup>673</sup> 13 prebendary canons are listed in a separate entry, Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, B:10; 2:16; 6:1.

<sup>674</sup> It is possible that the 9 clerics at Penkridge are also those referred to at Gnosall (both are Cuttlestone). Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 7:17; 7:18.

<sup>675</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 7:1; 7:5.

<sup>676</sup> J. Denton, *The English Royal Free Chapels, 1100-1300, a constitutional study* (Manchester, 1970), p. 23. Minster churches, be they royal or episcopal such as Eccleshall, acted as local focal points for religious activity and would have administered large parishes (*parochiae*), some five to fifteen times as large as a modern parish, see A. Thacker, 'Monks, preaching and pastoral care in early Anglo-Saxon England', p. 135, G. Rosser, 'The cure of souls in English towns before 1000', p. 268, both in . Blair and R. Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992).

given but a priest is mentioned.<sup>677</sup> Trentham was originally a pre-Conquest minster and later Augustinian House. It is associated, somewhat tentatively, with the eighth-century princess St Waerburh.<sup>678</sup> Offlow Hundred had four priests, two of which, Rolleston and King's Bromley, were held by the Earls of Mercia, while Chester Abbey held Fauld and Burton Abbey held Abbots Bromley. Abbots Bromley was given in 1002x1004 by Wulfric Spot to the Abbey at Burton (S.1536), this land had been granted to Wulfric by his mother Wulfrun. In 942 it was granted along with a series of other lands to Wulfsig *Maurus* (S.479). Another grant of (Abbots) Bromley (S.878) tells us that 'so it was held by Eadhelm, Alfred and Æthelwold just as Wulfsig the Black and Æscbyrht held it'. Hunt proposes that this clause indicates that Æscbyrht was a subtenant of Wulfsig and that Eadhelm, Alfred, and Æthelwold had likewise held that position.<sup>679</sup> Of those other estates connected to religious houses the priest mentioned at Walton (Stone) in Pirehill was likely to be associated with an early religious house there, whilst Hatherton was held by priests rather than having a priest present.<sup>680</sup> Earl Ælfgar held several of the remaining manors that had a priest present, at Mayfield (Totmonslow) and in Alveley, Sedgley and Worfield (all Seisdon).<sup>681</sup> At Sheriff Hales (Cuttlestone) we glimpse a disputed ownership. The entry tells us that Earl Ælfgar held it but 'the sheriff claims this manor for the king's revenue, the county testifies that Earl Edwin held it'. St Evroul's had one priest there.<sup>682</sup>

In Pirehill, if we subtract those royal and ecclesiastical manors that had priests, the Domesday survey indicates that Blithfield, Chebsey, Colton, Mucklestone, Standon, Stoke and Wolstanton are all candidates for further investigation as potential thegnly manors.

<sup>677</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 1:8.

<sup>678</sup> N. Tringham, 'Trentham', in N. Tringham (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 11 (2013), p. 258.

<sup>679</sup> Hunt, *Land Tenure*, p. 10, and C. Hart, *The Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands* (Leicester, 1975), p. 206.

<sup>680</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 7:13.

<sup>681</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 1:23; 8:3; 12:1; 9:1.

<sup>682</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 8:5.

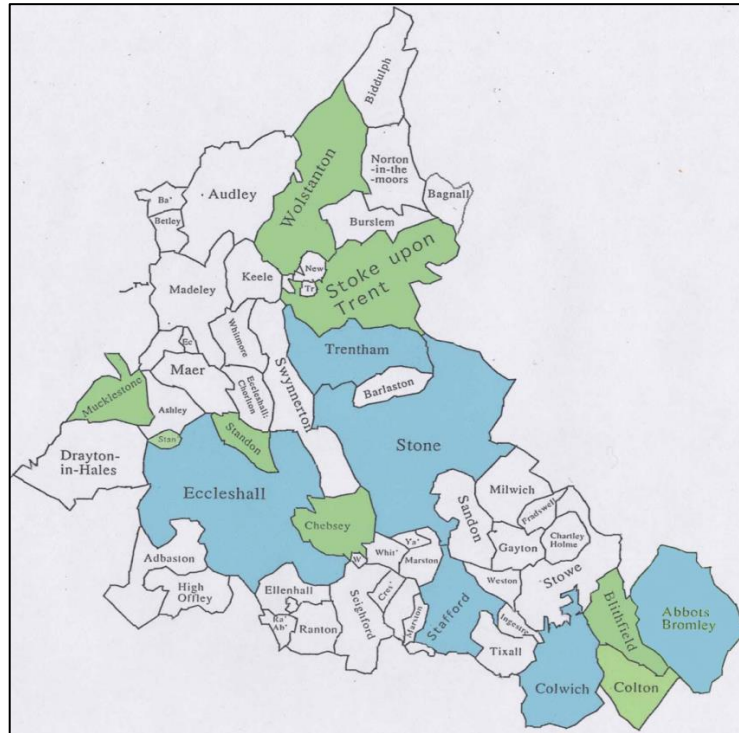


Figure 49: Parish map of Pirehill Hundred showing possible thegnly estates, in green, with priests at Domesday, blue being royal or ecclesiastical estates.<sup>683</sup>

Apart from the Church itself and the king, the role of major families like that of the family of Wulfric Spot in creating churches was important, but as we have seen, churches were also built for and by local thegns.<sup>684</sup> The Domesday Survey gives us a snapshot; it is a fixed point for us to work from. However, using Domesday evidence of a church or priest and giving the TRE owner of the manor is not entirely satisfactory as there are two decades between the two fixed points of the survey (TRE and TRW) , and as we have seen ownership might fluctuate. What is suggested here is that a freely held manor with church or priest indicates the possibility of a locally important central place. To summarise, we can see that from a total of 28 priests mentioned in the Domesday Survey for Staffordshire 40% are to be found in Pirehill and several of these have the potential to be ‘manorial’ in inception.<sup>685</sup>

<sup>683</sup> Base map taken from T. Cockin, *Old Parish Boundaries of Staffordshire* (Barlaston, 2005).

<sup>684</sup> Blair, ‘Secular Minster Churches’ p.104, and Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.3.

<sup>685</sup> This excludes priests at collegiate churches, the canons at Lichfield etc. See Slade, ‘Staffordshire Domesday’, pp. 19-20.

<b>Hundred</b>	<b>Priests</b>
Seisdon	6
Offlow	4
Cuttlestone	6
Pirehill	11
Totmonslow	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

Figure 50: Priests in each hundred.

That Pirehill is the area with most priests in the county is of interest and there may be a correlation between this and the fact that it is also the western part of Staffordshire that has the greater number of freely held estates at Domesday. It can also be seen that more estates were held freely in the west of the county than in the traditional ‘Mercian heartlands’ of the east near to Tamworth, Lichfield and Repton (Derbyshire).

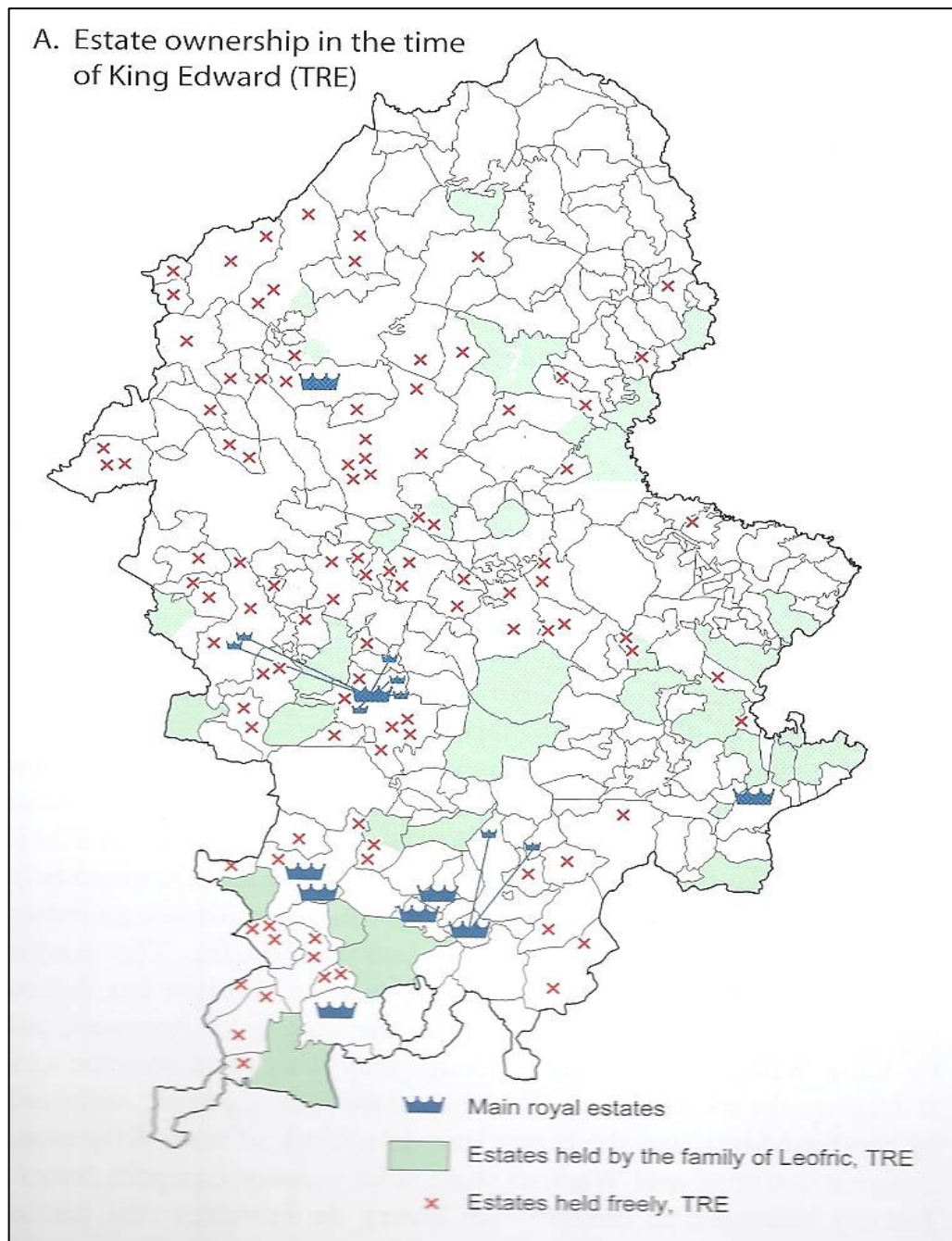


Figure 51: Estate ownership at the time of King Edward as shown in Domesday.<sup>686</sup>

### ***Taxatio Ecclesiastica***

Another later document that may help shed light on those estates with churches is the *Taxatio Ecclesiastica* (1291-1292) of Pope Nicholas IV. This is really the first source that gives us a reliable view of the medieval parochial structure of Staffordshire and was created to survey the spiritual and temporal incomes of the Church in England and

<sup>686</sup> D. Hooke, 'Anglo-Saxon Landscapes', in A. Phillips and C. Phillips (eds), *An Historical Atlas of Staffordshire* (Manchester, 2011), p. 33.

Wales. As with most sources, the *Taxatio* is partial in what it presents, as only those churches that had an income of more than six marks (£4) were assessed. Despite this it is an invaluable snapshot that, if approached cautiously, can be used to carefully project backwards. The Pirehill churches mentioned or indicated by Domesday have been set out in figure 52 with the 1291 returns.<sup>687</sup>

	£	s	d
Abbots Bromley	33	6	8
Eccleshall (prebend)	66	13	4
Blithfield	12	0	0
Chebsey	13	6	8
Colwich	26	13	4
Colton	omitted in return 1291		
Mucclestone	13	6	8
Stafford	58	17	0
Standon	6	13	4
Stone in Walton	40	0	0
Stoke on Trent in Penkhull	40	0	0
Stowe in Chartley	20	0	0
(not in DB)			
Trentham	13	6	8
Wolstanton	26	13	4

Figure 52: Pirehill 1291 returns.

These figures, 200 years after the Domesday Survey, show many of those manors that had priests were also amongst the most valuable in 1291. Stone, Eccleshall and Stafford remained important with high values. All three were also centres of large parishes as was Colwich. Three of the suggested manorial churches from Domesday (Chebsey, Blithfield and Mucklestone) have similar values. Standon's is lower and Colton does not feature at all, presumably because its value was too low. Wolstanton has a very high value. The one surprise here is possibly Trentham, its value is relatively low whilst Stoke's value is high. The exact relationship between Stoke, Trentham and the estate centred upon Penkhull is very difficult to untangle. This may have something to do with the post-Conquest foundation of a castle at nearby Newcastle and its impact on the local political geography.

<sup>687</sup> From J. Wedgwood, *Early Staffordshire History*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1916 (London, 1918), p. 187.



### Place-names: OE *tūn*

So far we have used written sources to identify places that might prove worthy of closer scrutiny. This section considers the most basic analysis of that information, the names people of the early medieval period gave to those places.

Place-name scholars have, broadly, divided place-names into two main groupings: topographical place-names which describe the geographical or physical appearance of a particular feature, and habitative names which have elements that are understood to describe the type of place, a *tūn* or *cot* etc. There is general agreement that topographical terms are often found at the centre of older multiple estates and are the earliest types of English place-names, and, that habitative names came into being as part of a separate naming phase. These later estates were ‘epitomized in Domesday’ where it can be seen that,

‘a group of small-scale landowners, whose only record is that left in the place-names, gave concentrated attention to their new lands, their pride in them was expressed in building activity, in churches and in memorial building’.<sup>688</sup>

In areas such as Staffordshire which are more or less aceramic in nature, place-names ‘might be the only detectible source of evidence’ for such settlements.<sup>689</sup> Some settlement elements such as *hām* are thought to have been in common usage before 730 whilst *tūn* is considered to come into general usage after 730.<sup>690</sup> A general understanding has emerged for many elements, for example: *worth* suggests an isolated farmstead or enclosure, whilst *tūn* and *cot* seem to suggest ‘groups of houses’ having had an earlier meaning of enclosure: *cot* indicates a cottage or small group of cottages, while *tūn* suggests something more substantial, ‘which often appear to have indicated the newly emerging villages as nucleation progressed’.<sup>691</sup>

<sup>688</sup> Stafford, *East Midlands*, p. 39.

<sup>689</sup> R. Jones and D. Hooke, ‘Methodological approaches to medieval rural settlement and landscapes’, in N. Christie and P. Stamper (eds), *Medieval Rural Settlement, Britain and Ireland, AD 800-1600* (Oxford, 2012), p. 38.

<sup>690</sup> B. Cox, ‘The place-names of the earliest English records’, *Journal of EPNS*, 8 (1975-1976), pp. 12–66.

<sup>691</sup> Jones and Hooke, ‘Methodological approaches’, p. 36.

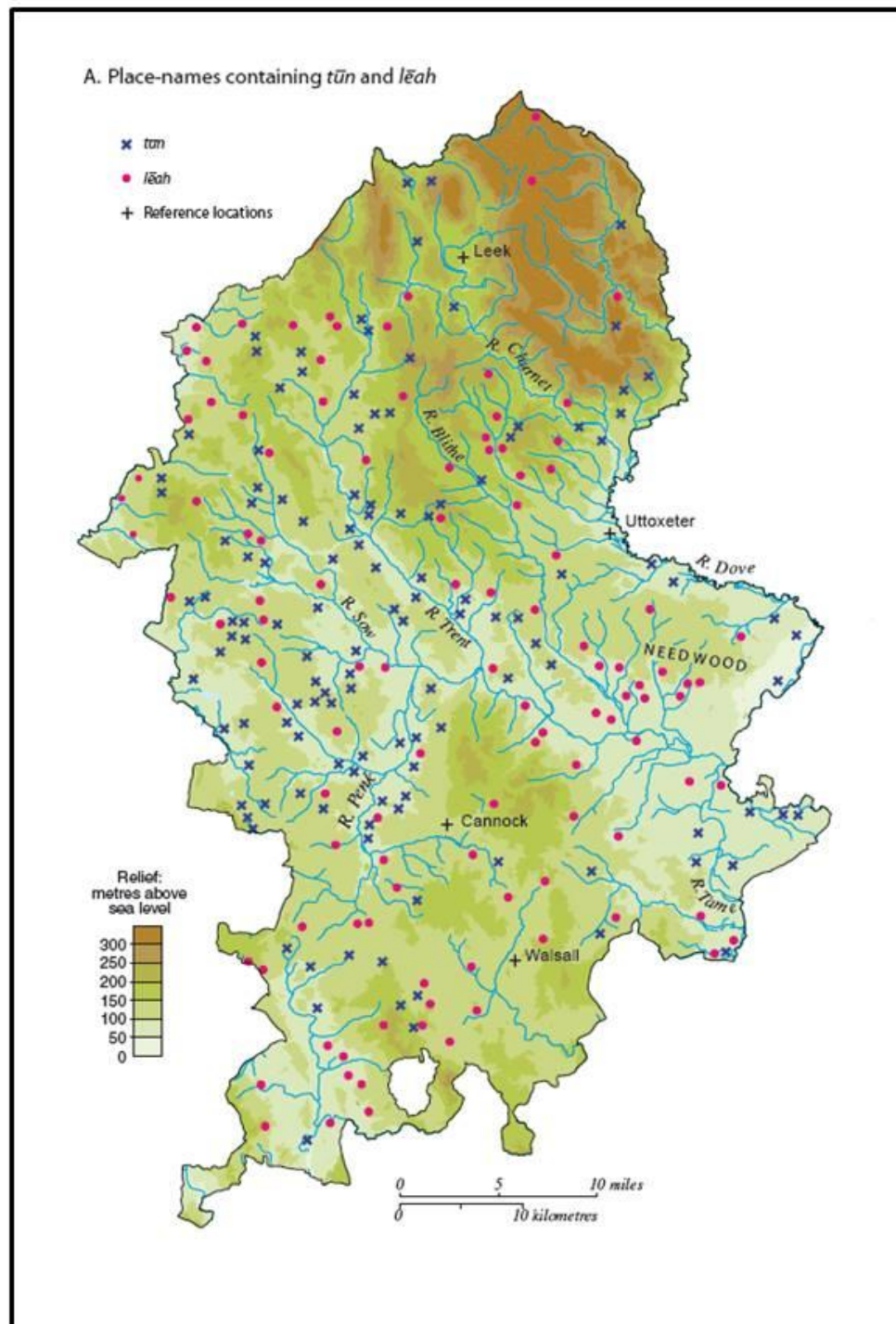


Figure 53: Distribution of place-name elements *tūn* and *lēah* in Staffordshire.<sup>692</sup>

<sup>692</sup> From Phillips and Phillips, *Historical Atlas*, p.29.

OE *tūn* has several meanings that seem to vary slightly through time but is generally understood to mean ‘an enclosure, a farmstead, an estate, a village’ although ‘the precise meanings of *tūn* at any one stage are not easy to determine’.<sup>693</sup> Thus every occurrence of *tūn* does not indicate a manor, nor can we say that all manors have a place-name that contains *tūn*. Chronologically the first usage of OE *tūn* was used to denote a fence, hedged enclosed piece of ground, a stockade or garden. This primary meaning can be found in several places in Staffordshire, and can more securely be taken to mean enclosure when associated with crops and domestic animals. The meaning of an enclosure giving a farmstead, hamlet or village evolved from this earlier understanding.

<sup>693</sup> This discussion, and quotes concerning OE *tūn*, are from A. Smith, *English Place-Name Society*, 26: *The Place-Name Elements Part Two JAFN-YTRI* (Cambridge, 1970), pp.188-198.

Place name	Enclosures
Ankerton	OE/ME <i>imker</i> 'bee-keeper' (other meanings possible)
Barton Under Needwood	OE <i>bere/bær</i> 'barley'
Burlaughton	OE <i>leac</i> 'leek'
Butterton	OE <i>butere</i> 'butter'
Calton	OE <i>calfra</i> 'calves' (other meanings possible)
Colton	OE <i>colt</i> 'colt' or OE <i>col</i> 'charcoal'
Dunstall (Tamworth)	OE <i>tun-stall</i> 'site of a farm'. Horovitz comments that 'the name is frequently found on the borders of ancient wastes, as if they had been outlying farmyards without homesteads'
Dunstall (Burton)	As above
Dunstall (Abbots Bromley)	As above
Dunstall (Wolverhampton)	As above
Dunstall (Trentham Priory)	As above and hermitage(?), well(?)
Garstones	OE <i>gat</i> or <i>geat</i> 'goat' or 'gate', <i>gærstun</i> (meadow, grassy enclosure, sometimes with the meaning grazing farm)
Gayton	ON <i>geit</i> 'goat' (other meanings possible)
Haunton	OE <i>haga</i> 'hedge, enclosure'
Hinksford	OE <i>hengest</i> 'horse' (other meanings possible)
Leighton	OE <i>leac</i> 'leek'
Marchington	OE <i>merece</i> 'smallage, wild celery' (other meanings possible)
Perton	OE <i>peru</i> 'pear'
Swynnerton	OE <i>swinford</i> 'pig ford'
Tunstal Sytch	OE <i>tun-stall</i> 'site of a farm' (see Dunstall above)
Tunstall (Adbaston)	As above
Tunstall (Stoke on Trent)	As above
Tunstead	OE <i>tun-stead</i> 'farmstead'

Figure 54: Places in Staffordshire with the meaning 'that which is fenced in' for OE *tūn*.<sup>694</sup>

OE *tūn* in combination with a directional element certainly seems to suggest a secondary development, it is implicit that they be east, west, north or south of something, and that something had to have been there in the first instance. Our understanding is that it is from central points, secular and ecclesiastical, that these places were named. So we can say that directional place-names were named from the outside not from within.<sup>695</sup>

<sup>694</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 87; p. 104; p. 160; p. 168; p. 170; p. 203; p. 240; p. 240; p. 240; p. 240; p. 240; p. 272; p. 273; p. 304; p. 317; p. 359; p. 382; p. 436; p. 526; p. 546; p. 546; p. 546; p. 546. The examples show several places that match this understanding, those containing OE *tun-stall* 'site of a farm'.

<sup>695</sup> R. Jones, 'Directional names in the early medieval landscape', in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds), *A Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, 2012), pp. 196-210.

Place name	Other
Aston (Stone)	OE <i>east</i> 'east'
Aston (Madeley)	OE <i>east</i> 'east'
Aston (Claverley)	OE <i>east</i> 'east'
Aston, Little	OE <i>east</i> 'east'
Aston, Wheaton	OE <i>east</i> 'east'
Astonsitch	OE <i>east</i> 'east'
Essington House Farm	OE <i>east</i> 'east', with OE <i>hean-tun</i> 'so east tun or high ground'
Middleston	'middle'
Middleton	'middle' (between Netherton and Overton)
Middleton Green	'middle'
Netherton (Hammerwich)	'nether'
Netherton (Tinacre Hill)	'nether'
Nethertown	'nether'
Norton Canes	OE <i>norð</i> 'northern'
Norton Green (Brown Edge)	OE <i>norð</i> 'northern'
Norton Green (Brownhills)	OE <i>norð</i> 'northern'
Norton in the Moors	OE <i>norð</i> 'northern'
Norton, Cold/Bridge	OE <i>norð</i> 'northern'
Orton	OE <i>ofer</i> 'upper'
Overton (Alrewas)	OE <i>ofer</i> or <i>uferra</i> 'ridge' or 'higher'
Overton (Checkley)	OE <i>ofer</i> or <i>uferra</i> 'ridge' or 'higher'
Overton (Hammerwich)	OE <i>ofer</i> or <i>uferra</i> 'ridge' or 'higher'
Sutton (Claverley/Maddock)	OE <i>suð</i> 'southern'
Sutton (Market Drayton)	OE <i>suð</i> 'southern'
Sutton (Newport)	OE <i>suð</i> 'southern'
Weston	OE <i>west</i> 'western'
Weston Coyney	OE <i>west</i> 'western'

Figure 55: *Tūn* with directional elements.<sup>696</sup>

Other place-names such as Byanna immediately north of Eccleshall gives the meaning 'beyond the river', which implies naming from 'this side of the river' at a central place which in this instance was the large estate centre at Eccleshall.<sup>697</sup> These directional names are found with other elements but 'by far the most common formation was with *tūn*'.<sup>698</sup>

It appears fairly clear that *tūn* became commonly used by the ninth century and place-names that have a personal name followed by a second element, especially *tūn* or *lēah*,

<sup>696</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 94; p. 94; p. 94; p. 94; p. 94; p. 94; p. 249; p. 388; p. 388; p. 389; p. 406; p. 406; p. 406; p. 413; p. 414; p. 414; p. 414; p. 414; p. 423; p. 425; p. 425; p. 425; p. 523; p. 523; p. 523; p. 568; p. 569; p. 569; p. 569; p. 569; p. 570.

<sup>697</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 168.

<sup>698</sup> R. Jones, 'Directional names', p. 196.

can be considered as descriptors of a settlement. It is a complex picture, but date-wise we can understand *tūn* as having come into usage during the later early medieval period, Gelling suggested the period immediately prior to the Conquest.<sup>699</sup> A *tūn* might refer to a new foundation but equally the association with an individual at a point in time could have led to the place-name 'x's *tūn* becoming fixed. A gathering of the notable *tūns* of Rolleston and Stretton out of Burton, Barton from Tatenhill and Marchington out of Hanbury were all estates that were granted to Wulfsgie the Black. He was by no means a small landowner but this collection of places may have served another purpose as he acquired 'a convenient bundle of lands that could be dispersed by him among his retainers'.<sup>700</sup>

Place name	Female name	Male name
Adbaston		Eadbald
Admaston		Eadmund/Eadmod
Almington		Alhmund
Alstone		Ælfred
Alton		Ælfa
Amerton		Eanbriht/Eanbeorht
Amington		Earma/Eamma etc.
Ankerton		Emerca(?), bees(?), ancor(?)
Apeton		Ab(b)a
Barlaston		Beornwulf
Barton		Beorht-
Bedintun		Beda
Beeston Tor		Bøsi(?), <i>beos</i> (?) coarse grass, <i>beo</i> (?) bumblebee
Beighterton		Beorhtthere(?), <i>beg-porn</i> (?)
Billington		Billa(?)
Bilson		Bil(l)/Bildr
Bobbington		Bubba
Branston		Brant
Brineton		Brun(a)/Bryni
Broughton	Hereburh(?), army ( <i>here</i> )	
Burouestone		Burgwine/Burgwulf(?), stone(?)
Burston		Burgwine, Burgwulf(?)
Catton		Catt/a(?), <i>catt</i> (?)
Chillington		Cilla(?), <i>cild</i> (?), <i>cild</i> (?)
Codyngton		Codda
Cotwalton		Cotta(?), <i>Cot</i> (?) (cottage), <i>wælle</i>
Croxton		Croc
Cuttesdon		Cutt/ <i>Cuþ</i>
Darlaston		Deorlaf

<sup>699</sup> M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (1978, Chichester, 2010 edn), p.185.

<sup>700</sup> Hunt, *Land Tenure*, p. 11.

Darlaston		Deorlaf
Denstone		Dene/Dane
Derrington		Dod(d)a
Dudmaston		Dudeman
Dunston		Dunn, <i>dunn</i>
Ecton, Ecton Hill		Ecca
Ellastone		Eadlac/Æpelac
Ellerton Grange		Æpelheard
Elston		Ælf
Enson		Ean
Essington		Esne, Esne - often a high ranking name, also
	servant, young boy, and	<i>inga</i>
Foston		Fot/Farulf/Fotr
Gayton		Gæga(?), <i>gat</i> (?)
Gunstone	Gunni	
Harlaston		Heoruwulf/Heorulaf
Haunton		Hagona/Hagene, <i>haga</i> (hedge, enclosure)
Hextons Farm		Heahstan, <i>hæcc</i> (?)
Hilderstone		Hildewulf
Hinksford		Hengest/Hynca, hengest (horse)
Ketelbernestona		Ketilbiðrn
Kibblestone		Cybbel
Kinvaston		Cynewald
Kniveden	Cengifu	
Knutton		Cnut(?), <i>cnotta</i> (a knot, a hillock)
Lodyngton		Luda
Loynton		Leofa
Ludstone		Hlud
Mucklestone		Mucel
Ogley Hay		Hocca, Occa, Ocga, Ogga
Oldington		Alda, and <i>ing</i>
Olton		Alda
Orbeton, Herbeton		Ordbriht
Oulton (Stone)		Alda, and <i>ing</i>
Oulton, Upper and Lower		Alda, and <i>ing</i>
Packington		Pac(c)a, <i>ing</i>
Rodbaston		Redbeald
Rolleston on Dove		Hroðwulf, Hróðulfr
Scropton		Skropi
Stallington		Stæl
Tillington		Tilli
Tipton		Tibba
Werrington		Wer
Whiston		Hwit, Witi
Whiston Eaves		Hwit, Witi(?), <i>hwit</i> (?), <i>efes</i> (?)
Whittington		Hwita(?), <i>hwit</i> (?), <i>ing</i> (?)
Whittington		Hwita(?), <i>hwit</i> (?), <i>ing</i> (?)
Whittington		Hwita(?), <i>hwit</i> (?), <i>ing</i> (?)
Wigginton		Wicga

Wilbrihton	Wilbriht
Winnington	Wynna(?), <i>ing</i>
Wobaston	Wigbald
Wolgarston	Wulfgar
Wollaston's Coppice	Wulflac
Wolstanton	Wulfstan
Wolverhampton	Wulfrun,
a noble woman	
Woollaston	Wulflaf
Worston	Wilfriþ(?)
Wulredeston	Wulfræd
Wulverdistone	Wulfheard

Figure 56: Personal names with OE *tūn* in Staffordshire.<sup>701</sup>

Gelling proposes that personal names coined with *tūn* were formed at the time of the granting of land to a specific individual:

‘... are we justified in inferring...that all the place-names which have meanings like ‘*x’tun*, *x’s byrig*, *x’s worth*, *x’s cot* arose from the granting by a king, nobleman or bishop of a viable estate to a man or woman who was not a peasant farmer? I think we are’.<sup>702</sup>

Gelling’s assertion is a helpful one, and one that we can develop. OE *tūn* could denote ‘a major centre, probably already looking like a village by 1086, with a big home farm, maybe a church, perhaps a common field system’, as well as a smaller ‘little valley farm’.<sup>703</sup> In these instances it may simply be that the lowest common denominator was ‘their buildedness’.<sup>704</sup> Thus these places were marked as a *tūn* not because of their size, or the moment they became manors or villages, but because of their appearance, the structures and associated components of such places. This interpretation of

<sup>701</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 81; p. 81; p. 83; p. 84; p. 84; p. 85; p. 86; p. 87; p. 88; p. 101; p. 104; p. 110; p. 111; p. 112; p. 120; p. 120; p. 133; p. 145; p. 149; p. 162; p. 163; p. 180; p. 190; p. 201; p. 218; p. 221; p. 224; p. 224; p. 227; p. 228; p. 239; p. 241; p. 244; p. 246; p. 246; p. 247; p. 248; p. 249; p. 262; p. 273; p. 288; p. 300; p. 304; p. 306; p. 315; p. 317; p. 340; p. 341; p. 346; p. 349; p. 350; p. 367; p. 373; p. 375; p. 402; p. 418; p. 419; p. 421; p. 422; p. 424; p. 424; p. 426; p. 462; p. 463; p. 480; p. 506; p. 538; p. 539; p. 568; p. 572; p. 572; p. 574; p. 574; p. 575; p. 576; p. 577; p. 580; p. 582; p. 584; p. 584; p. 585; p. 585; p. 590; p. 592; p. 594; p. 594.

<sup>702</sup> Gelling, *Signposts*, p. 184.

<sup>703</sup> R. Faith, ‘*Tūn* and *lēah* in the rural economy’, in R. Jones and S. Semple (eds), *A Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England* (Donington, 2012), pp. 238-242.

pp. 239-240

<sup>704</sup> Faith, ‘*Tūn* and *lēah*’, pp. 239-240



‘buildedness’, coincided with manorialisation and so *tūn* came to mean ‘a private and defensible space fortified with a palisade of some kind’.<sup>705</sup>

Wrathmell sees the use of *tūn* and other habitative place-names as indicative of ‘the granting away of chunks of territory that had been part of the core’.<sup>706</sup> If this is the case then they in themselves become a diagnostic tool of the process we are wishing to observe.

### Case studies

This next section will investigate individual places that may have been thegny manors as indicated by the sources examined above. They have all been shown to have either a pre-Conquest charter, or via the Domesday Survey that they were held freely and had priests.<sup>707</sup> The second part of these case studies will go on to suggest that a particular landscape was favoured during the early medieval period and that this typology can in itself become a diagnostic tool. It is clear that in some instances the landscape evidence is strong for some sites (Chebsey, Wolstanton etc.) and more challenging in others (for example Colton). Nonetheless it is hoped that it will become apparent that there is good evidence that the approach reveals something about these early manors.

### Darlaston

Darlaston is one of two examples in Pirehill of a manor with surviving pre-Conquest charter evidence.<sup>708</sup> Darlaston first occurs in a charter of 956 (S.602) from King Eadwig to Æthelnoth (minister) granting land at *Deorlafestune*, giving OE personal name *Deorlaf*’s *tūn*.<sup>709</sup> An Æthelnoth is seen to attest several charters between 931 and 934, and again between 941 and 948. Despite the relatively plentiful charter material of the late 940s and early 950s, no minister uses the name until 956. Of this Æthelnoth, the *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England* says:

‘It is just about within the bounds of decency to suggest that these all represent one man who managed to acquire a healthy portfolio before forfeiting it (or

<sup>705</sup> Faith, *English Peasantry*, p. 163.

<sup>706</sup> Wrathmell, ‘Resettlement of the Wolds’, p. 102.

<sup>707</sup> Church Eaton is used here as it highlights many of the general points being made here in a single example.

<sup>708</sup> Excluding mentions without boundary clauses for Cotwalton near Stone, and a possible reference to Eccleshall mentioned in the will of Wulfric Spot.

<sup>709</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 224.

some of it) to the king some time before 971. However, the identification is made wobbly by the hiatuses in attestation, and it is more likely that one Æthelnoth was at court until 948 and two or more others were active (though not at court) thereafter'.<sup>710</sup>

This Æthelnoth is presumably the second of the two suggested, a minister in the service of Eadwig. The grant reads:

‘I Eadwig, king of the Angles and governor and ruler of all the land of Britain [have given] to a certain faithful thegn of mine whom some call by the well-known name of Æthelnoth some portion of land in a place called *Deolavestun*, that he may have and possess it as long as he lives and after his time may leave it to whatsoever heir he will for an eternal inheritance. Let then the aforesaid land be free from worldly hindrance together with all things duly belonging to it, fields, pastures, meadows, woods, without (except) military service and the construction of bridge or fort’.<sup>711</sup>

The nature of the grant is interesting: Æthelnoth is free to do with the land as he sees fit although he owes military obligations which is fairly typical of these types of grant and his status.

<sup>710</sup> <http://www.pase.ac.uk> (08/09/2015).

<sup>711</sup> C. Bridgeman, *Staffordshire Pre-conquest Charters*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1916 (London, 1918), p. 96.

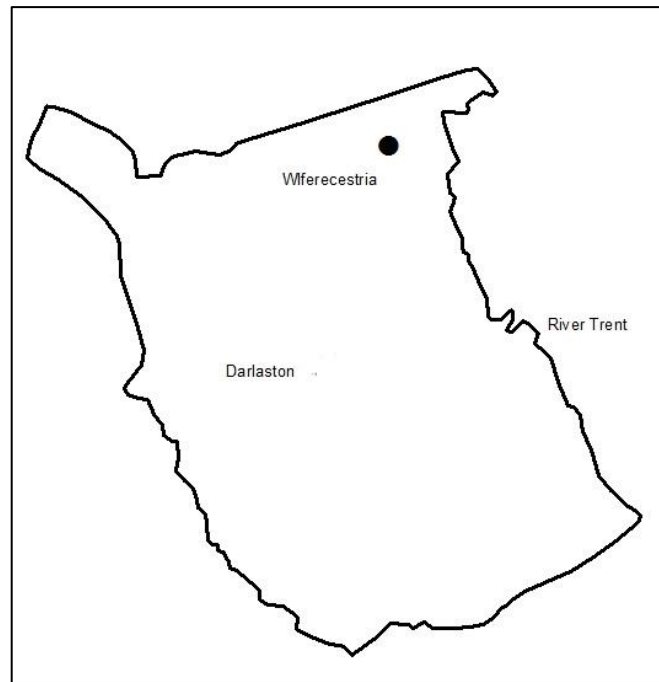


Figure 57: Darlaston township which follows the boundaries of a charter of 956.<sup>712</sup>

Darlaston was granted, nearly half a century later by Wulfric Spot to Burton Abbey (S.906 and S.1536) and so had quickly come into the hands of the largest most powerful family in tenth-century Mercia. Within the bounds of the land granted is Bury Bank, referred to as *Wlferecestria* 'Wulfhere's castle or fortification'.

Darlaston is shown to have six acres of meadow at Domesday, presumably near the river Trent, when it was held by the Abbey at Burton.<sup>713</sup> The site of the manor is difficult to locate but seems to have been below Bury Bank at the junction on the major north south axis (the present A34) and a major route west to Wales or Chester.

<sup>712</sup> Adaptation from D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire: the Charter Evidence* (Keele, 1983), p.89.

<sup>713</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 4:6.

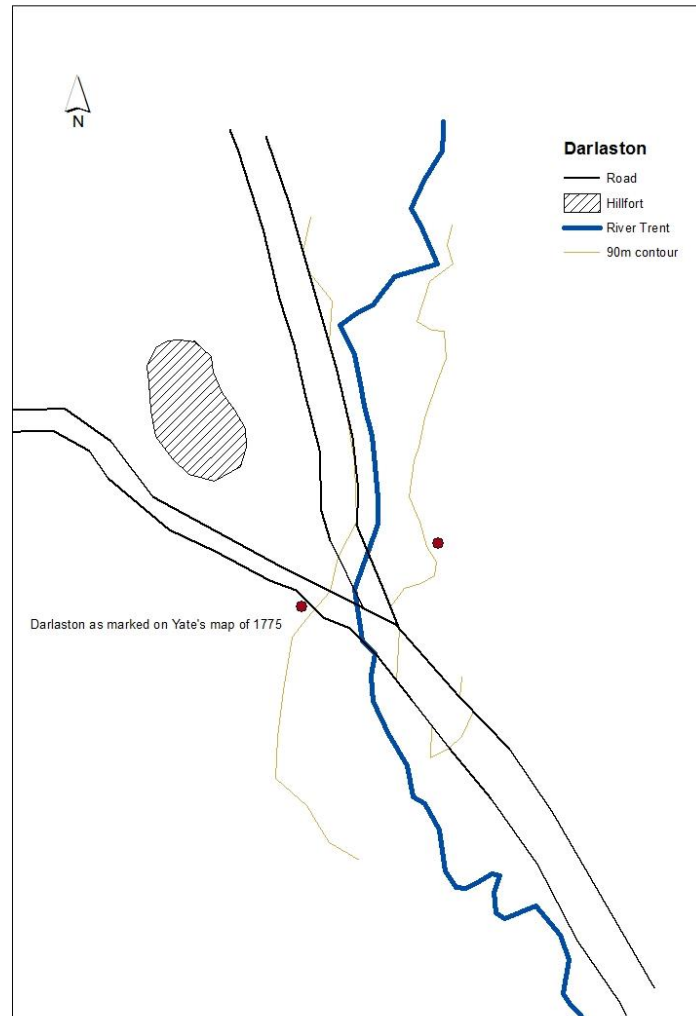


Figure 58: Potential sites for a Darlaston manorial centre.

It is difficult to say for certain whether Darlaston was ever the residence of Æthelnoth or Wulfric, it seems more likely it was sublet, possibly to a retainer. The manor itself carries the names of a man called *Deorlaf* and we can be fairly certain that it had been called that for some time prior to the grant to Æthelnoth, and we might assume that this *Deorlaf* had been resident there at least for some part of the year for his name to have become attached to the place and for it to remain ascribed to it. Though not proven, a tentative date range of 850-950 for a *Deorlaf* being associated with a *tūn* here is not beyond the realms of possibility, given the charter evidence pre-dating the first charter and fitting into an understanding of when the second *tūn* element came into general usage in this region.

### ***Madeley***

Madeley is the only other place in Pirehill with a charter and boundary clause. It is first mentioned in a charter of King Edgar in 975 (S.801), which granted land to Æthelwold, bishop of Winchester. By the time of the Domesday Survey it was held by Wulfgeat of Robert of Stafford, and Swein held it TRE.<sup>714</sup> Wulfgeat is another possible member of the wider kinship group associated with Wulfrun and Wulfric discussed in chapter five.<sup>715</sup> This local *Wulf* dimension is strengthened by the reference to a tumulus near the village in the thirteenth century named *Wolselowe* after OE personal name Wulfside.<sup>716</sup> Madeley itself is a compound of the personal name OE *Mada* with OE *lēah* (clearing), giving Mada's clearing.<sup>717</sup> Tringham gives another possible meaning, suggesting the first element maybe OE *mæthel*, meaning assembly point.<sup>718</sup> The charter of 975 mentions in the boundary clause a place called *on witenalege*, 'woodland clearing of the witan or counsellors'. Hart places this meeting place at the south-west of Wrinehill Wood, where the three counties of Cheshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire meet.<sup>719</sup>

Of Æthelwold, Sawyer wrote that he had a practice of obtaining former monastic sites, 'no doubt with a hope of restoring them', however, at Madeley, 'there is no evidence for an earlier religious community'.<sup>720</sup> In landscape terms, the church sits on a platform with a 105m contour overlooking the river Lea.

<sup>714</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 11:20.

<sup>715</sup> N. Tringham, 'Madeley', in N. Tringham (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 11 (2013), p. 175.

<sup>716</sup> A *Wilburh* (OE female personal name) is referenced in "on wilburge wege", that went past the church in S.801, and specifically in Tringham, 'Madeley', who also mentions *wierdes ford* from the OE personal name *Wigheard*, p. 168.

<sup>717</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 380.

<sup>718</sup> Tringham, 'Madeley', p. 168.

<sup>719</sup> Hart, *Early Charters*, p. 95.

<sup>720</sup> P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II: The Charters of Burton Abbey* (Oxford, 1979), p. 36 and n. 1, and Tringham, 'Madeley', p. 168.

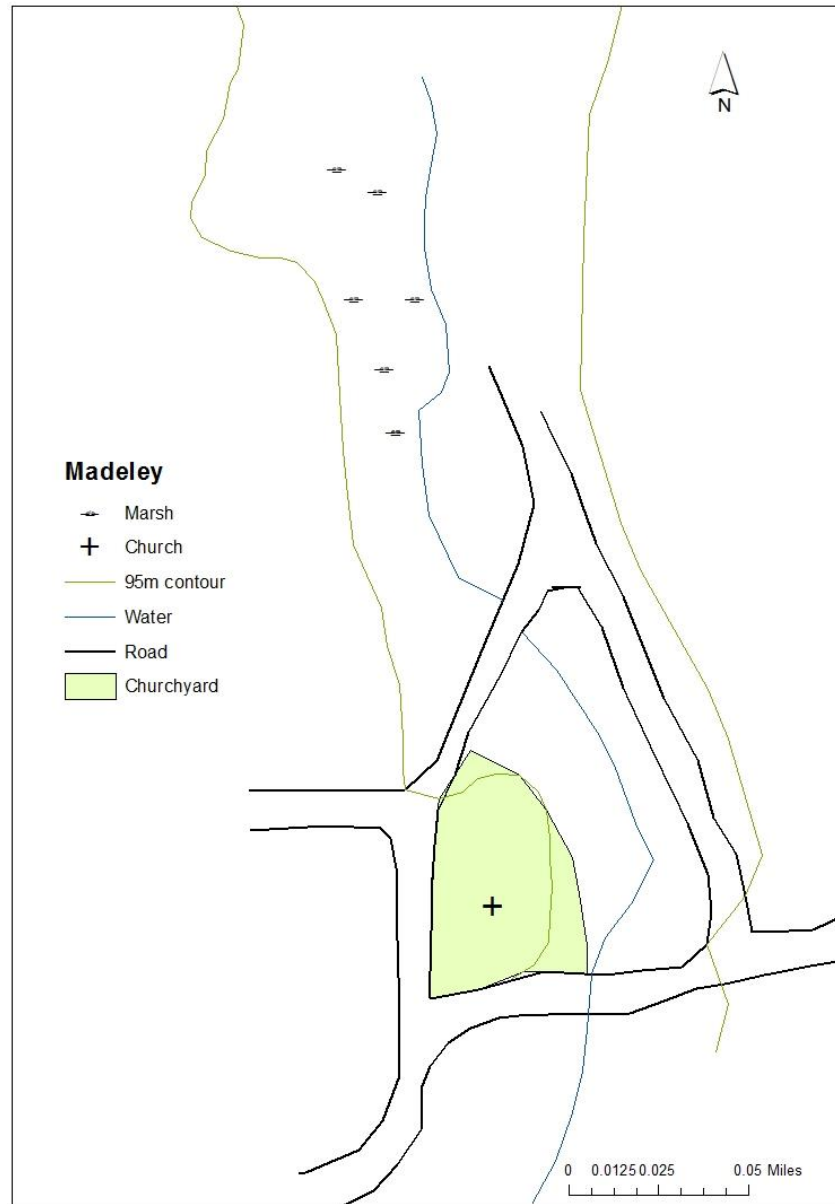


Figure 59: All Saints, Madeley, above the River Lea.

### Mucklestone

Mucklestone is an example of a *tūn* in the west of Pirehill on the Shropshire border. It was held in 1066 by Alric and Edric with a priest mentioned.<sup>721</sup> The landscape evidence for Mucklestone is difficult to interpret, unlike most of the other examples presented here it does not seem to seek out an 'edge'.

<sup>721</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 17:8.

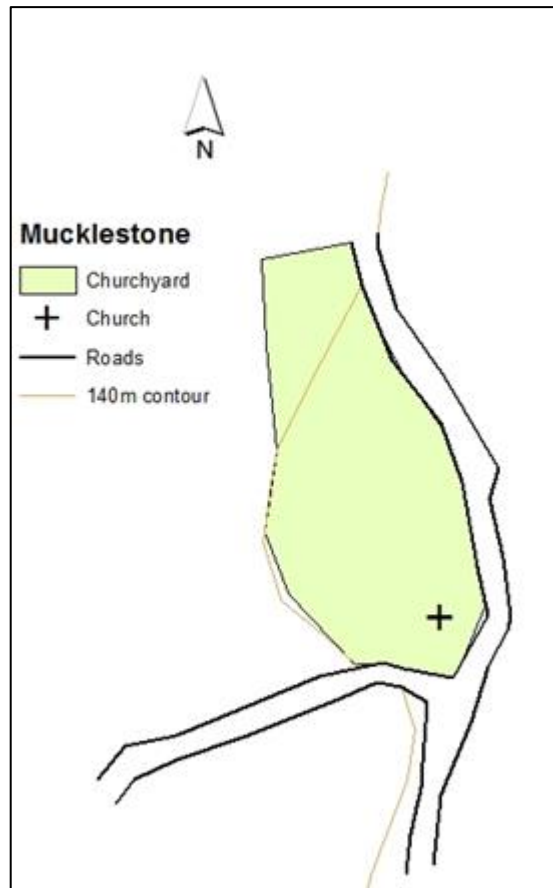


Figure 60: Map of Mucklestone showing manorial centre.

However, it is an example of how township names can support this wider thesis of understanding the landscape. The place-name (*Moclestone* 1086, *Mukleston* 1221) is open to interpretation. One possibility is OE *micel* and *stan* stone giving ‘great’ or ‘large’ plus ‘stone’ giving ‘Great stone’. The remains of a chambered tomb can still be found in the parish.<sup>722</sup>

The tomb is, however, in the township of Oakley and a more likely interpretation is OE personal name *Mucel* plus *tūn* giving ‘*Mucel’s tūn*’. The township map seems to mirror the Domesday entry with two manors, showing a clear subdivision at some point of the manor between Mucklestone and Winnington.

<sup>722</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 402.



Figure 61: The townships of Muckleston.

Winnington is given as OE personal name Wynna, so *tūn of Wynna's people*.<sup>723</sup> This suggests that both major townships are *tūns* named in opposition to each other, that is a personal name plus *tūn* was given to one of the places and to differentiate itself from (and compete with?) the other place. Nearby Knighton is an example of a *tūn* of a household servant or lord.<sup>724</sup> Parishes often have at their core a settlement on the better land and this is reflected in the settlement pattern and place-names. On the periphery we find lands with heavy soils or that are wooded.<sup>725</sup> Oakley suggests an area of the manor containing a particular resource or feature whilst Aston is the *tūn* to the east. The later Shropshire-Staffordshire boundary follows the River Tern in Muckleston which was in fact comprised of nine townships, four of which were part of Shropshire: Bearstone 'Bæghard's *tūn*', Dorrington 'Deora's *tūn*', Gravenhunger 'Hanging wood' and Woore, of uncertain meaning, possibly 'something wavering' such as trees on a ridge.<sup>726</sup> These townships, separated by a rationalisation of the landscape by the county

<sup>723</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 402.

<sup>724</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 349.

<sup>725</sup> N. Higham, *A Frontier Landscape, The North West in the Middle Ages* (London, 2004), p. 102.

<sup>726</sup> M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire, Part One: English Place-Name Society*, 62/63 (Irthingborough, 1990), p. 35, p. 111, p. 138 and p. 325.



boundary, conform to the pattern of personal named *tūns*, later subdivisions and resource defined townships.

### Standon

Standon is an example where its status is suggested by the arrangement and nomenclature of townships and the presence of a priest. The church does not lie on a spot that is easily identified as being an enclosure, although it does sit above a flood plain with rising land behind it. The parish itself though is geographically distinct, sitting on a large oval shaped hill.<sup>727</sup>

It was held TRE by Siward who was a freeman with a mill, two acres of meadow and a priest.<sup>728</sup> Standon (*Stantone* 1086, *Standon* 1190) gives the meaning ‘*tūn* at the stoney outcrop’.<sup>729</sup> The detached portion of Rudge gives the meaning ‘ridge’. This isolated portion indicates that Standon was formed out of the episcopal estate of Eccleshall.

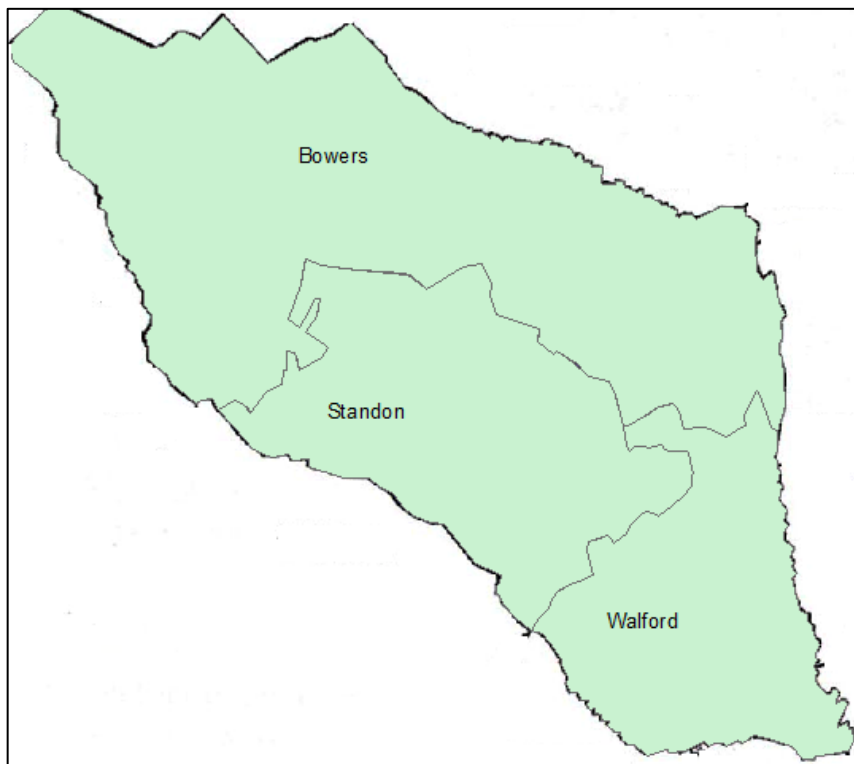


Figure 62: The townships of Standon (not including the detached portion of Rudge).

<sup>727</sup> Added to this is the detached portion of Rudge.

<sup>728</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 11:15.

<sup>729</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 507.

Of the remaining townships, Walford township gives the meaning ‘ford of the Britons’.<sup>730</sup> And, it is worthy of note that the township name of Bowers reflects those found at Mucklestone that indicate a servant’s holding, having the meaning ‘a peasant who held land in return for rents or services’.<sup>731</sup> These secondary township names intimate a manorial unit being later subdivided into apportionments and indicates that not all estate fragmentation can be ascribed to the period of the breaking-up of multiple estates. What we see in Standon is a pre-Conquest estate topographically described.

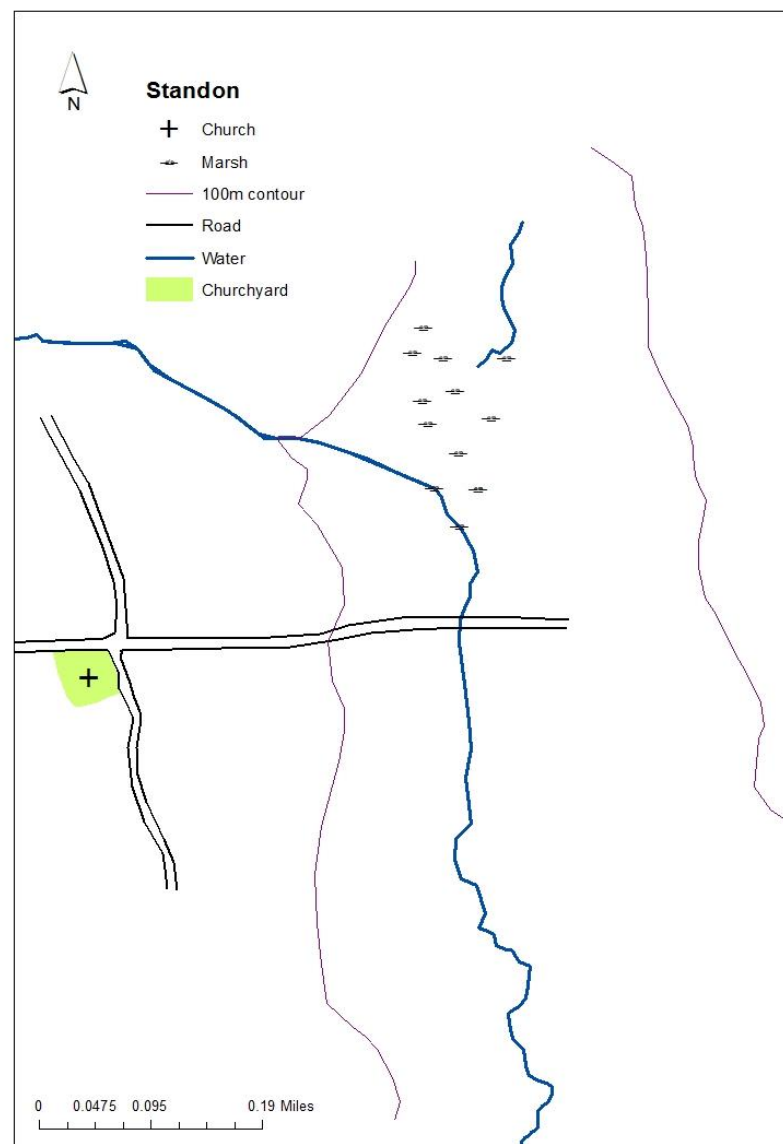


Figure 63: Topography of Standon.

<sup>730</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 554.

<sup>731</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 141.

## Blithfield

One of the more difficult topographies to interpret is Blithfield found in the east of the hundred. Once sitting above the River Blithe the landscaping of Blithfield Hall, the park land, the removal of the village and the later building of the reservoir make a study of the landscape setting unsatisfactory.

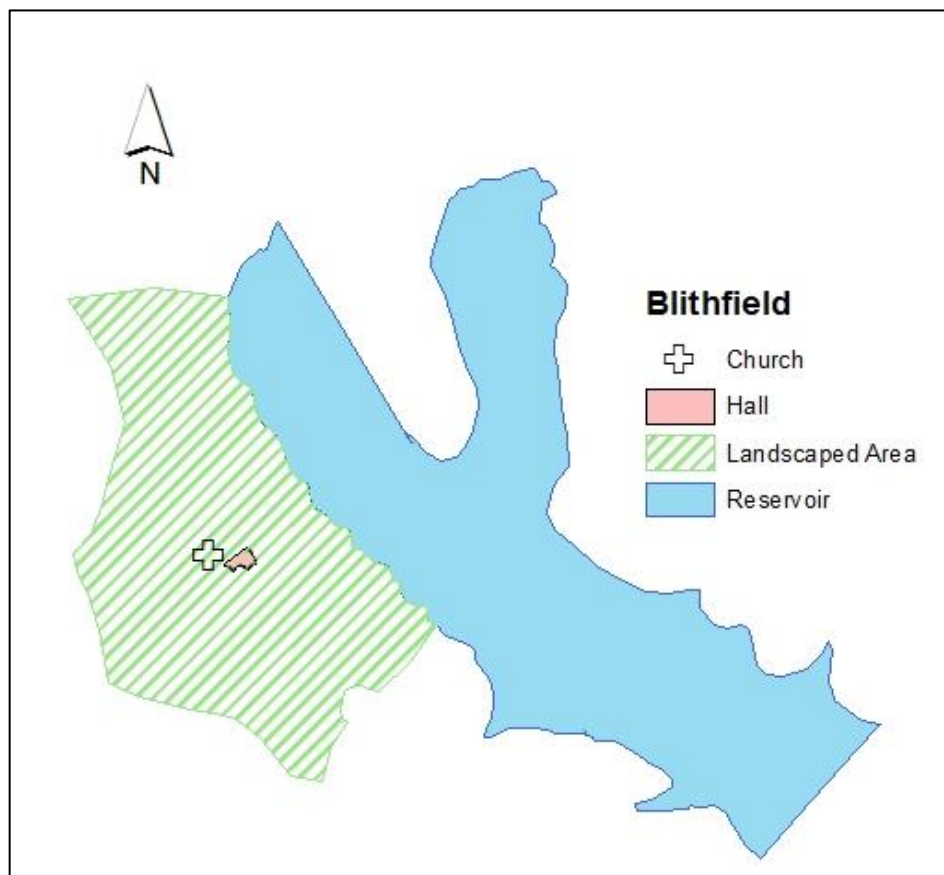


Figure 64: Blithfield with landscaped gardens and reservoir.

It was held (with a priest present) by Edmund at Domesday and he was a free man.<sup>732</sup> Blithfield (*Blidevelt*, 1086) gives the meaning ‘field’ or ‘open land by the river Blithe’.<sup>733</sup> Newton (*Niwetone*, 1086), the other township, contains the element *tūn* and gives ‘the new *tūn*’, presumably to distinguish it from Blithfield, although it should be noted that Drointon lies to the north-west of Newton in Stowe parish. Drointon (*Dregetone*, 1086) is another township name that gives a meaning relating to land given to a servant, in this instance OE *dreng*, ‘a free tenant holding land by tenure combining

<sup>732</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 8:27.

<sup>733</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 129.

rent service and military duty’, giving ‘*tūn* of the drengs’.<sup>734</sup> It is possible that these *tūns* are named in opposition to each other, a way of distinguishing identity.

The parish itself is said to have contained four other vills, those of Booth, Hampton, Steenwood and Admaston.<sup>735</sup> Booth gives ‘house or dwelling place’ and Hampton suggests ‘home’ or ‘high’ *tūn*.<sup>736</sup> Both of these are types of small dwelling that gave their names to other townships away from the centre, such as the several examples at Wolstanton. Steenwood indicates a resource or feature found further away from the centre, in this instance from OE *styfic*, ‘clearing’.<sup>737</sup> However, the earliest forms (*Stivinton* 1199, *Styphinton*, 1232, *Stiventon*, 1254) all suggest that they contain *tūn*. Admaston is another *tūn*, the earliest forms are *Ædmundestun*, 1176, *Edmodeston*, 1177, giving ‘the *tūn* of Eadmund’.<sup>738</sup> It may be here that we have our first identifiable person giving their name to a settlement. The submission being that this Eadmund was the same person who held Blithfield at Domesday.<sup>739</sup> A composition document concerning tithes from 1252 seems to suggest that Blithfield owed tithes to the Abbot of Burton, presumably as part of his ownership of Abbots Bromley,

‘...And if it should happen that the land of the old demesne [in which the said Robert confesses that the Abbot, etc, has of old the right of taking tithes] after this agreement be reduced to cultivation, the Abbot, etc shall take tithes fully without contradiction of the said Robert ... the parishioners however at Blithfield are to hear divine service and receive the sacraments of the church, the women shall be cleansed, the children baptized, the dead buried, marriages celebrated, and the rectors shall receive mortuary legacies, and accustomed offerings’.

What is also clear is that the manorial church, based within the lord’s complex (as it still is) was to provide pastoral care for the wider community of the manor and the newly assarted lands further afield.<sup>740</sup>

<sup>734</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 237.

<sup>735</sup> D. Murray, *Notes on the Early History of the Parish of Blithfield*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1919 (London, 1920), p. 1.

<sup>736</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 135 and p. 294

<sup>737</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 510.

<sup>738</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 81.

<sup>739</sup> Murray, ‘Notes on the early history’, p. 3.

<sup>740</sup> SRO: D603/A/Add/117-118. See also D603/A/Add/428.

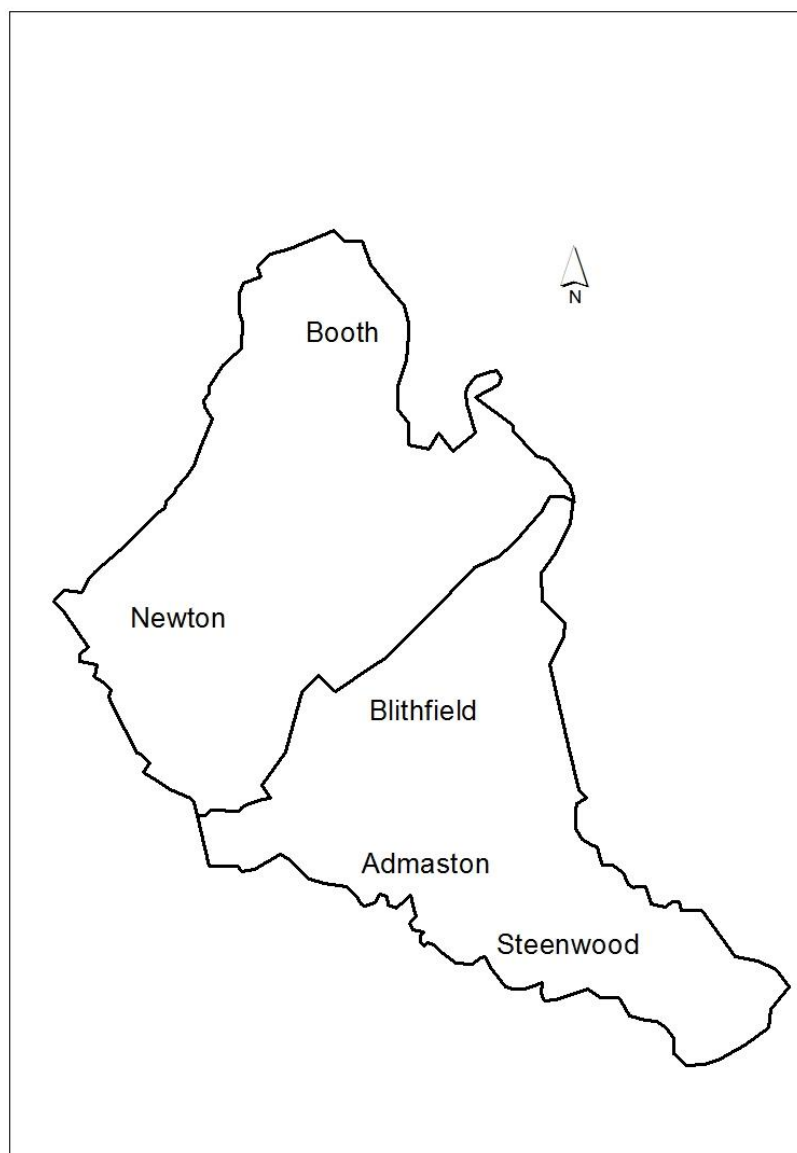


Figure 65: Blithfield townships.

### Colton

Colton parish joins Blithfield to the north. It was held *TRE* by Almund with a priest given, and Oda and Wulfric are shown holding land in a separate entry. The manor held extensive meadow land at Domesday and a mill was given for the manor formerly held by Oda and Wulfric.<sup>741</sup> Colton is part of a group of estates that, unlike in the west of Pirehill, are highly fragmented with detached portions across the area. This fragmentation highlights not only a sharing out of resources but helps us in establishing

<sup>741</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 8:15; 11:29.

some territorial relationships. The bishop had an estate and priest at Colwich (given as *Haiwode*) to the west of Colton (which has no other townships) and, as discussed, Blithfield immediately to the north of Colton had a priest. Blithfield owed dues to the Abbot of Burton, presumably via a former association with Abbots Bromley. Colwich held detached portions in Colton, Stowe, and further north, suggesting that it is from Colwich that Colton broke away.<sup>742</sup>

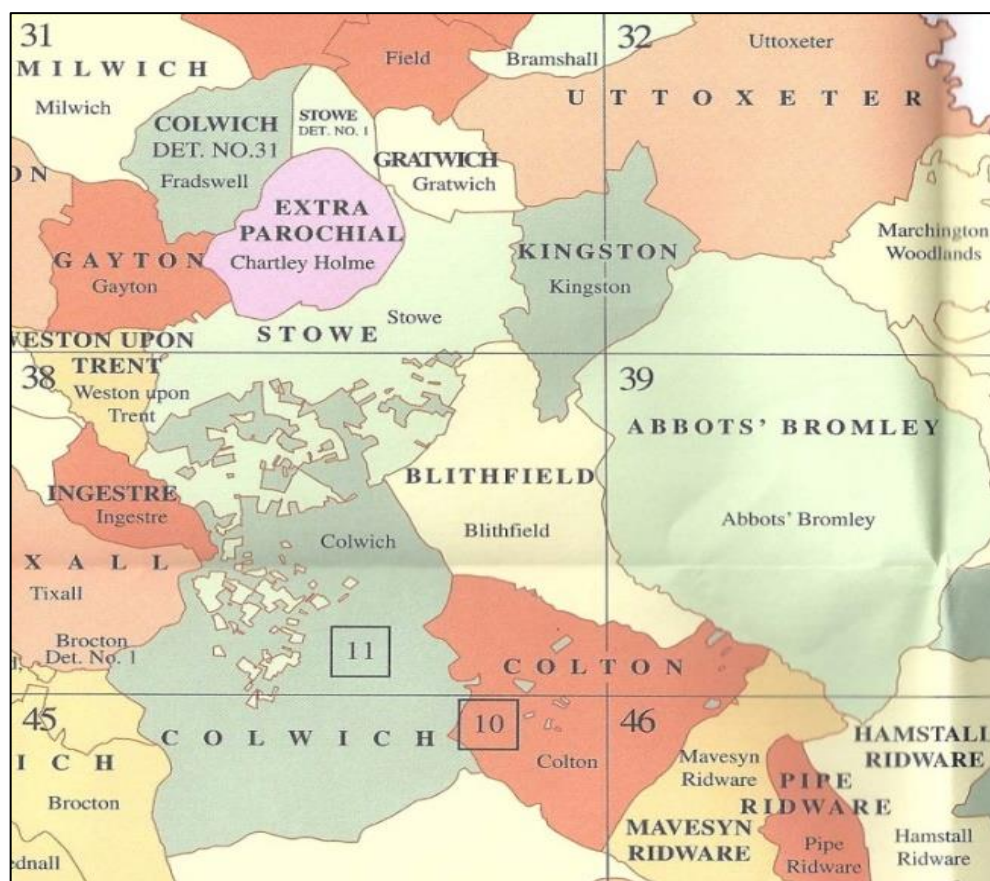


Figure 66: Colton, Colwich and Stowe, with detached portions.<sup>743</sup>

The meaning of the place-name Colton (*Coltone*, *Coltvne*, 1086) is given as either OE *colt* plus *tūn* giving ‘place where colts are reared’, or OE *col* giving ‘*tūn* where charcoal was produced’.<sup>744</sup> Colton sits on the 75m contour, the same as nearby Colwich. The area around the church is a flat landscape, the edges of which are difficult to discern. Nevertheless, careful examination of the landscape contours shows an enclosed space, with a watery landscape forming the edges of a proposed manorial

<sup>742</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 2:5.

<sup>743</sup> Taken from Phillips and Phillips, *Historical Atlas*.

<sup>744</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 204.

site.<sup>745</sup> A field called ‘Castle Croft’ is shown on the tithe map adjacent to the church which may possibly refer to an old manor house site.<sup>746</sup> This landscape is reminiscent of the low relief found at Botolph Bridge (Huntingdonshire) which uses the river’s edge to define the manorial complex.<sup>747</sup>

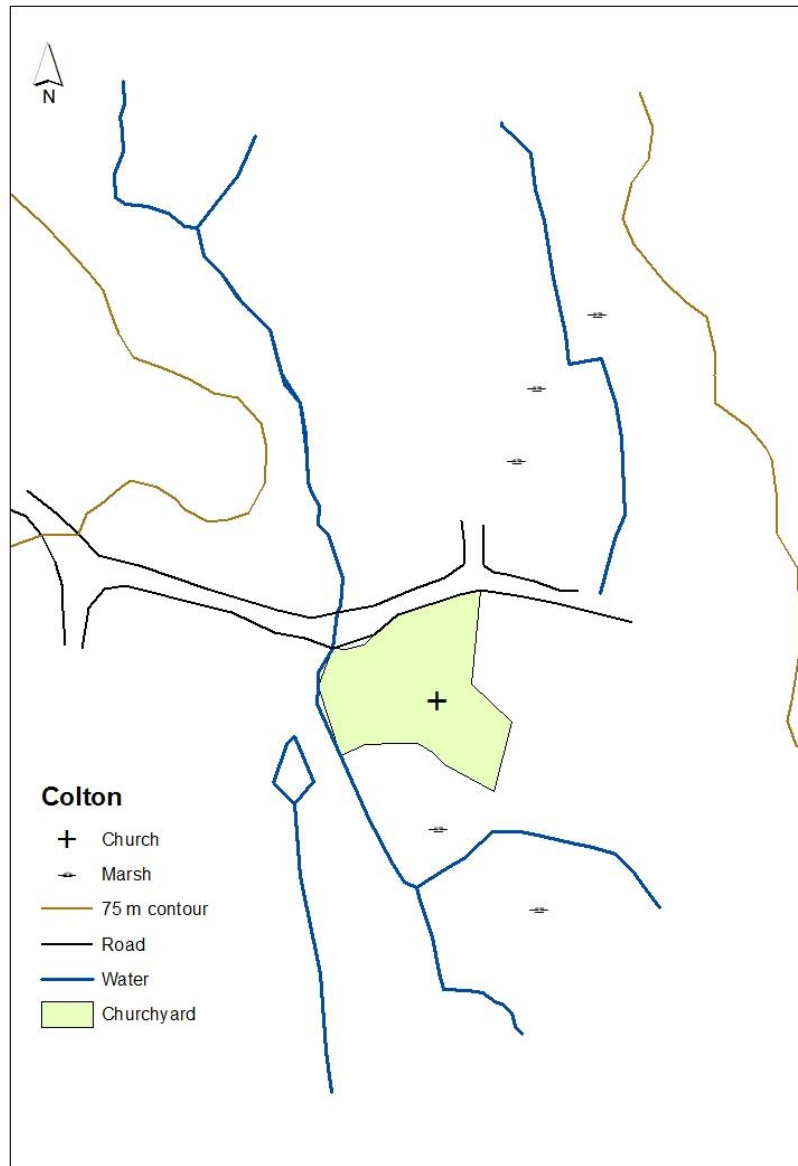


Figure 67: Map of Colton showing manorial centre.

<sup>745</sup> Bellamour Lodge was said to contain a thirteenth-century chapel, although this was interpreted from ‘limited evidence which comprised the stone footing for a small rectangular building, along with a stone corbel...the work was not carried out under modern archaeological conditions’. Staffordshire HER, ‘Colton EUS report’, <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/environment/eLand/planners-developers/HistoricEnvironment/Extensive-Urban-Survey/Staffordshire-Extensive-Urban-Survey-Project.aspx> (04/03/2015), pp. 17-18.

<sup>746</sup> Staffordshire HER, ‘Colton EUS report’, p. 17.

<sup>747</sup> P. Spoerry and R. Atkins, *A Late Saxon Village and Medieval Manor: Excavations at Botolph Bridge, Orton Longueville, Peterborough* (Bar Hill, 2015), p. 5.

## Wolstanton

Held by Earl Ælfgar at Domesday, Wolstanton falls into a category of manors with churches held by a great household. No early landholder is given TRE, however, and there is the possibility that this was a later accrual to the Earl's holdings.

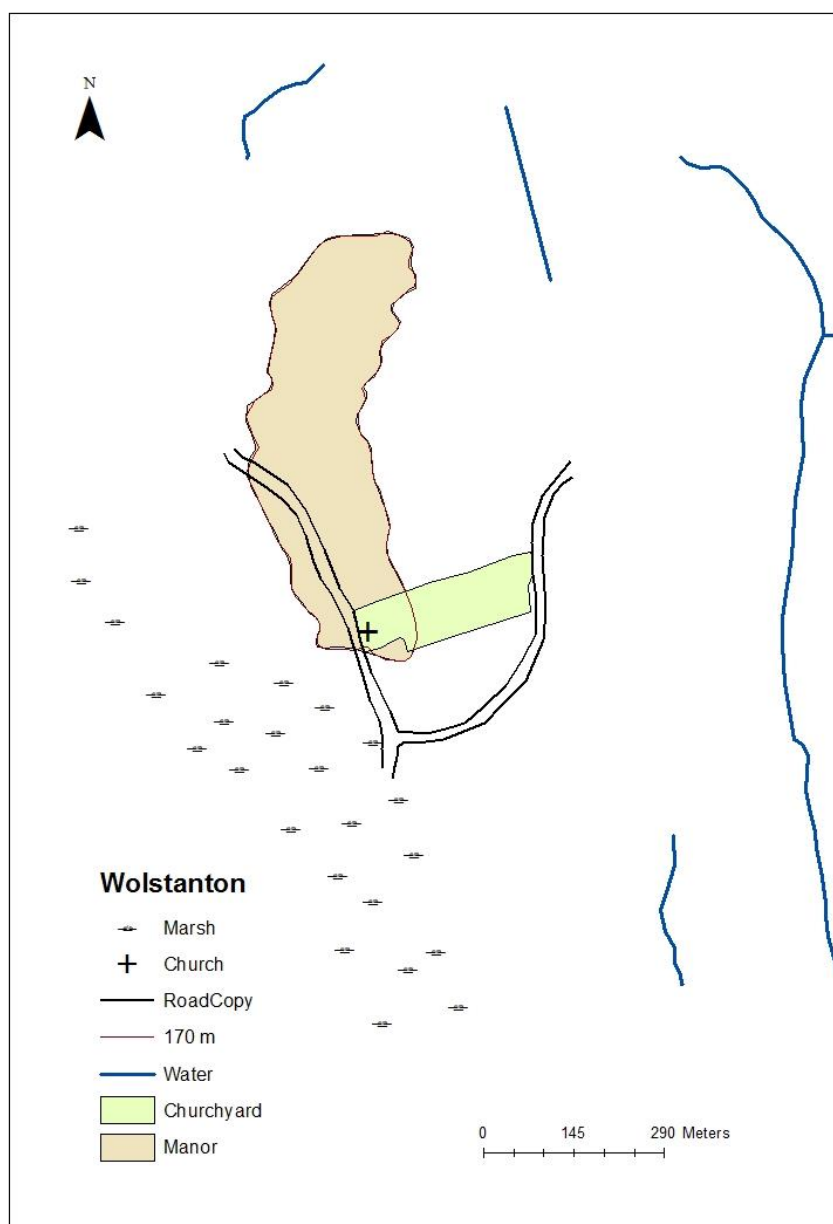


Figure 68: Map of Wolstanton showing manorial centre.



Given in Domesday as having appendages, these are, however, not specified unlike in the manor of Sugnall, for example which had all nine of its members listed.<sup>748</sup> Slade attempted to reconstruct an estate based on Wolstanton using the 1086 landholders.<sup>749</sup>

Place	Holder	Assessment	
		Hides	Virgates
Biddulph	The King	1	0
Thursfield	Richard the forester		1
Talk	Gamel		1
Audley	Gamel		2
Balterley	Gamel		½
Balterley	Wluin		½
Betley	Uluuin		2
Dimsdale	Richard the forester		1
Wolstanton	The King	2	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>

Figure 69: Slade's proposed 'five hide unit'.

Slade's reconstruction makes a 'five hide unit' for Wolstanton and, if correct, would follow the number of hides as a set out in the *Gepyncðo* being the amount required to achieve thegnly status (Chebsey is the only five hide unit in Pirehill). Balterley, part of Slade's calculation, was gifted by Wulfric Spot to Wulfgar, a servant and possible kinsman to Wulfric. This suggests an earlier interest in the manor at Wolstanton by the great family of the region using at least part of the manor as payment to their retainers and kinsmen.

The township map shows Wolstanton in the south-east of the later parish. This is a *tūn* with the OE personal name Wulfstan, *Wulfstan's tūn*.<sup>750</sup> The personal name element *Wulf* is one that recurs throughout this area (see chapter five). Two possible meanings for the township of Knutton are given by Horovitz, 'the tūn at the hillock' or Cnut's *tūn*.<sup>751</sup>

<sup>748</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 1:15.

<sup>749</sup> C. Slade, 'The Staffordshire Domesday', in L. Midgley (ed.), *VCH Staffordshire*, 6 (1958, London, reprint 1985), p. 3.

<sup>750</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 585.

<sup>751</sup> Clotone 1086, Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 350,

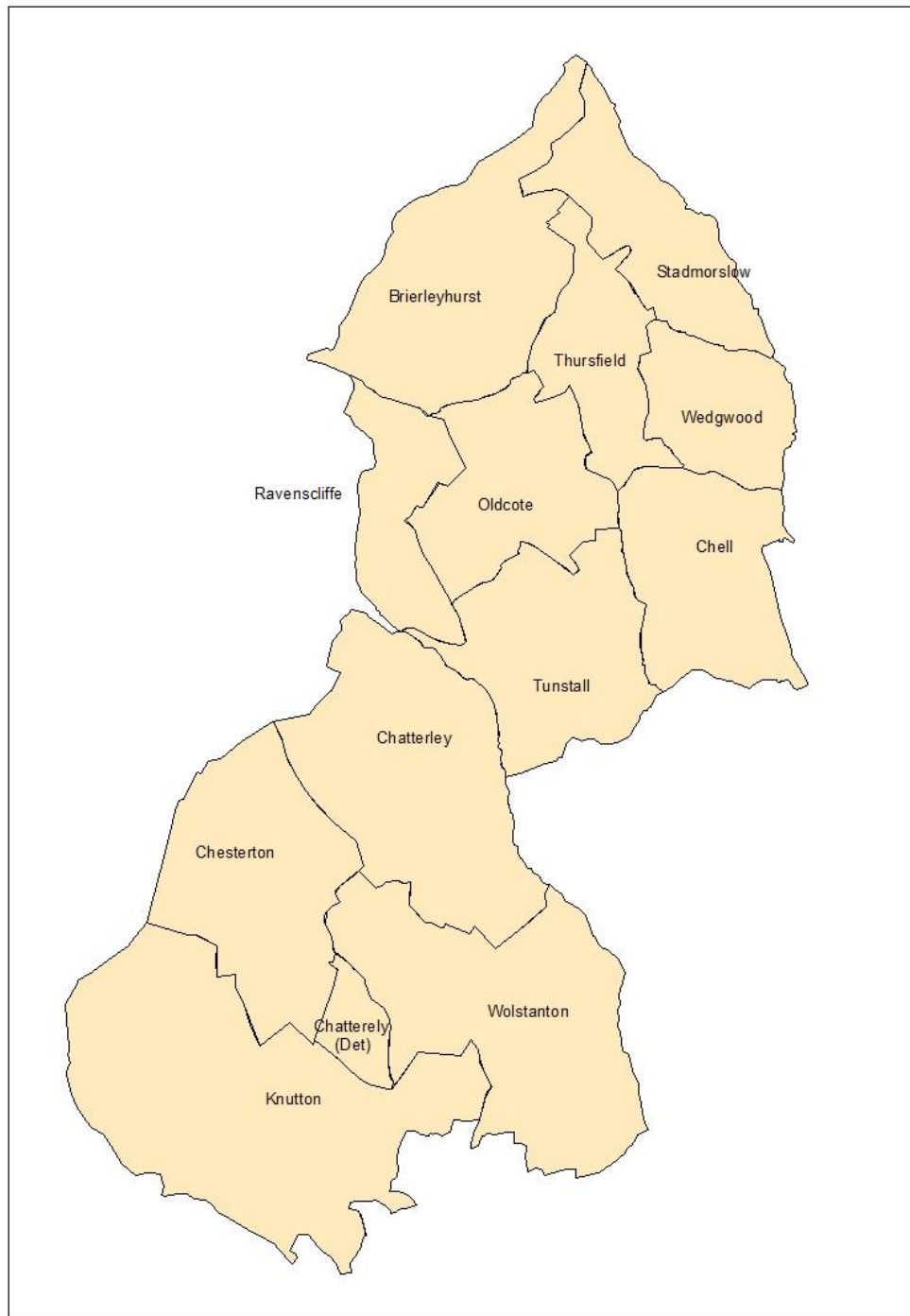


Figure 70: Wolstanton townships.

The third *tūn* in the south of the parish is Chesterton, OE *cester* with *tūn*. It was here that a piece of early medieval stone sculpture was found in the 1950s. Chatterley contains PrWelsh *cadeir* with OE *lēah* giving ‘wood by a hill called Cader’. Further place-name elements such as *holt*, *hyrst*, *lēah* and others indicating woodland, give a sense of the wider landscape beyond the settlement. As we move further north through

the parish we get Tunstall, here ‘abandoned farmhouse’, and Oldcote possibly Old *cot*. The other townships become more topographically described as we move further north, with Chell (‘gorge, ravine’), Ravenscliff (‘ransom cliff’), Wedgwood and Brierleyhurst (both self-explanatory). Furthest away is Thursfield (ON personal name Thorvaldr and field), suggesting a later settlement, and finally Stadmorslow, OE *hlāw* and stud giving ‘stud-mares low’, indicating a specialist activity or landscape feature.<sup>752</sup> The pattern suggested by these place-names is of a core of *tūns* in the south, with the manorial centre in the very south-east, with smaller farmsteads and topographically defined places further away from the central place. In terms of the landscape, figure 69 shows the suggested site of the manorial centre for Wolstanton, which follows a similar topographical pattern to that found at several other sites in Staffordshire considered so far. It is framed by a watery edge, with the church towards the edge of the raised island overlooking Wolstanton marsh.

### **Discussion: life on the *e(d)g(e)***

To summarise the findings so far, the written sources, charters and the Domesday Survey in particular, indicate where we can find ‘symptoms’ of manorial sites. The analysis of place-names and townships has helped to identify the wider landscape setting, indicating how the nomenclature of townships is linked to the formation of a thegnly landscape. This next section develops the theme of wateriness and examines manorial sites in the landscape. We have already discussed the association of churches with manorial sites, with good examples found at places such as Raunds Furnells (Northamptonshire) where the church was established in close proximity to the manor house within a decade or two of the establishment of the manor.<sup>753</sup> Another excavation report on a manorial site that shows a manor house and church within an enclosed space is that of Botolph Bridge (Huntingdonshire). Here the edge of the settlement was observed to favour a watery edge:

‘It seems clear that the focal point of the medieval village-the former church and manorial enclosures-was positioned on the terrace edge closest to the river and thus represented the northern edge of the settlement’.<sup>754</sup>

<sup>752</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 189, p. 185, p. 546, p. 418, p. 187; p. 454; p. 565; p. 148; p. 537; p. 506.

<sup>753</sup> Audouy and Chapman, *Raunds*, p. 85.

<sup>754</sup> Sperry and Atkins, *Late Saxon Village*, p. 5.

This morphology of manorial sites can be discerned in some of the Staffordshire examples often over-looking water or wet places. Trentham is a good example, although we can perhaps best understand it as a royal manor.

### Trentham

An earlier name for Trentham has been suggested as *ea*-land, OE *ea* ‘river/water’ plus ‘land’. The pre-Conquest church at Trentham lay alongside the river Trent and the Park Brook.<sup>755</sup> Its modern name gives *ham* on the River Trent.<sup>756</sup> Although the site at Trentham has been heavily landscaped it is still possible to see that this area has always been enclosed on at least two, possibly three, sides by water. Here, as at Church Eaton (discussed below), it is the 90-100 m contour that defines the edge of the settlement.

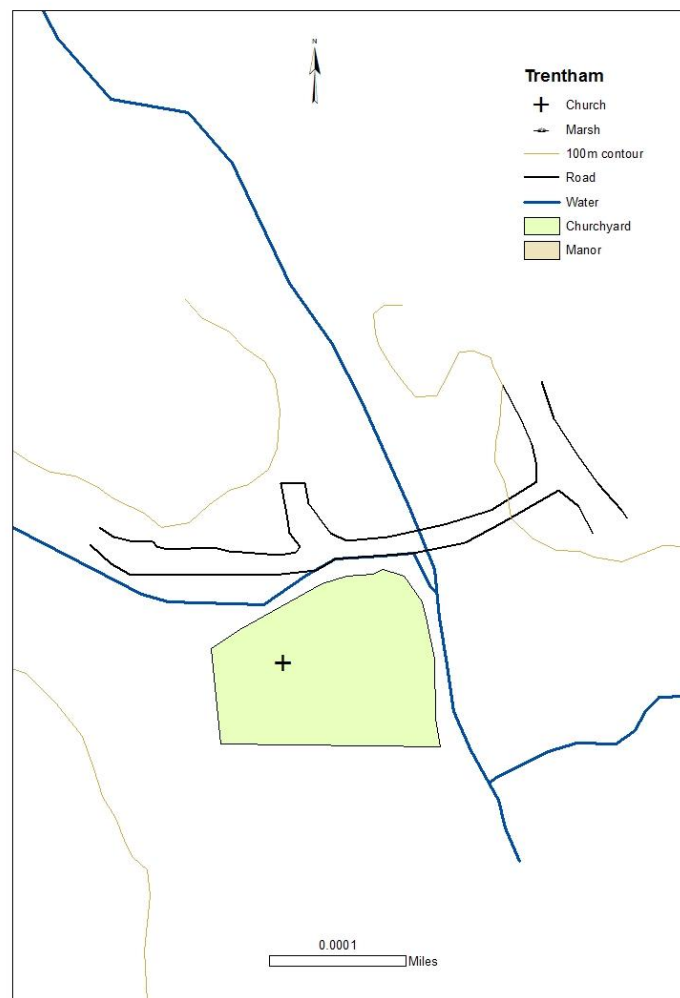


Figure 71: Map of Trentham showing manorial centre.

<sup>755</sup> Tringham, 'Trentham', p. 211.

<sup>756</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 543.

## Stoke

Stoke is a complex parish to understand and we have relatively little evidence for its earliest history. It does not have an entry in Domesday but is referred to under Caverswall (Totmonslow) which was held TRE by Wulfgeat, a possible member of the family *Wulf*. Caverswall held ‘half of Stoke church’.<sup>757</sup> The mention of a church rather than a priest might suggest a shared manorial interest, and this is further emphasised by the fact that the later parish of Stoke had detached portions in the adjacent parish of Caverswall. That the two were later divided into separate hundreds indicated that this relationship may have pre-dated their creation. The piece of stone sculpture found at Stoke may also be indicative of a thegnly site, and in terms of a watery landscape, the site of St Peter’s sits just above the River Trent.

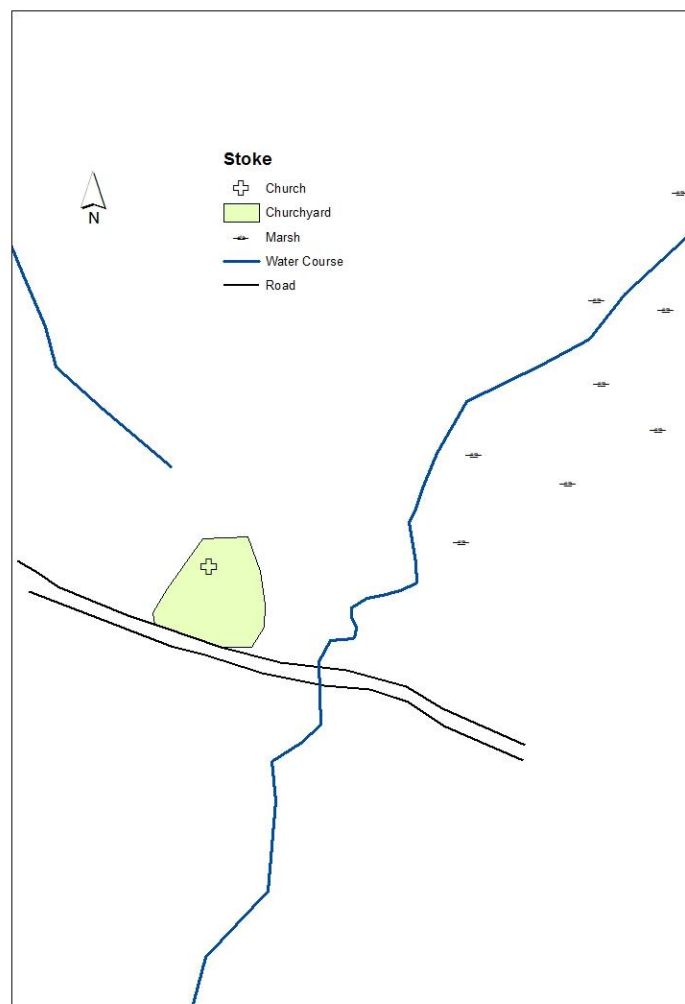


Figure 72: Site of St Peter's, Stoke.

<sup>757</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 11:36.

## Church Eaton

Perhaps the clearest example of a site seeking out the edge is that of Church Eaton (Cuttlestone), a later market town which is to be found on the edge of a platform or terrace.

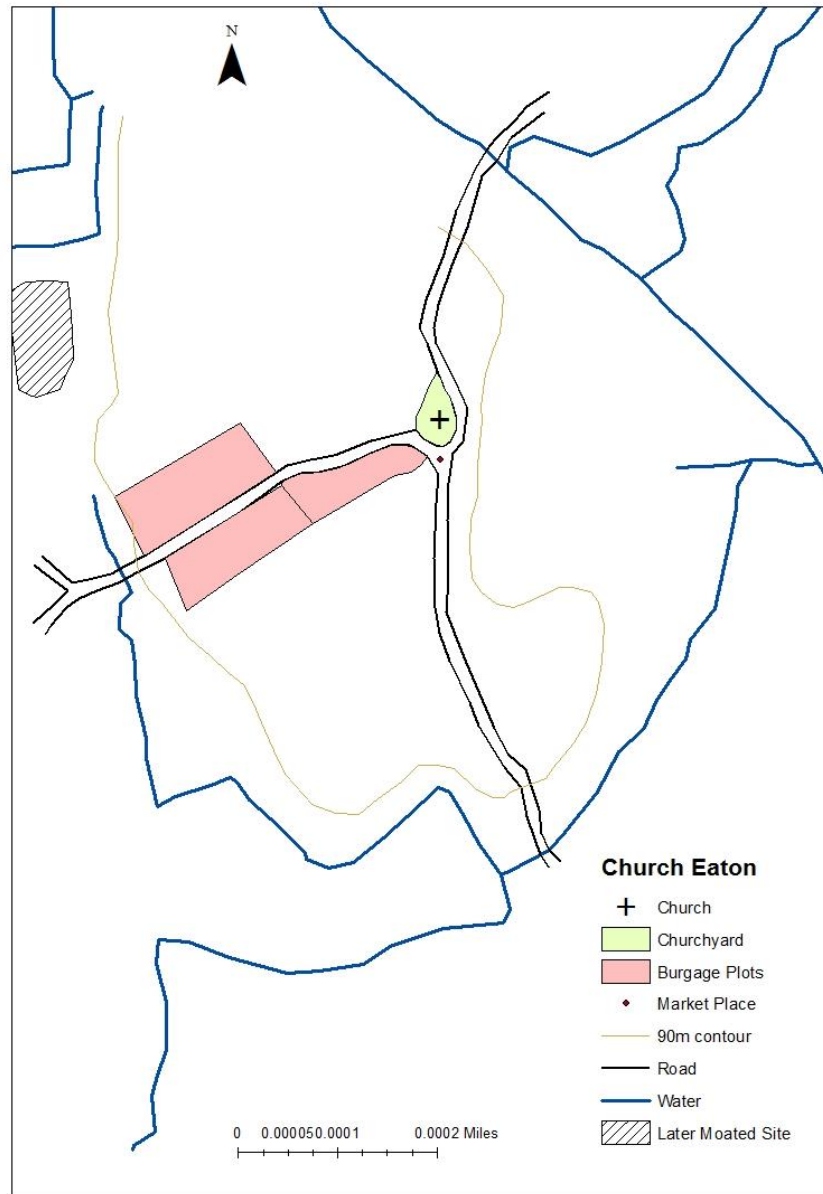


Figure 73: Landscape of Church Eaton.

It was held at the time of the Domesday Survey by Wilgrip, with a priest, and he was a free man.<sup>758</sup> The *church* element of the place-name Church Eaton is a later addition. It

<sup>758</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 11:65.

is given as *Eitone* in Domesday which provides the meaning OE *eg* ‘island or on dry ground in a marsh’ with *tūn*.<sup>759</sup>

Close inspection of the site shows that water dominates the edges of the settlement and a later, medieval moated site to the north-east used this wet landscape to its advantage. Medieval burgage plots were laid out along the road to the east of the church but stop at the ‘edge’ of the *eg*. A market place was also added in the medieval period as part of a planned development, the likely site seems to have been to the south of the church. The church itself sits on the very edge of the settlement. Unlike another *eg* site at Chebsey, Church Eaton is a more complete ‘island’. The dedication to St Editha (St Eadgyth), along with the feature known as St Editha’s well, is not likely to have been pre-Conquest but to have been adopted later, most probably when the church was given to Polesworth Abbey, itself dedicated to St Editha. The earliest settlement is ‘likely to have lain adjacent to the church where irregular property plots have been identified... clustered on the high land’.<sup>760</sup> This combination of landscape features, the Domesday Survey and place-name evidence seems to offer a credible early medieval manorial site.

### Seeking out the *e(d)g(e)*

Part of the proposal forwarded here is that watery edges were actively chosen for early medieval sites. In Pirehill, Chebsey is the clearest example we have of an early central place. It is the only five-hide unit for that hundred which was a defining factor in holding the rank of thegn. Domesday records that Henry de Ferrers held Chebsey and that:

‘Humphrey from him 5 hides

Land for 12 ploughs. In lordship 3:8 slaves

20 villagers with a priest and 9 smallholders have 8 ploughs

Meadow, 20 acres: woodland pasture 2 furlongs long and 1 wide

Value £4

To this manor belonged Stafford land on which the king ordered a castle to be made: it has been destroyed’.<sup>761</sup>

<sup>759</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 242.

<sup>760</sup> Staffordshire Historic Environment Team, *Church Eaton, Historic Character Assessment* (Stafford, 2011), p. 5 and p. 10.

<sup>761</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 10:9.

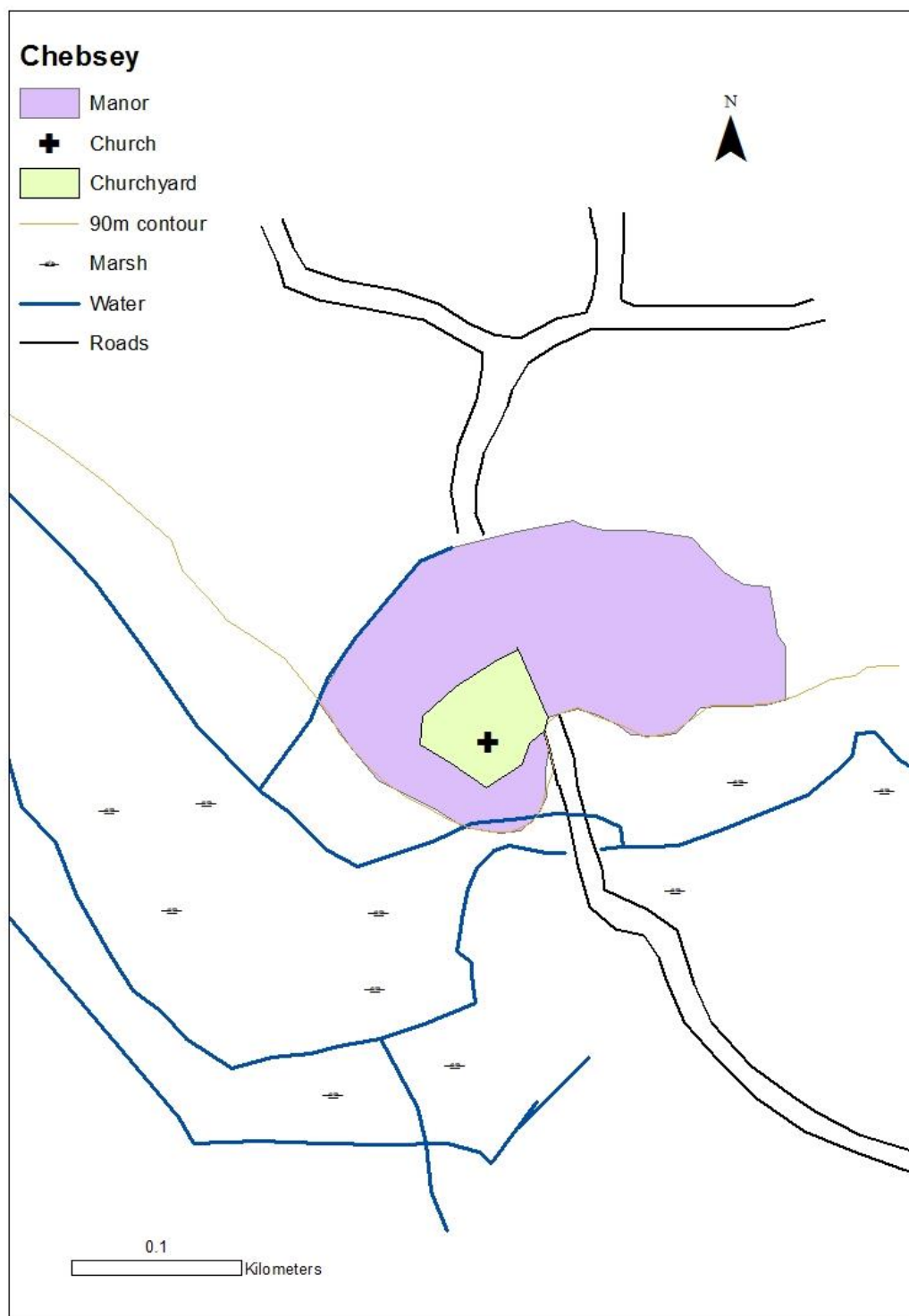


Figure 74: Chebsey manorial centre, bounded by water to the south running east west.

The land which the manor held in Stafford was that which William ordered a castle to be built during his conquest of the north in 1070. It lay within the burh of Stafford and



was by this time destroyed ‘quod modo est destructum’. Chebsey was associated with the Norman castle or part of ‘a system of maintenance for the burhs established by Æthelflaeda’, and that the estate held a plot of land in Stafford from the foundation of the burh in 913.<sup>762</sup> The status of the church at Chebsey is hinted at by the fact that in the late twelfth century the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield confirmed that Chebsey should be free ‘from synodals and from all other customs and charges’.<sup>763</sup> The stone sculpture in the churchyard at Chebsey discussed in chapter three dates to sometime in the tenth century and is indicative of a place of high status. Chebsey sits between the large multiple estates of Stone, Eccleshall and Stafford. The location of the manor, hemmed in on all sides by these three large estates implies that it is a manorial break-away. The place-name gives us OE personal name *Cebbi* with OE *eg* ‘island, place near water’.<sup>764</sup> The manor site is implied by the 90m contour on an area of flat land before it rises to the north, where the later manor house and church sited above the water’s edge.

Although Chebsey is not a *tūn*, the use of a personal name to identify a manorial centre is consistent with the naming of manors shown elsewhere in this study. The northern township, Norton (north and *tūn*) is a later division of the manor as is the smaller fragmentation at Hilcote from ‘hill’ and *cot* ‘cottage’.<sup>765</sup> The naming of Halfhead ‘half hide’, might have been prompted in juxtaposition, an oppositional naming practice, sitting as it does adjacent to a far superior settlement rather than being a mathematical calculation.<sup>766</sup> However, as with *Nortun* in the same manor, it may have been, as seen with directional names, an external secondary and administrative naming custom.

<sup>762</sup> P. Morgan, ‘The Domesday Castles of Staffordshire’, *Staffordshire History*, 5 (1987), p. 44.

<sup>763</sup> H. Savage, *The Great Register of Lichfield Cathedral Known as Magnum Registrum Album*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1924 (Highgate, 1926), p. 116.

<sup>764</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 186.

<sup>765</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 315.

<sup>766</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 291.



Figure 75: The townships of Chebsey.

It is perhaps noteworthy that the *eg*-iness of Chebsey is only seen from certain vantage points since the land rises to the north, unlike the example at Church Eaton which is a more complete 'island'. Here we get an understanding of *eg* as promontory, and is a place-name element that shows itself to be indicative of these early sites in Staffordshire.

The 'wateriness' expressed in place-names such as Church Eaton, Trentham and Chebsey is an attribute that is demonstrated to be a consistent factor in this part of Staffordshire. This siting of central places has been discussed for other similar sites across the country, we have already mentioned Botolph Bridge but also:

'Barton upon Humber bears a strong resemblance to that at Earl's Barton...It stands on the end of a spur of land, which falls away on three sides; on the fourth side, to the north, the neck of the spur is cut across by a ditch'.<sup>767</sup>

<sup>767</sup> Williams, 'Bell-house', p. 234.

Chebsey also sits as part of a string of place-names that include OE *eg*. Further south can be found Gamesley Brook, a tributary of the River Sow, earlier place-name *Gamelese*, a personal name *Gamel* OE and OE *eg* island.<sup>768</sup> Seighford is another settlement in a low lying watery landscape. The place-name is complicated but mirrors the later use of ‘ford’ at Stafford. Again the church sits on the edge overlooking water.<sup>769</sup>

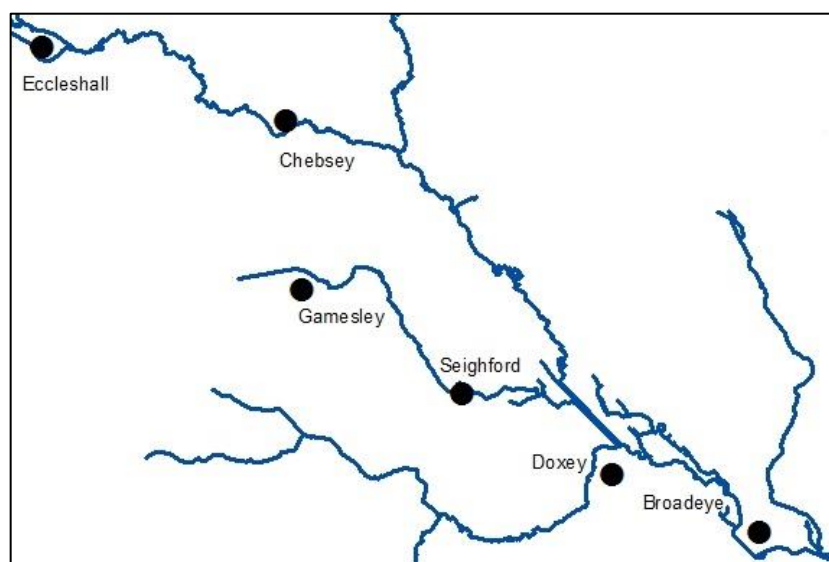


Figure 76: String of ‘watery places’ along the Sow Valley.

Continuing down the banks of the River Sow we find Doxey. This gives a meaning of personal name *Docc*, with OE *eg* and it lies, like so many other places in this study, on the 90-100m contour with the River Sow on one side and small streams on its other sides.<sup>770</sup> Finally, we have Broadeye from OE *brad-eg* ‘broad’ or ‘spacious island’.<sup>771</sup> Its descriptor perhaps used to distinguish it from the *egs* of *Gamel*, *Cebbi* and *Docc*? This is most likely to have been an earlier name of what later became Stafford. The town is surrounded by water on three sides. Gelling is discussing place-name elements and their dating tells us that:

‘There are about 180 names containing *eg* in Ekwall 1960, and the element is not very common in minor names or field names. In view of this moderate frequency, it is remarkable the *eg* heads the list of OE terms in names recorded

<sup>768</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 271. A possible site is the Ladford industrial estate, which sits on the 90 metre contour.

<sup>769</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 481.

<sup>770</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 234.

<sup>771</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 149.

by c. 730 ...it must be concluded that *eg* was more commonly used in place-names formation before AD 730 than in the centuries after'.<sup>772</sup>

It is possible that we have an earlier string of settlements along the River Sow. Since Gelling suggests that OE *halh* overlaps with the OE *eg*, meaning that we could extend our settlement string of watery places along the Sow to Eccleshall (OE *ecles* from Latin *ecclesia* 'a body of Christians, or a church'), a large early episcopal estate that dominates that part of Pirehill, and one that is as '*eg-y*' as any other found along the Sow valley.<sup>773</sup> The bishop's palace ('castle') is the likely site of the original settlement. To the south is the later planned town, with market place and burgage plots.

<sup>772</sup> M. Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, 1984), p. 35.

<sup>773</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 243.

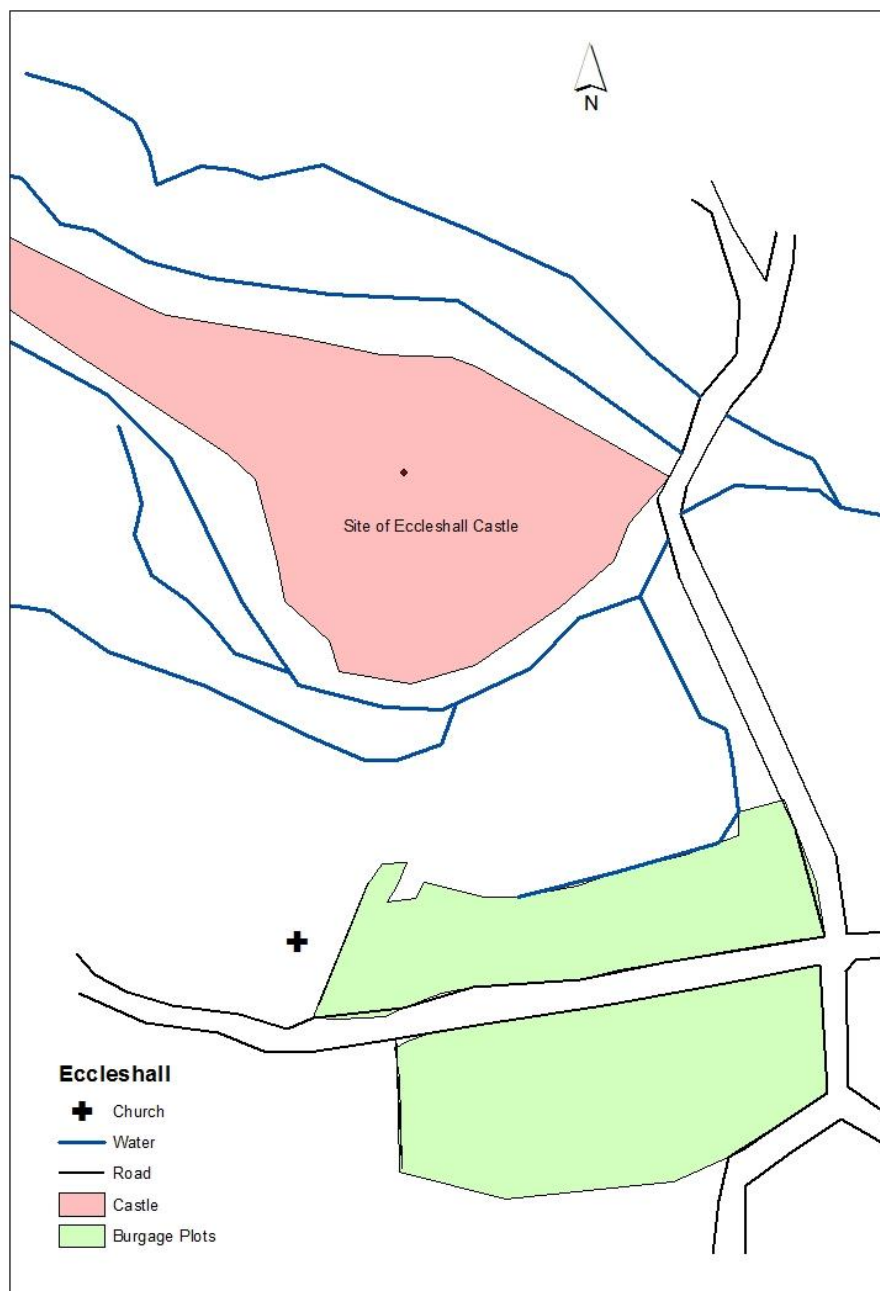


Figure 77: Topography of Eccleshall.

### **Discussion: a commonality of topographies**

In examining the manorial sites that have shown themselves to have the symptoms of a thegnly residence we can see some commonalities in terms of the documentary and place-name evidence. The purpose of this chapter was to use these symptoms to examine the landscape, in doing so the landscape itself has revealed itself as a possible symptom. Many of these sites have demonstrated island-like features, sitting nestled on

promontories.<sup>774</sup> Some caution is required. There are some early sites that do not conform to this topography which serves a reminder to not over-simplify matters, and that what is presented here is a hypothesis. Furthermore, this type of evidence causes some apprehension amongst landscape historians. Hamerow has noted that,

‘Anxiety about environmental determinism has led to a reluctance to attribute variability in the settlement record to anything other than human agency. Nevertheless a number of researchers have recently and persuasively reiterated the importance of local environment in shaping early medieval settlements and landscapes’.<sup>775</sup>

Despite this there is enough weight in terms of the numbers and the importance of these sites to suggest that the watery edge of the landscape of early medieval Staffordshire was sought out. The importance of water in the siting of settlements is clear, the need for a fresh supply of water for the inhabitants and their animals is apparent. This type of landscape, for religious sites, has been noted on in passing (in a footnote) by Blair. His suggestion was that it was associated with the practices of the Church: ‘the locations of many English minsters, with open ground and water south-eastwards and gently rising ground north-westwards, recall the sorts of sites believed in China to generate propitious *feng-shui*’.<sup>776</sup> The evidence presented here suggests that Blair may have misinterpreted what he noted. The indications are that these sites were as much favoured by the local elite and royal estates as they were by the Church. This can be seen in the royal example of Kings Bromley in the next chapter and here is best demonstrated by the example of Darlaston which seemingly never had a church but was nonetheless sited on the edge of the river Trent.

Careful analysis of place-name evidence in conjunction with a close examination of the landscape and documentary evidence makes it possible to put forward a reasoned case for a series of sites that show signs of being early thegnly estate

<sup>774</sup> Other important places in Staffordshire also do this, places such as Wulfic Spot’s foundation at Burton; Lichfield Cathedral sits in a landscape that has gently rising ground to the north-west and marshy land to the south and east, as does Penkridge, first mentioned in charter of 958 (S.667).

<sup>775</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements*, p. 89, n. 14, and in particular see T. Williamson, *Environment, Society and Landscape in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2013).

<sup>776</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 191 n. 41.

centres. The naming itself may mark the foundation of a place, or the granting of the place to a high-ranking servant, possibly at a time when the manor becomes residential and a fixed identity was created, as at Admaston. The process we have noted was fluid and by no means linear, and many other manors may have failed to ‘upgrade’ to having a church or, if they did, the evidence is lacking. A number of the places that are candidates for being the residences of local secular lords (thegns) contain a *tūn* element, often in combination with a personal name, but this is not exclusively the case. Not all such residential central places contain the element *tūn* with a personal name, such as Chebsey, while others do contain the *tūn* element but not the personal name as at Church Eaton. The evidence at Mucclstone, Standon and other places suggests a later subdividing of these estates, being handed out to the estate’s servants. Many of these sites exhibit some common features, in particular, they can be seen to be places that sit ‘apart’ from the surrounding landscape. The proposed ‘manorial’ sites, for example at Wolstanton and Church Eaton (Cuttlestone), have been demonstrated to look very much like ‘islands’, sitting in a watery landscape and indeed this ‘island-ness’ is a feature in several of the place-names recorded for these places. Others, such as Chebsey and Colton sit on promontories, their ‘island-ness’ is from certain aspects only, and yet they remain apart. Standon parish is separated from the surrounding Eccleshall estate, sitting apart on a large oval hill. This, ‘island-ness’ might be considered a distinguishing feature of the manorial sites of Pirehill Hundred. However, it is not just the proposed ‘manorial’ sites that demonstrate this; Trentham’s place-name history and topography suggests a similar background. The church of St Peter’s at Stoke sits on the River Trent, and the church at Stone sits above the flood plain. Baswich (Offlow) and Colwich overlook the Rivers Sow and Trent respectively. The ecclesiastical centre of Eccleshall (later the bishop’s palace) sits enveloped by watery land with a string of places that suggest ‘island’ conditions and even the burh of Stafford sits on an island, previously known as Broadeye. What is important here are not the differences, there are variations, but the commonality of topographies.

All of the examples, including those from outside Pirehill, have a church and at most of these the church is to be found towards the edge of the settlement, and nearly all towards the edge of a settlement that overlooks water. Churches that are on the edge of manorial enclosures may have been placed there to ensure that the church was

accessible to the lords of the manor but also to others from outside the manorial family; they could access the church and yet remain excluded from the rest of the manorial complex.<sup>777</sup> Another possibility remains, if stone sculpture can be understood to have been part of a memorial process erected to remember someone, or a group of people, then these churches may have been built upon the sites of these earlier memorial places. It may then be significant that stone sculpture has been found at three of the sites discussed in this chapter, Chebsey, Eccleshall, and Stoke, whilst the piece found at Chesterton may perhaps have been located in a manor that failed to upgrade to parish status. The reuse of sites, the repair and rebuilding of important structures over several generations forged links with the past and claimed ownership for the present. At Catholme ‘at least five structures were dismantled and rebuilt on the same spot, some several times’. Like the memories and narratives associated with barrows and stone sculpture we can see the connection between the ‘desire to create long-term relationships with a place and the growing importance of landholding and inheritance’.<sup>778</sup> It is tempting to see these as great defences against Viking marauders, or Welsh incursions into Staffordshire although it is equally as likely that these ‘manorial’ sites were set in opposition to each other in a period of political intrigue and power vacuums. Defensive, possibly, they also compete in a different way, signifying allusions to lordly rank and social ambition. The ‘proper’ place for a church may have been thought to be on the edge, or a bluff of some sort, and this was emulated by secular lords, and not just restricted to minster churches. Perhaps, rather than attempting to distinguish between them, we should consider them to be a continuum of an idea of how a place should look and feel.

<sup>777</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 389.

<sup>778</sup> Hamerow, *Rural Settlements*, pp. 35-36.



## CHAPTER FIVE: A TENTH-CENTURY FAMILY – KINSHIP IN PRACTICE IN THE STAFFORDSHIRE LANDSCAPE

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Previous chapters have shown that the growing thegnly class of Staffordshire took notions of lordship and how to express this in the landscape from local and regional elites. The influence of Æthelred and Æthelflaed has been observed through the promotion of local saints and remembrance strategies such as the use of stone sculpture and the founding of religious houses. This next chapter considers the influence of a single kinship group whose sway was felt across Staffordshire and beyond, and seeks to locate that family's base within Staffordshire.

It is difficult to give an exact figure for the numbers of charters that survive for Staffordshire for the early medieval period. Many were created before the county became fully established and do not reference it. In addition, charters often include places from across several counties and many can be difficult to locate. Bridgeman listed 28 charters relating to Staffordshire, ten of which have boundary clauses examined by Hooke.<sup>779</sup> The largest single archive from within the county are the 38 pre-Conquest charters that survive from the Burton Abbey archives (some of which have boundary clauses) and several of these relate to Staffordshire lands.<sup>780</sup> Of these, half are concerned with estates owned by the abbey at Burton and most, if not all, can be associated with Wulfric Spot or his family. In fact the collection could also be seen as a family archive. This notion is strengthened by the fact that several charters concern land held by Wulfric that were never given to the abbey (S.557, S.554, S.749), or were held by members of his family such as Wulfgeat (S.720), his mother Wulfrun, or Morcar (S.992, S.924, S.928), or Wulfric's brother Ælfhelm (S.395, S.397, S.548, S.569, S.707, S.739).<sup>781</sup> It is within this archive that we find perhaps the single most

<sup>779</sup> C. Bridgeman, *Staffordshire Pre-conquest Charters*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1916 (London, 1918), pp. 67-137, and D. Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire: The Charter Evidence* (Keele, 1983).

<sup>780</sup> See P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II: The Charters of Burton Abbey* (Oxford, 1979).

<sup>781</sup> See Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xiii for a breakdown.

important document relating to early medieval Staffordshire, the confirmation charter of the will of Wulfric himself (S.906).<sup>782</sup>

Wulfric was a wealthy magnate and part of an important Mercian family and his will shows that he was a landowner ‘on a vast scale’.<sup>783</sup> At his death (from the charter evidence) Wulfric Spot was likely to be an individual who had lived to a good age.<sup>784</sup> A later chronicle from the early sixteenth century tells us that both he and his wife Ealhswith, were buried in the abbey church of his foundation at Burton.<sup>785</sup> The chronicle also mentions that he was mortally wounded at a battle near Ipswich and later died of his wounds in 1010.<sup>786</sup> Although Bridgeman saw this as a plausible account, it has since been dismissed. The date is too late as the confirmation charter for Wulfric Spot’s will is dated 1002x1004 and so the Ipswich story seemingly relates to another Wulfric.<sup>787</sup> His byname, Spot, is first recorded in the thirteenth-century Burton annals, ‘*quidam nobilis nomine Wulfricus cognomento Spot*’.<sup>788</sup> Later sources use terms such as *comes* and *consul* to describe him but these terms do not occur in the will or any of the charters. In the charter that confirms the details of Wulfric’s will he is described as ‘the king’s thegn of noble lineage, Wulfric’ (S.906). Clauses in the will indicate his status:

‘þæt is þæt ic geann minon hlaforde twa hund mancessa goldes . 7 twa seolforhilted sweord . 7 feower hors . twa gesadelode . 7 twa ungesadelode . 7 þa wæpna þe þærto gebyriað’.

‘First I grant to my lord two hundred mancuses of gold, and two silver-hilted swords and four horses, two saddled and two unsaddled, and the weapons which are due them’.<sup>789</sup>

<sup>782</sup> M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), p. 170.

<sup>783</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xv.

<sup>784</sup> D. Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930), p.152.

<sup>785</sup> This in the opening of ‘A List of the Several Abbots of Burton upon Trent’, SRO D603/ADD/X/2.

<sup>786</sup> C. Bridgeman, *Will of Wulfric Spot*, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 1916 (London, 1918), p. 3.

<sup>787</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxix.

<sup>788</sup> H. Luard (ed.), ‘Burton Annales in Annales Monastici I’, Rolls Series (London, 1864), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k50240s.image.r=annales+monastici.f84.langEN> (15/05/2014), p. 183, and in P. Sawyer, *Wulfric Spot* (d. 1002x4), Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/30/101030096/> (15/05/2014), and Bridgeman, *Will of Wulfric Spot*, p.2.

<sup>789</sup> Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp. 46-47.

These grants ‘to my lord’ imply a conflating of obligations. A monetary payment was usually reserved for an earl to be paid in heriot, whilst the number of horses mentioned is a payment normally understood to be one for a king’s thegn.<sup>790</sup> It is, however, possible that Wulfric owed more than a single obligation. He is likely to be the individual described as the ‘devoted minister, Wulfric’ who was granted Austrey (Warwickshire) in 958 by King Eadred (S.576), given that we know that Wulfric Spott later granted Austrey ‘just as it stands with the produce and the men’ in his will to Morcar’s wife.

From the surviving charter evidence it is possible to observe Wulfric as being active at court for a prolonged period from around 980 to 1002.<sup>791</sup> He belonged to a group of men who were ‘of considerable calibre, many of whom turned out to be closely associated with the advancement of the monastic cause’.<sup>792</sup> This interest is reflected in his foundation at Burton. Of his general status we can be sure that Wulfric was a leading nobleman of his age, being part of ‘a circle of influential clerics and laymen around Æthelred II who constituted the major – perhaps dominant – presence at his court’.<sup>793</sup>

This period in the family’s history and their fate has been well researched and discussed elsewhere, in particular in a series of articles by Insley.<sup>794</sup>

<sup>790</sup> Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, p. 153.

<sup>791</sup> S. Keynes, ‘The diplomas of King Æthelred ‘The Unready’ (978–1016): a study in their use as historical evidence’, *Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought*, 3rd series, 13 (Cambridge, 1980), p. 188.

<sup>792</sup> Keynes, ‘Diplomas of King Æthelred’, p. 189.

<sup>793</sup> C. Insley, ‘The Family of Wulfric Spott: an Anglo-Saxon Marcher Dynasty?’, in D. Roffe (ed.), *The English and their Legacy* (Woodbridge, 2012), p. 116.

<sup>794</sup> C. Insley, ‘Politics, conflict and kinship in early eleventh century Mercia’, *Midlands History*, 25 (Birmingham, 2000), pp. 28–42, C. Insley, ‘Southumbria’, in P. Stafford (ed.), *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c.500–c.1100* (2009, Chichester, 2013 edn), pp. 322–340, and Insley, ‘Family of Wulfric Spott’, pp. 115–128.

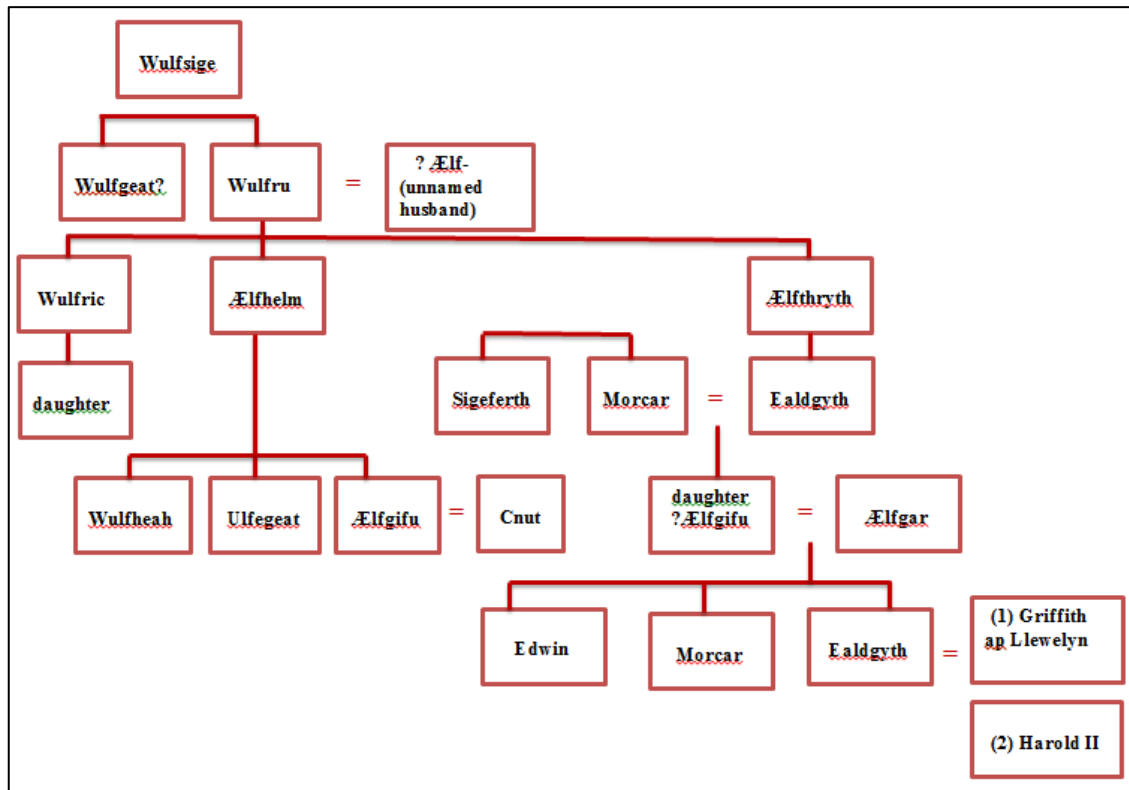


Figure 78: Wulfrun's and Wulfric Spot's family tree (adapted from Sawyer).<sup>795</sup>

Of Wulfric's closest surviving family we know that his brother, Ælfhelm, was ealdorman of Northumbria, and part of that prominent circle of family and friends found at the king's court. Both brothers feature together as witnesses on three separate occasions in the surviving charters of the period.<sup>796</sup> Wulfric granted Ælfhelm four estates in his will. Wulfheah, the son of Ælfhelm, received three estates and shared a seemingly large grant of land 'between the Wirral and the Mersey' with his father. Wulfheah's close political relationship with his father at court is emphasised by the four occasions when his name occurs immediately after that of his father's in the witness lists.<sup>797</sup> The witness lists show the close link between politics and family at court, and indicate how the family of Wulfric were able to work these close kinship bonds. In an indication of their proximity to the royal family we see in a charter of 996 (S.877), that all three family members Wulfric, Ælfhelm and Wulfheah head the list of witnesses. In this charter King Æthelred granted land to Ælfthryth, his own mother, which we might assume was an important family bequest and their prominence in the witness list is

<sup>795</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xlii.

<sup>796</sup> Keynes, 'Diplomas of King Æthelred', p. 189.

<sup>797</sup> Keynes, 'Diplomas of King Æthelred', p. 189.

seemingly an indication of royal favour.<sup>798</sup> A second, perhaps less favoured son of Ælfhelm was Ulfgeat who was only granted a single unidentified estate in Wulfric's will 'aet Northtune in the hope that he may be a better friend and supporter of the monastery'.<sup>799</sup> The sub-clause perhaps anticipates a challenge of some sort from some members of the wider family to the grants in the will and a possible divergence of family interests; the grant might be seen as an attempt to head off a later challenge.<sup>800</sup> The attempted appeasement (if this is what it is) of Ulfgeat in the will shows how important kinship was, and that claims and counter claims could be made for land even about a bequest with a very impressive witness list. It also highlights a wider point: that land was in essence perceived as belonging to the wider kinship group rather than solely as personal property to be disposed of as an individual might see fit.<sup>801</sup> Considering lands as the holdings of a wider kinship group and not solely as separate holdings of various individuals will be helpful as we search to locate this family in the landscape.

### **A tenth-century continuity?**

The will of Wulfric Spott itself is the most northerly of the 68 surviving documents that make-up the corpus of surviving Anglo-Saxon wills.<sup>802</sup> Wulfric held large swathes of land in the north, the Wirral, the land '*betwus Ribbel and Mærse*' (between the Ribble and the Mersey) and the Soke of Conisborough (Yorkshire).<sup>803</sup> Insley has made the case for seeing Wulfric and his family as a 'marcher dynasty'.<sup>804</sup>

We have seen that Wulfric's brother Ælfhelm was a Northumbrian thegn, and also that Wulfric's niece and goddaughter was married to Morcar, one of the main lay beneficiaries of Wulfric's will. Morcar's powerful position as thegn of the Five Boroughs made him an extremely important and strategic ally to the immediate east of tenth-century Mercian Staffordshire. In effect, this alliance meant that Wulfric's extended family held land right across the northern edge of tenth and early eleventh-century Mercia with strong interests further north. We do not know for certain when

<sup>798</sup> Keynes, 'Diplomas of King Æthelred', p. 189.

<sup>799</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxvi.

<sup>800</sup> L. Tollerton, *Wills and Will Making in Anglo-Saxon England* (York, 2011), p. 159.

<sup>801</sup> The list with the king, archbishops, bishops etc. can be found in Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, pp. 48-53.

<sup>802</sup> Tollerton, *Wills and Will Making*, p. 11.

<sup>803</sup> Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, p. 154, and P. Sawyer, 'The Charters of Burton Abbey', *Northern History*, 10 (1975), p. 30.

<sup>804</sup> Insley, 'Family of Wulfric Spott', p. 116.

these large estates were created but this family's marcher holdings, it will be shown here, can be dated back to the re-conquest of Mercia and to be, in effect, a continuation of a process that began with the campaigns of Edward and Æthelflæd at the beginning of the tenth century.

Sawyer suggests that we can reconstruct two large blocks of land that were important in the process of the re-conquest of lands from Scandinavian rule. Firstly a group of lands:

‘comprising the Wye and Hope valleys in the southern Peak District... and was in the early years of the tenth century apparently a key to the submission of the north’.

Secondly:

‘A large and fairly compact group of estates either side of the River Trent across the main routes from Northumbria to Lichfield and Tamworth that was granted in 942 to Wulfsige the Black most probably with the recovery of the five boroughs’.<sup>805</sup>

The lands at Hope and Ashford (both Derbyshire) occur in a charter that is part of the Burton archive (S. 397), namely 60 hides confirmed in 926 by Athelstan to Uhtred, and land bought from the *paganis*, Scandinavian conquerors of the land. This was done some time between Edward's accession in 899 and Æthelred's death in 911.<sup>806</sup> Given that the abbey at Burton did not have an interest in this area and although there is no evidence that Wulfric ever held this land, the fact that the charter ended up in the Burton archive implies that the land was at some point in the ownership of Wulfric's family or kinship group. It may have come into the possession of Ælfhelm, Wulfric's brother, with his other northern landholdings, and thence to the Crown upon his murder in 1006.<sup>807</sup> This land was held together with Bakewell, and as another Burton charter (S.548) shows, it was later granted to Uhtred *dux* in 949. Together these lands formed ‘a triple estate with 27 berewicks stretching over 15 miles’.<sup>808</sup> The importance of this site

<sup>805</sup> Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’, p. 30.

<sup>806</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. 6.

<sup>807</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>808</sup> Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’, p. 33.

is clear. We know that around 920, three years after the death of Æthelflæd, King Edward:<sup>809</sup>

‘went to Bakewell in the Peak of Derbyshire and had a fortress built in the neighbourhood and garrisoned. Then the king of the Scots and the whole Scottish nation accepted him as ‘father and lord’: so also did Rægnald and the sons of Eadwulf and all the inhabitants of Northumbria’.<sup>810</sup>

In the same year as this first charter (926) Athelstan made an alliance with Sihtric, king of Northumbria at a meeting at Tamworth where he offered his only full sister in marriage in an attempt to forge closer ties with the Northumbrian kingdom.<sup>811</sup> Apart from stressing the continued significance of Tamworth, this meeting is perhaps also indicative of the weakness of the hold on this part of, what was once independent Mercia, by Edward and Athelstan, given that this northern tip of Mercia was controlled by a northern lord. The Peaks of Staffordshire and Derbyshire remained the northern boundary of Mercia, ‘surviving the Viking settlement of the area’, with Bakewell towards the far northern boundary.<sup>812</sup> These charters plot a sequence of the reclamation of land and influence, the starting point being Æthelflæd’s taking of Derby in 917 and the subsequent submission to Edward in 920. Consequently there was a growing interest in owning land in this region, to regain and retrieve Mercian or English influence, which was also an opportunity for trusted members of the court to take an advantage, as indicated by the purchases from ‘pagans’ six years later and the grant of Bakewell in 946. They indicate the role of Wulfric’s wider kinship group in the tenth century struggle to gain control of land once under the influence of Scandinavian lords. Another way of establishing control was to establish new, or to re-found, religious houses. The grant of King Eadred to Uhtred of land at Bakewell (S.548) states ‘*Hoc dumtaxat coenubium Badecanwelle*’ (indicating a monastery at Bakewell).<sup>813</sup> These lands did not pass into the hands of Burton Abbey but, we assume, into the family’s

<sup>809</sup> ASC gives a date of 924 or 923, Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’ uses 920, p. 33, whilst P. Stafford in *The East Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1985), p. 138, says ‘about 920’.

<sup>810</sup> ASC, p. 104.

<sup>811</sup> S. Foot, *Æthelstan, the First King of England* (London, 2012), p. 48, and Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’, p. 34.

<sup>812</sup> Stafford, *East Midlands*, p. 114 and p. 135.

<sup>813</sup> Electronic Sawyer, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/548.html> (21/06/2013), and C. Hart, *The Early Charters of Northern England and the North Midlands* (Leicester, 1975), p. 104.

ownership, most likely Ælfhelm's, Wulfric's brother and ealdorman of Northumbria.<sup>814</sup> He may have had several motivations for establishing a monastery. An ageing Uhtred might have been considering his own mortality and had concerns for his soul, and that of his family.<sup>815</sup> But he would also have gained political influence and cultural cachet in establishing a minster with a large landholding in region of the *paganis*. If it was a re-founding of an earlier religious house, the claiming of such a site, of its supernatural powers, and of restoring its vibrancy could also have been considered as bestowing good fortune on the life and soul of Uhtred.

A second grouping of land grants contained within the Burton archive consisted of manors relating to the mid-Trent Valley which were granted to Wulfsige the Black. Wulfsige seems likely to have been related to Wulfric's mother Wulfrun, possibly her father.<sup>816</sup> A charter of 942 shows land being granted from King Edmund to Wulfsige the Black (S.479), totalling some 40 hides at Alrewas, Bromley (Kings and Abbots), Barton, Tatenhill, Branston, Stretton, Rolleston, Clifton and Haunton. This grant took in land on the Staffordshire border to the north of the Trent 'between its two tributaries the Blithe and the Dove, a distance of about 12 miles together with Alrewas and King's Bromley on the south bank'.<sup>817</sup> It also included Clifton (Campville) and Haunton. Clifton was, throughout the medieval period, a very wealthy and important manor and it was where the borders of four counties met (Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Warwickshire), at No Man's Heath. That the charter contains lands later held by Wulfric and granted to Burton Abbey in his will (Stretton and Bromley) shows a continuity of landholding by the family. Indeed, the last place mentioned, Bromley, occurs in another grant (S.878) which had been held by Wulfrun, Wulfric's mother. This reinforces the proposal that a link is shown between three generations of the same family.<sup>818</sup>

Another grant (S.484) in 942 from King Edmund to Wulfsige the Black granted land on the other side of the Trent at Walton-on-Trent, Coton in the Elms, Linton, Cauldwell, Drakelow (all Derbyshire), and Newbold in Barton-under-Needwood (Staffordshire). In

<sup>814</sup> Sawyer, 'Charters of Burton Abbey', p. 34.

<sup>815</sup> Sargent, 'Lichfield', p. 222.

<sup>816</sup> Hooke, *Landscape of Anglo-Saxon Staffordshire*, p. 31.

<sup>817</sup> Sawyer, 'Charters of Burton Abbey', p. 35.

<sup>818</sup> Sawyer, 'Charters of Burton Abbey', p. 36.



a third grant (S.1606), again in 942, King Edmund granted land to Wulfsige *Maurus* (the Black) at Croxall, Catton, Walton-on-Trent, Drakelow, Stapenhill (Derbyshire), and at *Sulueston*, possibly Silverstone, Northamptonshire.<sup>819</sup> This grant took in the south side of the Trent to seven miles below the Tame.<sup>820</sup> Together these lands formed a formidable block. It is possible that these grants were merely confirming an existing ownership. Sawyer, however, thinks it unlikely that ‘such a large and compact estate could have been preserved as a unit for long so close to the heart of Mercia’. Rather, it seems to be part of an attempt to consolidate land and authority into the hands of a family (or kinship group), a process we have already identified as having taken place on the northern fringe of Mercia at Bakewell. Once the king had established his overlordship he was then free to leave the local lord, in this case Wulfsige, in command of the area and with the responsibility of establishing and maintaining the king’s authority. The whole process ‘is best seen not as a defensive measure but as a stage in the recovery of Derby, Nottingham and the other boroughs’.<sup>821</sup> This is very much an act of consolidation, a development that carried on from the successes of the early tenth century and one, it is argued here, that continued throughout the tenth century. The suggestion is that this family not only replicated the policy of bringing land under ‘English’ control, but that they also mirrored the wider cultural practices of Edward and Æthelflæd. A process that was entrusted to a kinship group based around the family of Wulfric Spot and one that, in documentary terms at least, ended with the will of Wulfric Spot in the early eleventh century, and, in real terms, a few years later with the demise of the family’s fortunes.

### **The family *Wulf* and their religious houses**

In his will (S.906) Wulfric granted:

‘to every bishop five mancuses of gold and to each of the two archbishops ten mancuses of gold. And I grant to every monastic house one pound and to every abbot and every abbess five mancuses of gold. And I grant to Archbishop Aelfric the lands *aet Dumeltan* along with the other, for my soul, in the hope that

<sup>819</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II* (1975), pp. 15- 16.

<sup>820</sup> Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’, pp. 34-35.

<sup>821</sup> Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’, pp. 37- 38.

he may be a better friend and supporter of the monastery which I have founded'.<sup>822</sup>

Bequests such as these to religious communities or orders are by no means unusual in early medieval wills. Here the generosity of the grant to Burton is matched by grants to every bishop, abbot and abbess, as well as a grant to every monastic order with twice as much going to the archbishops. Beyond the great cost and investment in his own foundation Wulfric was an enthusiast for the new Benedictine order with his foundation at Burton being the most northerly house of the order at the time, and the only one in central Mercia. He was a member of a wider circle at court who shared an interest in promoting monasticism as well as his own interests. Wulfric was a man who, at this stage of his life at least, clearly had great zeal for religion.<sup>823</sup>

Wulfric's land holdings to the north and east, as a marcher lord, have been discussed above. Here, it will be suggested that the land to the west of Staffordshire into Shropshire may have had a core set of estates from which the family was based; that these estates, if looked at together, help to identify some of the unlocated places in the will; and that, moreover, they probably relate to the maternal rather than the paternal line. We are uncertain as to the identity of Wulfric's father. John of Worcester tells us that Wulfrun was the wife of Ælfhelm, but the only known historic personage of this period and of that name is Wulfric's brother, and so this appears to be a misunderstanding.<sup>824</sup> Both the *Burton Annals* and the *Chronicle of Abingdon* record that Wulfric endowed Burton with his inheritance from his father 'deditque ei omnem hereditatem paternam appretiatem DCC libras'.<sup>825</sup> However, this is not specifically recorded in either the will or the confirmation charter.<sup>826</sup> It is worthy of note that Wulfric is described as the son of Wulfrun, *Wulfric Wulfrune sunu* in a charter of 995 (S.886). Insley has pointed out that 'it is striking ... and not often commented upon... that Wulfric was identified by a matronymic... suggesting that his father had either died

<sup>822</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xviii.

<sup>823</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxi.

<sup>824</sup> Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, p. 152.

<sup>825</sup> H. Luard (ed.), 'Burton Annales in Annales Monastici I', *Rolls Series* (London, 1864), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k50240s.image.r=Annales+monastici.f84.langEN> (15/05/2014) p. 183, and this from Abingdon, the Burton Annales gives 'septingentas' instead of DCC., Rev. J. Stevenson (ed.), 'Chronicon monasterii de Abingdon' (London, 1858), [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL18636128M/Chronicon\\_monasterii\\_de\\_Abingdon](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL18636128M/Chronicon_monasterii_de_Abingdon). (15/05/2014).

<sup>826</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xx.

early or was, for some reason, *persona non grata*'.<sup>827</sup> Wulfric also had an interest at Tamworth which we have seen remained an important Mercian centre in the tenth century. His will shows him to have held, what we must assume, quite unique rights to land at Tamworth, land which was 'not to be subject to any service nor to any man born'.<sup>828</sup> These lands may have been passed down through the family. We know that his mother, Wulfrun, would have held property in the burh as she was captured by the Danes in Tamworth in 943. The ASC seems to imply that she was a woman of some importance, that she would have been familiar to a wider audience. Of Wulfrun's capture we are told that:

'In this year Analf stormed Tamworth and there was great slaughter on both sides, the Danes had victory and carried booty away with them. On this raid Wulfrun was taken prisoner'.<sup>829</sup>

A holding in Tamworth was granted to the community where Wulfric's *earm* ('wretched') daughter lived, 'wretched' it is thought in the sense of some disability, which is also suggested by the terms of the grant for her life time only.<sup>830</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy that Tamworth was the only specifically named unreformed community to receive anything in the will. The family's importance is highlighted by this close association with Tamworth which had been the most important secular centre in Mercia and remained a place of some status throughout the first half of the tenth century.

Of Wulfrun we know that she was granted ten *cassati*, nine in *Heantune* and one in *Treselcotum* (Trescott) in 985 (S.860), where she is described as 'a certain lady of the name of Wulfrun'.<sup>831</sup> Wulfrun is shown to found a church dedicated to St Mary at a place called *Ham tun* in a charter dated 996 (for 994, S.1380), later to become known as St Peter's.<sup>832</sup> In this charter she is styled as a 'noble matron and religious woman'.<sup>833</sup>

<sup>827</sup> Insley, 'Family of Wulfric Spott', p. 122.

<sup>828</sup> S. 1536, translation in Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp. 46-51.

<sup>829</sup> ASC, p. 111.

<sup>830</sup> Gelling, *West Midlands*, p. 151.

<sup>831</sup> Bridgeman, 'Staffordshire Pre-conquest Charters', pp. 101-103.

<sup>832</sup> The earliest reference to Wolverhampton refers to the Heantune, Wulfrun's name being added at a later date. *Heantune* (OE *Hean* plus *tūn*) gives 'high' plus *tūn*. The 'high' may refer either to the settlements height in the landscape, and so it was noted within the naming of the site because it was unusual, or possibly *hean* denotes 'chief'. It may simply be that the importance of this site was such that it attracted the attentions of the religiously minded because, or in spite of, its 'highness'. D. Horovitz, *The Place-Names of Staffordshire* (Brewood, 2005), p.149. See

This suggests that by this point in her life Wulfrun had founded or entered a religious community, presumably the one at Wolverhampton. Although Wulfrun's name is not added to the place-name Hamtun in the Domesday Survey, it is recorded as 'the church of *Wolvrenehamptonia*' by 1075x1085.<sup>834</sup> A *fossatum Wulfrini* is mentioned to the east of Wolverhampton at Stow Heath.<sup>835</sup> The naming of places after a female is not unheard of but is relatively rare, enough to suggest, along with the mention in ASC, that she was a significant personage. The confirmation of the grant of land by Wulfrun informs us that she granted land to the 'monastery of Hamtune, which has now in modern time been built', indicating a new foundation. However, a later phrase relating to land which 'just as your aforesaid monastery of Hampton has kept them from ancient times' suggests it may have been a re-founding, a practice that we have seen occurred elsewhere (S.1380).<sup>836</sup> There was a belief that the house here was founded by Wulfhere in 659, mentioned in the nineteenth century, although there is no evidence beyond that tradition to prove this.<sup>837</sup> The foundation charter makes specific mention of members of Wulfrun's family:

'I Wulfrun grant to my proper patron and high throned King of kings, and (in honour of) the everlasting Virgin Mother of God, Mary, and of all saints, for the body of my husband and of my soul, ten hides of land to that aforesaid monastery of the servants of God there, and in another convenient place another ten hides for the offences of Wulfgeat my kinsman lest he should hear in judgement to be dreaded from the severe Judge, "Go away from me, I hungered and thirsted" and so on. Because he is blessed who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Finally now my sole daughter, Elfthryth, has migrated from the world to the life-giving airs. For the third time I have granted 10 hides to the

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also D. Hooke and T. Slater, *Anglo-Saxon Wolverhampton, the Town and its Monastery* (Wolverhampton, 1986), pp. 35-39.

<sup>833</sup> W. Duignan and W. Stevenson, *Charter of Wulfrun to the Monastery at 'Hamtun'* (Wolverhampton, 1888).

<sup>834</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, p. 584.

<sup>835</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, pp. 517 and 586.

<sup>836</sup> Bridgeman, 'Staffordshire Pre-conquest Charters', pp. 105-115, and Duignan and Stevenson, *Charter of Wulfrun*, translates this a 'venerable' rather than ancient, p. 105.

<sup>837</sup> This is another form of story-telling, about how people understood the past, as seen in previous chapters., J. Murray, *Handbook for travellers in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Staffordshire* (1874), <https://archive.org/details/handbookfortrav15firgoog> (01/05/2015), p. 132.

almighty God, with ineffable charity, more willingly than the others (which are surrounded by these territories)'.<sup>838</sup>

Wulfrun granted ten hides for the soul of her un-named husband, as well as ten hides for her 'soul' and her deceased daughter's soul Ælfthryth. Wulfgeat was also granted ten hides for his soul, and here we receive a little additional information from the charter, he is clearly an important figure, since his 'soul' received a third of the total grants:

'ten hides for the offences of Wulfgeat my kinsman lest he should hear in judgement to be dreaded from the severe Judge, "Go away from me, I hungered and thirsted" and so on'.

The relationship between Wulfgeat and Wulfrun is unspecified but the nature of the grant shows him to have been an important person to her, this is accentuated by Wulfrun's willingness to support him in the afterlife despite an implied disgrace. The family were no strangers to paying the price of early medieval intrigues, Insley as we have seen has suggested that Wulfric's father may have been *persona non grata* and his brother Ælfhelm was murdered, and his sons blinded in 1006. Wulfgeat had clearly erred, either against the king's authority or that of the Church, or both. It seems reasonable to suggest that he was a kinsman and, given the nature of the other recipients of prayers, a close one. Another tradition concerning the founding of the house at Wolverhampton (first mentioned in 1548) suggests that it was initially founded by King Edgar who it was thought had given the land to Wulfrun's kinsman Wulfgeat.<sup>839</sup> It is impossible to prove that Wulfgeat was the patron of the original church at *Hamptun* but a family link is suggested.<sup>840</sup> We can conclude from the charter and supporting evidence that it is reasonable to suggest he was a significant local figure and probable

<sup>838</sup> Duignan and Stevenson, *Charter of Wulfrun*, p. 9, also in Bridgeman, 'Staffordshire pre-conquest charters', p. 106.

<sup>839</sup> D. Knowles and R. Hadock, *Medieval Religious Houses; England and Wales* (1953, London, 1971 edn), p. 444.

<sup>840</sup> It has been suggested that a church was founded at Wolverhampton within a pre historic enclosure, Hooke and Slater, *Anglo-Saxon Wolverhampton*, pp. 15-17. Although Horovitz has suggested that this may be a curvilinear boundary often associated with monastic spaces, D. Horovitz, *Notes and Materials on the Battle of Tettenhall 910 A.D. and Other Researches* (Brewood, 2010), p. 327, referring to J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 196-198.

kinsman to Wulfrun and Wulfric, although this relationship is not commented upon in any detail in the main work about the family.<sup>841</sup>

A will survives for a Wulfgeat of Donington, a Shropshire parish that directly borders Staffordshire and which it is eight miles east of Wolverhampton (S.1534). The will is undated but is thought to be from around 1000.<sup>842</sup> There are two possible historical candidates for the author of this will, firstly, the Wulfgeat recorded in *ASC* who in 1006 was deprived of all his property and secondly the Wulfgeat who flourished from 964-974 who Whitelock considered to be a different person.<sup>843</sup> Whitelock is uncertain which of the two it might be and writes, 'I do not consider that the evidence is sufficient to justify either identification'.<sup>844</sup> There is, however, some scope for attempting to refine the possibilities. The will grants gifts of:

‘Two horses, two swords and four shields and four spears and ten mares and ten colts. And he prays his lord for the love of God that he will be a friend to his wife and daughter’.

This extract at first glance seems like a fairly formulaic payment that we can see in other wills of the period, such as Wulfric Spott's. It does not, however, sound like the bequest of a man who has just been deprived of all his property by his lord. Further grants of land to his wife of land at Kilsall, Evenlode and Roden for her lifetime to then revert to his 'kindred' reinforce this point, as do additional grants to his daughters and kinswoman Ælfhild, whose land at Wrottesley (Seisdon) was to revert to him should he outlive her. Although the will may have been written before the eventual fall of (the *ASC*) Wulfgeat in 1006, there is enough here to suggest that the will is of another Wulfgeat.

The mention of Wulfgeat in the grant of Wulfrun suggests that her kinsman was already disgraced and along with her daughter was presumably dead by that date (994). This Wulfgeat was the beneficiary of a grant by King Edgar in 963 of land recorded in a

<sup>841</sup> Insley, 'Family of Wulfric Spott', pp. 122-123.

<sup>842</sup> Electronic Sawyer, <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/1534.html#> (21/06/2013).

<sup>843</sup> *ASC*, p. 136.

<sup>844</sup> Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp. 55-56 and p. 165.

charter held in the Burton archive (S.720), in which land was given at Duddestone and *Ernlege* (Arley, Seisdon). The land at Arley was later granted by Wulfrun in her charter for the foundation at Wolverhampton. That the charter ended up at Burton (rather than Wolverhampton) emphasises the kinship link between Wulfgeat, Wulfrun and her son Wulfric.<sup>845</sup>

Wulfgeat of Donington granted in his will gifts to a series of religious institutions, for:

‘his soul’s need, he grants forgiveness to each of those that have sinned against him. And he grants a year’s rent to his men as a gift. May they who succeed to land there enjoy the income according as they carry out the charitable bequests’.

To God he granted ‘his burial fee’, his *sawelscaettas*, presumably to the church at the manor of Donington, St Cuthbert’s or a mother church unnamed. He also granted land at *Tardebidge* (Worcestershire) as well as ‘one pound of pence, and twenty-six freedmen, for his soul’. He gave gifts to Worcester (Cathedral), Hereford (Cathedral) and St Guthlac’s at Hereford, as well as religious houses at Leominster, and Clifton on Teme (Worcestershire). More locally he gave gifts of two bullocks each to the churches at Tong, on the Staffordshire-Shropshire border, and at Penkridge (Cuttlestone) and a gift of four bullocks to Wolverhampton. If the foundation by Wulfrun had been in the 990s then this grant could not have come before then. However, we have seen from the grant by Wulfrun that there is good reason to consider hers was an act of ‘re-endowment and probable rebuilding’.<sup>846</sup> We have the possibility that the will is that of the Wulfgeat that flourished in the period 964-974, or a third Wulfgeat unknown to us beyond this will. There are good reasons to suggest that both, if they are two individuals, were kinsmen of the family *Wulf*.

It is possible to locate Wulfgeat in the landscape for in his will he is described as ‘Wulfgeates gecwide aet Dunnintune’, that is Wulfgeat of Donington. The manorial site at Donington shows every indication of being an important site in the landscape. Although there is no priest present in the Domesday Survey, the will of Wulfgeat

<sup>845</sup> Hart, *Early Charters*, p. 79.

<sup>846</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 356.

indicates a church was present at the time the will was written. At the time of the survey it was said that:

Earl Edwin held it, 3 hides ...In lordship 4 ploughs; 8 ploughmen, 2 female slaves;

12 villages and 2 smallholders with 3 ploughs; a further 7 ploughs would be possible there.

A mill which pays 5 packloads of corn, woodland 1 league long and ½ wide, in Droitwich 5 salt-houses which pay 20s

Before 1066 it paid £20, now £9.<sup>847</sup>

The estate was a wealthy one and it was held at the time of the Conquest by Earl Edwin is indicative of its status. Nearby Tong, associated with Donington in the will, was held by Earl Morcar, suggesting that the wider estate retained its status as an important place. Tong, like Donington is not shown to have a church at the time of the Domesday survey, and both are shown to have decreased significantly in value. The Donington site appears to follow the topographical pattern established in the previous chapter. The present church, St Cuthbert's, sits on a promontory overlooking a large area of what would have been marshland fed by pools and streams which have since been landscaped. That the parish boundary follows this water course to the south of the site indicates a long-standing and important boundary, a manorial one fossilised into a parochial boundary, as seen elsewhere.

<sup>847</sup> J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book, Shropshire* (Chichester, 1986), 4.1.25.



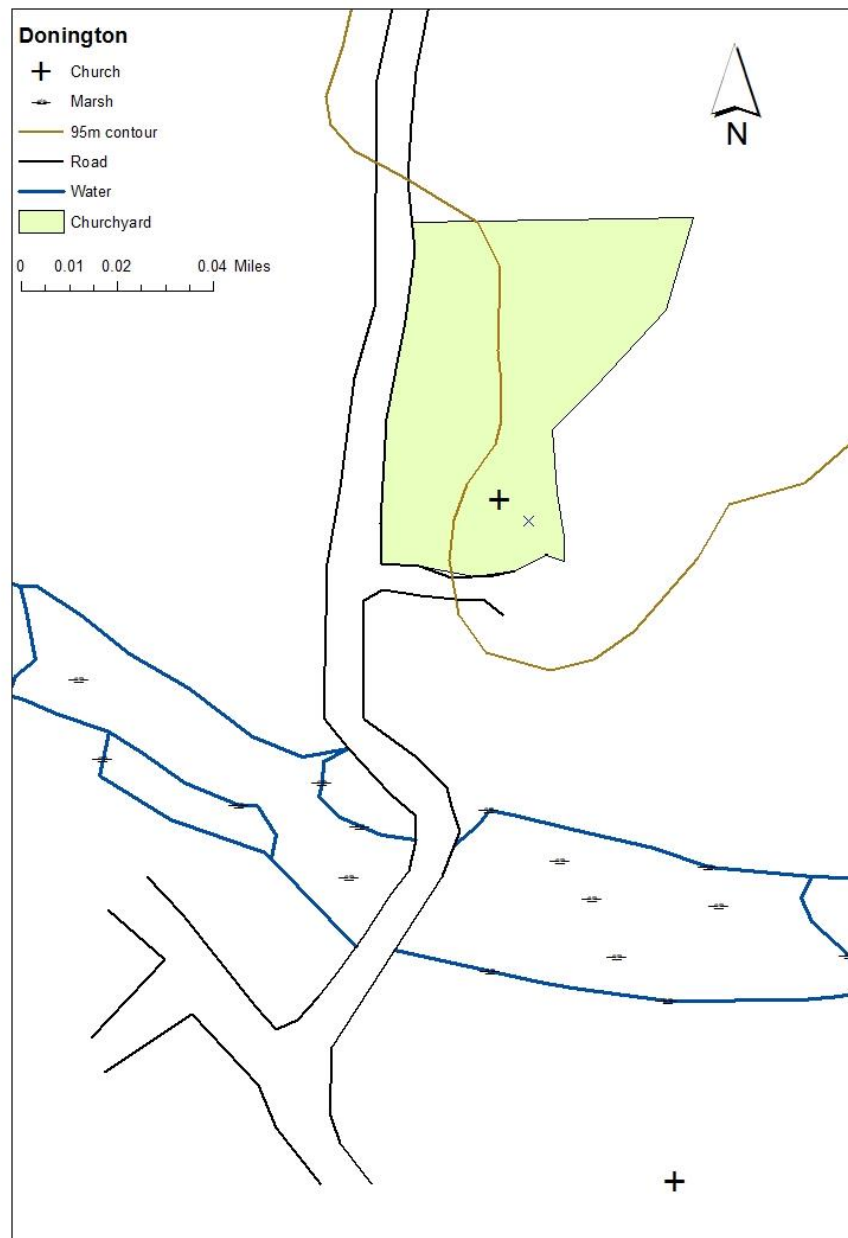


Figure 79: Map of Donington manorial centre showing the watery landscape beneath the promontory and the 95m contour which defines the plateau.

The place-name gives OE *tūn* with the OE personal name *Dunna*.<sup>848</sup> Donington is only eight miles from Wolverhampton, 12 from Penkridge, and less than four from Tong, this assists us in locating a wider family *Wulf* landscape.<sup>849</sup>

<sup>848</sup> It may possibly also be *Dūning* 'hill-place', M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire, Part One: English Place-Name Society*, 62/63 (Irthingborough, 1990), pp. 110-111.

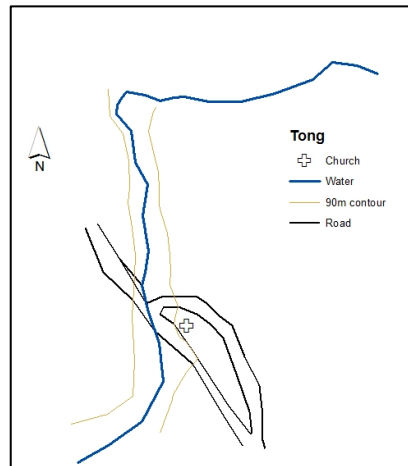


Figure 80: Map of Tong showing manorial centre.

In his will Wulfric Spot left *Twangan* to his kinsman Æthelric and ‘after his day it is to go to Burton for my soul and for his (or my) mother’s soul’, presumably Æthelric’s mother but possibly Wulfric’s mother Wulfrun.<sup>850</sup> Despite the uncertainty, and however we interpret this phrase, it suggests a close kinship. Sawyer was uncertain of the identification of this *Twangan*, ‘the argument is not decisive’, but he errs towards Tonge in Leicestershire.<sup>851</sup> It is suggested here that there is greater evidence to put forward Tong in Shropshire as the one mentioned in the will, and this is supported by Gelling’s analysis of the place-name forms of the two candidates.<sup>852</sup>

Identifying this Tong as the one in Shropshire is important because it indicates close family ties in this area over a prolonged period. We can propose that we have the wills (or bequests) for three individuals from the same family in the same region, and, conceivably three successive generations. It is a quite remarkable survival and one that has not been commented on in any great detail before. Through these wills we can see that Wulfgeat shares the concerns of both Wulfrun and Wulfric: his desire that his daughters should be looked after can be compared with Wulfrun’s concern for her daughter’s soul, and Wulfric’s ‘poor’ daughter, and attempts to secure his bequest and the security of his family through a series of gifts. That the one daughter received a

<sup>849</sup> See Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, no. XIX, pp. 54-56 and pp. 163-167. Also Bridgeman, ‘Staffordshire pre-conquest charters’, pp. 119-121.

<sup>850</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xviii.

<sup>851</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxvii.

<sup>852</sup> Gelling, *Place-Names of Shropshire*, p. 293.

larger portion of the bequest is likely to do with the fact that she had a son, a strategy designed to keep the family's holdings together and consolidated through the male line.<sup>853</sup>

Under Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia (956-83), there had been a reaction against the monastic holding of estates and a decline in endowments to religious houses. This 'anti-monastic' movement, perhaps more motivated by 'political consideration' than hostility to any reform program, had nonetheless an impact on the giving of land.<sup>854</sup> This background is perhaps reflected in the three wills of the family *Wulf*, both Wulfrun and her son Wulfric went on to found, or re-establish, religious houses whilst it is noticeable that Wulfgeat's grants, a generation earlier than Wulfrun, are of moveable goods, 'brewing of malt', 'bullocks' etc. This may feasibly have been framed within the capacity which Wulfgeat had to grant, but it mirrors the political background, and may help to date the will. Not granting land to the Church was also a good strategy for keeping the family's land holdings together. As we have seen Wulfgeat was careful in the bequests he made to his daughters, showing that he wished to consolidate the landholdings of the family. Grants of moveable goods, in particular livestock, were an important means to this end, and it may also have suited churchmen, since any stock accrued during their time in office, they may have been able to dispose of for the sake of their own souls.<sup>855</sup> The will also contains a clause putting his wife and daughter under the king's protection ('for the love of God that he will be a friend to his wife and daughter'), possibly an indication of some uncertainty or concern at least over the future of his landholdings.<sup>856</sup>

'Staffordshire... notable for its group of wealthy clerical minsters, later to have the peculiar legal status of royal free chapels... Their origins are uncertain but some of them appear among the Herefordshire, Shropshire and Staffordshire minsters in the will of Wulfgeat of Donington'.<sup>857</sup>

<sup>853</sup> Tollerton, *Wills and Will Making*, p. 174.

<sup>854</sup> A. Williams, 'Princeps Merciorum gentis: the family, career and connections of Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia, 956-83', in *Anglo-Saxon England*, 10 (1981), p. 167.

<sup>855</sup> Tollerton, *Wills and Will Making*, p. 182.

<sup>856</sup> Tollerton, *Wills and Will Making*, p. 194.

<sup>857</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 309.

The date of the foundation at Wolverhampton represents a period of renewed interest in the noble patronage of secular minsters:

‘Until 975 the monastic party’s hold at court may have discouraged the laity from major, transformative patronage of the seculars, but the re-endowment and probable rebuilding of the old minster at Wolverhampton by the Mercian noblewoman Wulfrun around 990 suggests a revived confidence in traditional forms’.<sup>858</sup>

It is striking that Wulfric, a decade or so later, did not leave anything to his mother’s foundation at Wolverhampton in his will. This may have been because it was not a reformed house, or possibly that it had been dealt with through other bequests which have not survived. Wulfrun’s foundation at Wolverhampton, like that at nearby Penkridge, retained the status of a royal free chapel throughout the medieval period. This status indicates that it was initially a foundation of some significance (possibly royal in nature) from the outset. Such houses were, for example, free from episcopal jurisdiction.<sup>859</sup> The importance of the church at Wolverhampton is highlighted in the eleventh century when William I gave it and its possessions to his own chaplain, Samson.<sup>860</sup>

These bequests firmly place the family in an area in west Staffordshire and the far east of Shropshire, on the lands that straddle the two counties. Here the family was connected with the two most important religious foundations of the period, Wolverhampton and Burton, and associated with the royal free chapel at Penkridge. Nearby Pattingham was held by the Earls of Mercia TRE.<sup>861</sup> In the area of what is now the Staffordshire and Shropshire border Wulfric granted manors at Gailey, Longford (Shropshire), Pillaton, Romsley, Shipley, Sutton Maddock, Stirchley (both Shropshire) and Whiston. Other family members are mentioned and we have seen there is a continuity of family interest at Tong from Wulfgeat to Wulfric, who granted land there

<sup>858</sup> Blair, *Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p. 356.

<sup>859</sup> A. Evans and R. Evans, ‘Wolverhampton, St Peter’, in R. Pugh (ed.) *VCH Staffordshire*, 3 (1970), pp. 321-330.

<sup>860</sup> J. Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book: Staffordshire* (Chichester, 1976), 7:1.

<sup>861</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 1:28.

for Æthelric's soul and for that of his mother (it is uncertain if the genitive refers to Wulfric's mother, the mother of Æthelric):

‘And I grant to Æthelric for his day the estate *aet Wibbetofte*, and that *aet Twongan*, and after his day it is to go to Burton for my soul and for his mother's and for his’.

Despite the uncertainty over whose mother this refers to, it clearly indicates that they belonged to a wider kinship group connected to Wulfric's family, although the exact nature of this is uncertain.<sup>862</sup> Another kinsman is Wulfgar who was granted Balterley (Pirehill) by Wulfric in his will ‘I grant to my retainer Wulfgar the estate *aet Baltrytheleage* just as his father acquired it for him’. The terms of the grant indicate that he was a kinsman of some description. The will describes him as Wulfric's *cnihte* ‘a word usually used for higher officials of a household and the position of his bequest in the will, between those made to Wulfric's close relations, suggests a very close relationship, possibly kinship’.<sup>863</sup> It is also worth noting that Wolgarston one mile east of Penkridge comes from OE *Wulfgars tun* and Woollaston five miles east of Penkridge gives *Wulflaf's tun* and Woolley just south of Brewood gives *Wulf's tun*. The now lost *Wulfhampton* ‘village of wulf’ is found two miles NE of Bobbington.<sup>864</sup>

Wulfric's grants also indicate that he and his family had gathered into their portfolio a number of sites that were important or of some consequence. One such manor was *Cunugesburg*, Conisborough (Yorkshire), the place-name giving ‘the king's stronghold’, an important estate and one of the more northerly grants in the will. Sawyer suggests that the *Eccleshale* mentioned in the will of Wulfric Spot is Eccleshall in Pirehill. This large composite estate was later an important manor of the bishops of Lichfield with the place-name suggesting an early (pre-conquest) religious centre.<sup>865</sup> Wulfric also granted the manor of Darlaston (Pirehill), for which a surviving charter exists and within which was the hill fort known as *Wlferecestria*, a place that would

<sup>862</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxii.

<sup>863</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxi.

<sup>864</sup> Horovitz, *Place-Names*, pp. 584, 590, 594.

<sup>865</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxxiv.

have resonated with the echoes of a strong and successful military Mercian past.<sup>866</sup> In his will Wulfric granted *Baltrytheleage* (Balterley, Pirehill) which lay within the parish of Bartholmley (a Cheshire parish with townships in Staffordshire). It was a place associated with the cult of Beorhthelm and there is potential for believing that the family *Wulf* still held part of this land TRE when it is shown to be held by Godwine and Wulfric. Nearby Betley was held by Wulfwin at the time of the survey, a Wulfric holding it TRE.<sup>867</sup> Wulfric Spot also granted an estate at Ilam, another place associated with the cult of Beorhthelm, and one with significant examples of stone sculpture. This may indicate that the family held or acquired estates where locally important cults were present. The site at Burton had an earlier association with St Modwen. We can also add to this the estate at what later became Wulfrun's re-founding of a religious house at Wolverhampton with its imposing stone cross. At some point the family seem also to have held Bakewell, which also had a re-founded minster and was an important place on the northern tip of Mercia, and, was a centre for a school of stone sculpture. We know that the family was closely associated with Tamworth with its cult of St Eadgyth and owned property over which it held significant lordly rights and, as Sawyer has suggested, Wulfric may have been the lord of the Tamworth community where his daughter was based.<sup>868</sup> Together this is an impressive portfolio. We can see that the family held a series of important estates that brought with them status and continuity, a linkage to the past. These estates rooted the family's claims within the region. This establishment of roots was enforced by their encouragement of new religious orders, the establishing of cults, or reviving and enhancing of older ones. Thus the link at Tamworth ties the family to the cult of St Eadgyth, one of the cults promoted by Æthelflaed in her campaign of the 920s.

This cult is also to be found at Church Eaton for which we have charter evidence in the Burton archive, and for which the evidence as a potential estate centre was examined in chapter four. The grant by Athelstan to Beorhthelm at *Eatun*, is dated 850 for 939, was not seen as being Church Eaton (Cuttlestone) by Sawyer who more or less dismissed the suggestion: 'Neither the abbey nor Wulfric apparently had any claim to

<sup>866</sup> Of the minor places Cotwalton (in Stone, Pirehill) was also granted in the will, and nearby Spot Arce has been associated with Wulfric Spot. Bridgeman, *Will of Wulfric Spot*, p. 35, later dismissed by Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxxi, and discussed in Horovitz, *Place-Names*, pp. 503-504.

<sup>867</sup> Morris, *Domesday: Staffordshire*, 17:10; 11; 12.

<sup>868</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxii.

such a place and it could have been any one of the many Eatons in the Midlands or even further afield'.<sup>869</sup> It is difficult to prove with any certainty a likely candidate's credentials but it is possible to hint that the case for Church Eaton might be a little stronger than suggested by Sawyer. In its favour, and one of the main thrusts of this section, is the geographical proximity of Church Eaton to the other estates held by major figures in the family of Wulfric Spot, within the later hundred of Cuttlestone but also in the west of what became Staffordshire. Church Eaton is nine miles from Donington, eight from Tong and seven from Penkridge, the church is dedicated to Editha (St Eadgyth). However, the association with St Eadgyth is generally considered to have been imported with the Marmion family in the later middle ages, together with the promotion of the cult at Polesworth Abbey. A second charter in the Burton archive (S.545) highlights a continued link in the archive with *Eatun*.<sup>870</sup> It is the geographical relationship with other *Wulf* family estates and interests together with the fact that the charters survive in the Burton archives that gives the faintest of hints that this might be Church Eaton. There is no compelling case for Church Eaton, but as has been mentioned already, the archive at Burton seems to act as a family archive, as much if

<sup>869</sup> The personal name Beorhthelm and any association with the earlier saint is likely to be nothing more than coincidental. PASE lists 49 Beorhthelm's, <http://www.pase.ac.uk/index.html> (08/09/2015).

<sup>870</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, pp. 7-9 (S.392).





were preserved in the archive at Burton. The estates of Uhtred and Wulfsige were tenth-century entities or re-establishments of estates on the edge of English/Mercian control, they sat on the border on lands of uncertain authority, as English control swept northwards throughout the century, as at Conisborough where:

‘The Derbyshire estates north-east of Chesterfield lay on the threshold of Northumbria and the vast estate later known as the Soke of Conisborough was a natural extension from that area into Northumbria itself’.<sup>871</sup>

A similar understanding can perhaps be made for the possession of the ‘lands between the Ribble and the Mersey, and the Wirral’ in Wulfric’s will, which suggests even larger areas beeing granted away. This kinship group can be seen as acting as the trusted establishers of royal authority in those areas. Another example are the holdings of Uhtred at Bakewell which, we can assume, end up within the estates of Wulfric’s family where the indications are that these lands were likely to have been granted to the family in the 940s to 950s.<sup>872</sup> We also detect a continuity of landholding within the family or kinship group, the case of Abbots Bromley being a good example, linking Wulfric, Wulfsige, and Wulfrun at successive points in time. The question posed here is whether we can position the family within the landscape. Where was their base? Most late tenth-century families associated with Mercia ‘originated in Wessex... the one exception to this seems to be the family of Wulfric Spott’.<sup>873</sup> If not from Wessex, to where can we locate this family, if at all? Starting with the paternal side of the family we know what we do not know. We do not know the name of Wulfric’s father. We might assume that he was either dead for a very long time or possibly disgraced for Wulfric to be described as *Wulfric Wulfrune sunu* (S.886). Sawyer does suggest that the paternal side of Wulfric’s family can be traced through the *Ælf*-element as seen in the personal names of children he had with Wulfrun, Wulfric, *Ælfhelm* and *Ælfthryth* (who is dead by the time she is named in Wulfrun’s endowment charter).<sup>874</sup> We have already seen that *Ælfhild* was named as a kinswoman to Wulfgeat. On the maternal, and possibly more important, side of the family we should begin with Wulfsige *Maurus* (the

<sup>871</sup> Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’, p. 38.

<sup>872</sup> Insley, ‘Family of Wulfric Spott’, p. 125.

<sup>873</sup> Insley, ‘Southumbria’, p. 330.

<sup>874</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xl.

Black) whose relationship to Wulfric Spott can be detected through the land grant of 996 when Æthelred granted land at Abbots Bromley to Wulfric, who was to hold it ‘as his mother held it’; it had earlier been held by Wulfsige *Maurus* (S.479).<sup>875</sup> Wulfsige is thought to have played an important role in recovering land from the Danes as part of the early tenth-century re-conquest begun by Æthelred and Æthelflæd.<sup>876</sup> The suggestion is that Wulfsige may well have been the father of Wulfrun and so the maternal grandfather of Wulfric.<sup>877</sup> That we see the use of a by-name for both grandfather and grandson is another possible linking attribute, a family practice, so to speak. The importance of the maternal line is also suggested by the use of the personal name element *Wulf*. This can be traced through four generations, possibly being given to the eldest offspring. Beginning with Wulfsige *Maurus*, the element can be traced to his daughter Wulfrun and then Wulfric and for the fourth generation Ælhelm, Wulfric’s brother had a son, Wulfheah. The case for Wulfgeat as a family member has already been made, his will tells us that he had a daughter named Wilflæd and another Wulfgifu. Sawyer has identified other family members, several of whom also include the name element *Wulf*, for example, Wulfhelm who granted Marchington (Staffordshire) in 951 (S.557), and, also from the Burton archive, Wulfmær who was granted land in Wiltshire (S.707). In addition, it is ‘more than likely that Wulfric numbered among his family one or more of the Wulfrics’ who occur in charters of the mid-tenth century’ (S.520 and S.550).<sup>878</sup> To this we can also add the Wulfgar at Balterley who was a kinsman, and a Wulfgeat who was part of the group prominent at court with Wulfric and his brother in the 990s. It is unlikely to be coincidence that the first Abbot of Burton was also named Wulfgeat (S.906).<sup>879</sup> The fate of the extended family of Wulfrun and Wulfric in the period after the death of Wulfric has been discussed by Insley.<sup>880</sup> In 1006 Ælhelm was murdered whilst out hunting near Shrewsbury, and Wulfheah and his brother Ufegeat were blinded on the king’s orders. Eadric Streona who afterwards was made ‘earldorman of all of Mercia’ was accused of the crime, which was been seen as a palace coup. Morcar survived the 1006 coup and received royal grants in 1009 (S. 922), 1011 (S. 924) and 1012 (S.928) but the perilous

<sup>875</sup> Hart, *Early Charters*, p. 205. It is worthy of note that Wulfrun did not grant the land to her own foundation at Wolverhampton but rather it went to Wulfric who later granted it Burton.

<sup>876</sup> Sawyer, ‘Charters of Burton Abbey’, p. 30.

<sup>877</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xl, and Insley, ‘Family of Wulfric Spott’, p. 123.

<sup>878</sup> Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xli.

<sup>879</sup> Keynes, ‘Diplomas of King Æthelred’, p. 189, and Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters II*, p. xxi.

<sup>880</sup> Insley, ‘Politics, conflict and kinship’, pp. 28-42.

position of courtly figures is demonstrated by that fact that he was murdered, along with Sigeferth, in 1015.<sup>881</sup>

Thus the maternal family of Wulfric can be observed being proactively engaged in the major affairs of the tenth century. They are important figures at court and trusted servants of the king, they are supporters of the new monastic movements who are seen to consolidate English holdings as a bulwark against Danish influence. We can trace these actions back to Wulfsgie, and that Wulfrun and Wulfric continued this process can be appreciated in their landholdings and also in the establishment of monastic houses whose prayer and influence would have supported and consolidated this territorial reclamation. That the family held estates associated with earlier cults is surely part of this process, as Insley identified:

‘The themes of dynastic commemoration, the Christian history of the world and the place of the English within it, were common themes in the history of these charters and were perhaps echoes of the sorts of discussions and debates had within royal councils’.<sup>882</sup>

It is noteworthy that several of the family’s estates straddled the county boundaries, such as Barthomley, Tong and Donington to the west, and the region from Burton down to Tamworth in the east. The lands granted to Wolverhampton show holdings within a block of territory that continued across Cuttlestone Hundred with a firm grip on many of the important cult sites across the county. The final act of the three main documents of Wulgeat’s will, Wulfrun’s foundation charter and the will of Wulfric Spot, was the establishment at Burton of the most northerly Benedictine house in England. This foundation was a continuation of the efforts of several generations to bolster English control in lands once under Viking control or influence. The Benedictine order, with its strict rule would have been seen as a spiritual power-house, a fit, powerful, and energetic new regime to help the family extend and consolidate its own position, as well as support and extend English rule. It links not only Wulfric, but his family across several generations to the major themes of the tenth century, themes that began with

<sup>881</sup> See Insley, ‘Politics, conflict and kinship’ for a wider discussion about these events.

<sup>882</sup> Insley, ‘Southumbria’, p. 326.

Æthelred and Æthelflæd, that of re-conquest and consolidation, investment in local saints and cults, and support for the monastic orders, intrinsically linked with the demise of Mercia and the creation of England itself.

# CONCLUSION

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The main purpose of this thesis has been to use Pirehill as the focal point for a study of the early medieval period, to stretch the sources, and to broaden the map of places of interest in early medieval Staffordshire and Mercia, on the edge of which Pirehill sits. It has not been to tell a chronological history of the area, as in truth we lack the resources to do that. Rather, the thesis has challenged some of the conventional perceptions and interpretations scholars have considered for the area, where it has been considered at all. The chosen methodology has been multi-disciplinary and multi-focus, honing in on the research area but drawing on examples from across the county and region. As such, stone sculpture has been explored from hundred, to across the county, and beyond. The examination of *hlāws* went from county, to hundred, and down to township level, revealing at each stage new examples. Further, the major Mercian noble family of Wulfrun was considered because of their influence on Pirehill, the county, and beyond. This multi-focal approach has been the key to shedding light on the darker corners of Pirehill's past.

Chapter one addressed the issue of the supposed lack of burial evidence in Staffordshire. No new tumuli were proven to have been found, it was not the intention to do so. However a new, subtler, less archaeological, approach has been able to reveal new evidence about the period. This new evidence shows that it is possible to find more instances of potential tumuli in Staffordshire, and this is significant because it widens our geographical understanding of where these features may be found. This in turn challenges some of the assumptions made by other scholars researching burials in the early medieval period. Crucially what has been revealed here is that the significance of what constituted a barrow in the early medieval period is what is decisive. It is not the archaeological truth of such features that we should seek, rather their 'hlāw-ness'. This helps us greatly in reading the landscape, and may also assist in further research into naming practices and potential burial customs. It is also here that we find our first instance of storytelling in the landscape, and it is only by understanding the cultural milieu of the early medieval period that we can comprehend just what a *hlāw* was. This thesis has shown that modern archaeological approaches are far too restrictive and, in

fact, misleading. These features were part of a landscape of creativity and re-invention. Prehistoric barrows may have been re-used or ignored completely whilst natural features may have been seen as *hlāws*, becoming significant features in the cultural landscape and interpretation of the period. This understanding introduced the concept of ‘social reality’ and of a landscape upon which these realities were inscribed and through which they were interpreted.

In re-examining the accumulated *vitae* of the likes of Wulfhad and Ruffin, and Beorhthelm, we have seen a similar story-making process. Here it has been possible to identify some of the historical figures in the promotion of local cults. Wærburh is a case in point, since it was possible to reveal how her cult was promoted and etched onto the local topography. The role of Wærburh as ‘sentinel’ and the placing of local saints such as Beorhthelm with the tenth-century burhs stresses the power and importance of these local cults to the development of tenth-century England. More localised examples, found chronicled in the landscape through place-names, show these *vitae* contain more detail about the region than has been previously credited, the cults lived and breathed in the landscape even if the evidence for the individuals themselves is harder to come by. Through the chapter on burial mounds and by examining the role of local saints it has been demonstrated that the dead could work as intercessors on behalf of the living, and, that the dead communicated not only with the living, but also the other dead and supernatural beings. Here this has shown itself to be a persistent belief system throughout the period. Here too we have also seen the creation of memory mediated through material such as stone monuments, and also mnemonic tools like the naming of landscape features after local notables, saints or kings. The later named Queen’s Low, associated with Æthelflaed and *Wlverlowe* (Wulfhere’s *hlāw*) illustrates how the past was interpreted in the past, but also that the historical ‘truth’ of these features lies not only in archaeological remains but can be found in the stories that people told and of the associations they wished to make. The *hlāws* and saints of Pirehill foreground for us that both remembering and forgetting were ‘related dimensions of social memory by which communities and individuals assert, imagine,

contest, negotiate, and suppress past, presents and futures'.<sup>883</sup> Together these chapters highlight a range of memorial strategies often overlooked and even misinterpreted in academic discourse, and it has been shown here that there is plentiful evidence for an active and creative response to living in early medieval Staffordshire expressed through the landscape.

Another major thread highlighted throughout this thesis has been the dissemination of ideas and fashions through elite emulation. The Mercian centre that was Æthelred's and Æthelflaed's Gloucester is a pivotal place. Here we observed the most important Mercian kinship group using stone sculpture to remember their dead, a practice followed by a later shift in focus to a new religious foundation, to where relics were imported. This was a process Æthelred and Æthelflaed later repeated across Mercia as they went on to found new burhs. Such practices echoed across the region during the next century, in Staffordshire at the burhs of Stafford and Tamworth, and later mirrored elsewhere by the family of Wulfrun and Wulfric. Eventually this fashion found its way to local manorial centres, with the emerging thegnly class, across the county.

These ideas are all rooted firmly in understandings of the lived experience of people in the early medieval period and examining how this was articulated both through and onto the landscape. The theme of landscape settlement and morphology explored in chapter four was where the focus of this thesis returned to the edge (OE *ecg*).<sup>884</sup> Figures 83 to 86 show four estate centres with pre-Conquest evidence from outside Pirehill, all of which seek out the *ecg*, emphasising again that it is on the edge that we should look for early medieval centres, not only royal or religious centres, but also thegnly manors.<sup>885</sup>

<sup>883</sup> H. Williams, J. Kirton, and M. Gondek, 'Introduction: Stones in substance, space and time', in H. Williams, J. Kirton, M. and Gondek (eds), *Early Medieval Stone Monuments: Materiality, Biography, Landscape* (Woodbridge, 2015), p. 10.

<sup>884</sup> K. Wickham-Crowley, 'Living on the ecg: the mutable boundaries of land and water in Anglo-Saxon contexts', in C. Lees and G. Overing (eds), *A Place to Believe In: Medieval Monasticism in the Landscape* (Pennsylvania, 2006), pp. 85-110.

<sup>885</sup> For other examples see also Catton, Croxall, Barton and Walton on Trent.

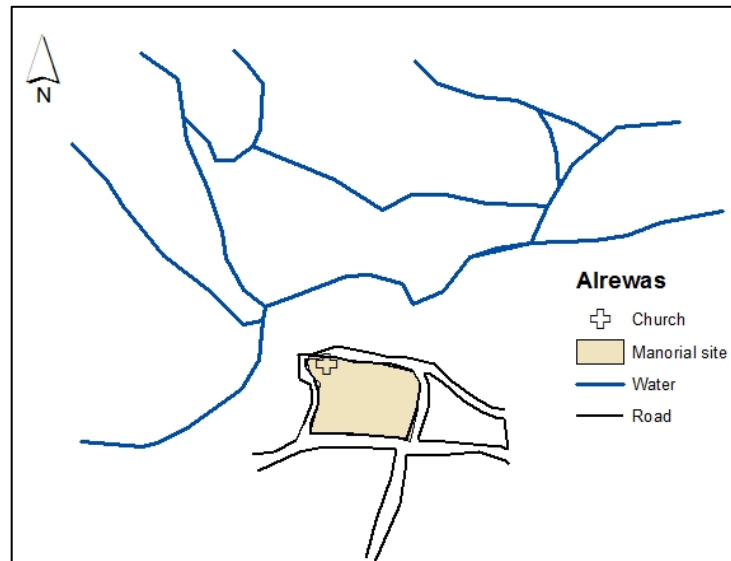


Figure 82: Manorial centre with pre-Conquest evidence: Alrewas (S. 479).

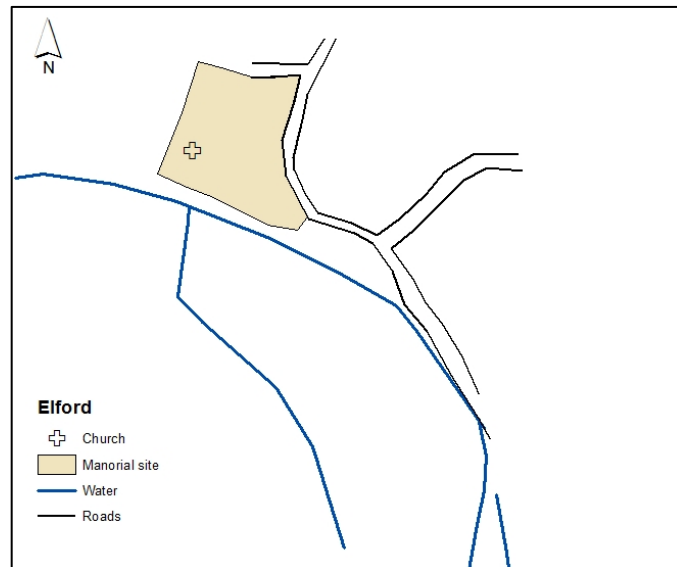


Figure 83: Manorial centre with pre-Conquest evidence: Elford (S. 906).



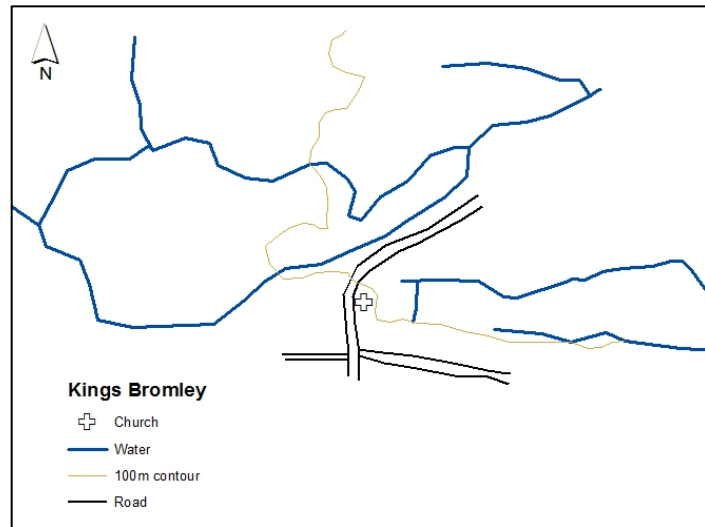


Figure 84: Manorial centre with pre-Conquest evidence: Kings Bromley (S. 479).

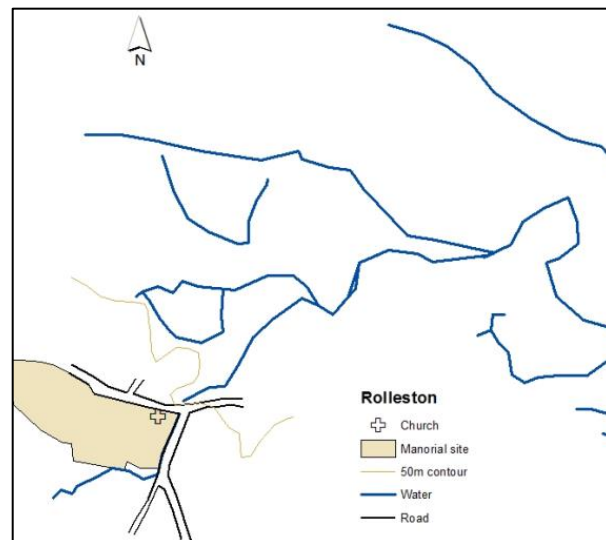


Figure 85: Manorial centre with pre-Conquest evidence: Rolleston (S. 479 and S. 920).

The anatomy of such sites is clearly revealed by a series of what Beresford called ‘symptoms’, a concept that has recurred throughout this thesis. If sufficient symptoms can be identified then we can start to write the histories of places that would otherwise remain unwritten. It is here that a plea is made for the allowance of ‘fuzziness’. In order to develop a wider landscape canvass we must be permitted to stretch our

‘symptoms’. The ‘edginess’ exemplified by the location of these thegnly manors can also be perceived in the study of *hlāws* where the Staffordshire examples have been thought to be merely on the edge of more interesting things happening to the east. Likewise the corpus of Staffordshire stone sculpture has been understood to be on the edge of a cultural grouping from the east. The re-evaluation of the stone sculpture of Staffordshire carried out here brings it into the broader context of Mercian history, suggesting that we can observe a pattern of emulation from places such as Gloucester and Sandbach, and across Staffordshire at places such as Ilam, Leek and Chebsey. In some ways this reassessment mirrors the observation that burial mounds may have been more prevalent in Staffordshire than was once thought. The key proposal presented here is that these examples should be seen as social strategies and not expressions of a ‘cultural necessity’.<sup>886</sup> This challenges the prevailing ethnocentric interpretation that has been attached to this evidence, or lack of it, in western Staffordshire. Importantly it brings material evidence into line with place-name evidence. Often understood to be on the edge of the Scandinavian world, this study has shown that the corpus of stone sculpture belongs within a Mercian tradition and that although at times on the edge, this did not make it a peripheral place. As Hawkes remarked:

‘The centre of Sandbach may have been situated on the western periphery of ninth-century Mercia, but the decoration of its crosses indicates that it was this precise geographical situation that opened it up to contemporary developments in mainland Europe’<sup>887</sup>

Through this thesis it has been established that kinship is central to our understanding of the period, be this through the remembrance strategies incorporated into *hlāws* or stone sculpture, or through the underpinning of land ownership, or creation and consolidation of kinship groups. We have seen that kinship within a contested landscape was a central device for ensuring both ownership of land and social stability.<sup>888</sup> The kinship group of the *Wulf* family were owners of estates across Staffordshire and beyond as evidenced in the charters of the period. They also acted out

<sup>886</sup> For a recent discussion to approaches of pre-historic monuments and their interpretation see C. Richards and R. Jones (eds), *The Developments of Neolithic House Societies in Orkney* (Oxford, 2016), p.6

<sup>887</sup> J. Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses, Signs and Significance in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture* (Dublin, 2002), p. 148.

<sup>888</sup> G. Althoff, *Family, Friends and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2004).

the changing fashions for memorialisation found among early medieval elites. This is may be discerned in the setting up of stone sculpture in Wolverhampton, and certainly with Wulfrun's founding of a religious house there (as the family of Æthelred had done at Gloucester). This resulted in another mnemonic moment when Wulfrun's name was subsequently given to that settlement. A generation later Wulfric's own foundation at Burton included the promotion of a local saint. This elite Mercian family aped the fashions of the day as set by Æthelred and Æthelflaed. This trend progressed with the new local elite and the foundation of thegnylly manors with their stone sculpture and later local churches, landscape manifestations of competitive 'Parvenu elites' which Blair has described as trying:

'To buttress their status by building ritual monuments: seventh-century 'princely' barrows and tenth-century manorial churches resulted from not dissimilar impulses'.<sup>889</sup>

As this thesis has demonstrated, the Staffordshire barrows, estates and stone sculpture express the tireless manoeuvring for position, status, and advantage of the early medieval local lord through his manor.

One of the main problems in drawing conclusions about what this tells us about early medieval Staffordshire is that the main sources rarely overlap, and we are left with large geographical and chronological gaps. Despite this, the thesis has been able to present a history through which we can discern a series of narratives, disparate at times but offering points of synergy. This manifests itself in the naming of *hlāws*, whether they contained known individuals or were just natural features understood as burial mounds. The stories associated with local saints or historical figures such as Wulfhere whose presence, real or not, in the Staffordshire landscape, have a biography of their own, both throughout the early medieval period and beyond.<sup>890</sup> Importantly this biographical detailing is expressed through the landscape itself, as a place where experiences, stories

<sup>889</sup> J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 370.

<sup>890</sup> For the biographies of stone sculpture see Williams, Kirton, and Gondek, 'Introduction: Stones in substance', pp. 17-20.

and identities are constantly being forged, re-examined and renegotiated.<sup>891</sup> In reading these narratives for the first time we can see that the edginess of the landscape of Pirehill has its own ‘mnemonic qualities’.<sup>892</sup>

‘We sense we are reaching the edge of our world when we run out of stories to tell about the places we see. Borders and boundaries usually tend to be thought of more as abstract geographical, legal, and political constructs than as lived realities, as arbitrary lines inked onto the map but not reflected on the land. Nevertheless, boundaries – not those drawn by surveyors and cartographers and marked by fences and signs but those superimposed on the land and inscribed in the mind through the daily experience of inhabiting a locality; not those erected fiercely from without but those pushed out gently from within – are frequently an important component of people’s lived sense of place’.<sup>893</sup>

This thesis has brought this landscape into wider discussions about the period. We have seen in the introduction how recent research on rural settlement ignores the region.<sup>894</sup> It has shown that even in places as seemingly unpromising as Pirehill something can be said about the people of the period. In landscape terms it is a study of the little world, the local, the manorial complex with its church and burial place, a micro-topography, ‘a place of power where clerical, family and broader community agencies interacted in the construction of social memory’.<sup>895</sup> Through this landscape we see the way the early medieval landscape was perceived and how people engaged with it in a creative and imaginative series of responses. Their past and present were negotiated and expressed through monuments and the landscape, where ‘people develop a shared identity by identifying, exploring and agreeing on memories’.<sup>896</sup> The fundamental concerns of this thesis have been those creative responses that people had to living in the landscape. It has been about stories and storytelling, about the creation of memory, the invention of

<sup>891</sup> T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment; Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Abingdon 2000), and specifically T. Ingold, ‘The temporality of landscape’, *World Archaeology*, 25.2 (1993), pp. 152-174.

<sup>892</sup> See for example I-M. Back Danielsson, ‘Walking down memory lane’, in H. Williams, J. Kirton, M. Gondek (eds), *Early Medieval Stone Monuments: Materiality, Biography, Landscape* (Woodbridge, 2015), p. 65.

<sup>893</sup> K. Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape* (Iowa, 1993), pp. 68-9.

<sup>894</sup> H. Hamerow, *Rural Settlements and Society in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>895</sup> H. Williams, ‘Hogbacks: The materiality of solid spaces’, in Williams, Kirton, and Gondek (eds) *Early Medieval Stone Monuments*: p. 261.

<sup>896</sup> C. Cubbitt, ‘Memory and narrative in the cult of saints’, in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Use of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), p.31.

home, spirituality and social hierarchy. This thesis has sought to re-tell some of those stories and to recapture, to some extent at least, early medieval senses of place in Pirehill. And, it has been about edginess, in terms of settlements seeking out the edge of watery landscapes, but also on a larger scale about how this region, in the heart of Mercia, has remained on the edge of scholarly discussions. In some ways this thesis challenges the certainties that scholars have used to bring some order to a difficult period and place to study. It has blurred some of the certainties and it is perhaps time now for a wider re-examination of these. Instead of certainty we should search for a more sophisticated narrative, one that embraces blurred and fuzzy perspectives. It is perhaps time for a new chapter, a new canvas and new set of stories to be told. Above all though this is an account, ultimately, about living in a mutable landscape and the stories people once told there.

# APPENDIX: STAFFORDSHIRE SCUPLTURE

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This appendix is based upon the work Sidebottom's unpublished Ph.D. thesis.<sup>897</sup> All the sites discussed below have been visited and inspected. I have used Sidebottom's numbering of the pieces for reasons of continuity. Likewise the numbering of the motifs is based on Sidebottom's for the same reason. The drawings are based on Sidebottom's identification as well observations. Disagreements are marked in the text.<sup>898</sup>

<sup>897</sup> P. Sidebottom, *Schools of Anglo-Saxon stone sculpture*, unpub. Ph.D. thesis, (University of Sheffield, 1994).

<sup>898</sup> I am indebted to C. Rayner for the drawings and for support taking the photographs.

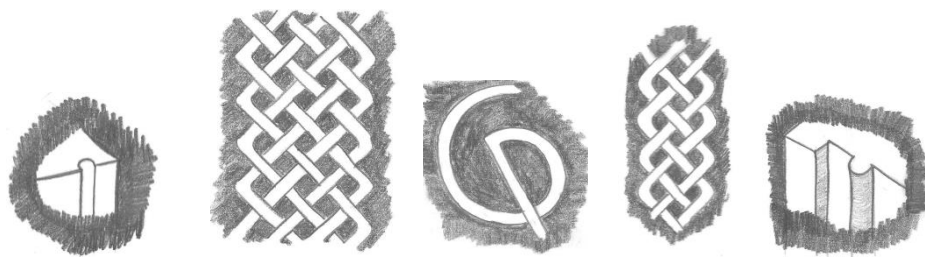
### Alstonefield 1: St Peter's

A rectangular-sectioned shaft which was built into the church fabric can now be found in the churchyard set into a later medieval stone base. Said to be of the South-western Regional School.



Alstonefield 1 (E)   Alstonefield 1 (N)   Alstonefield 1 (S)   Alstonefield 1 (W)

### Motifs



Flat banded edge   P6   A1   P4   Inner rim frame  
moulding

And, modelled carving technique, double-stranded pattern, diagonal grid, part dressed-off.

## Alstonefield 2: St Peter's

Cross-shaft later re-modelled. Not attributed to any school by Sidebottom.



### Motifs



E1 (mirrored)



CC1

And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

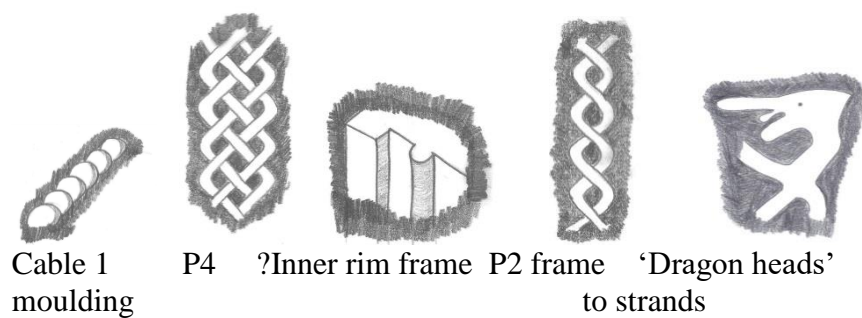


### Alstonefield 3: St Peter's

Possibly part of a cross shaft, like *Alstonefield 1*, it was found in 1875 and is now concreted into the interior wall of the church. The school is unknown, but it may belong to the South-western Regional School.



### Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, double-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

#### Alstonefield 4: St Peter's

Part of a rectangular-sectioned shaft as with *Alstonefield 1*, this element was found in 1875, and is now inside the church, loose with other church fabric. Sidebottom says it is of the Dove Valley local school, from the South-western Regional School.



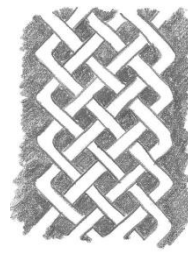
#### Motifs



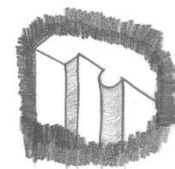
Flat banded edge  
moulding



Clergy figure holding  
book (clergy figure type)



P6



Inner rim frame

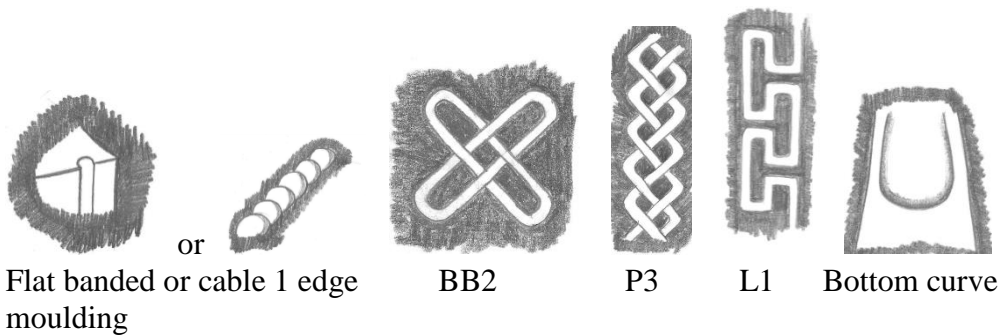
And, modelled carving technique, diagonal grid.

### Alstonefield 5: St Peter's

As with *Alstonefield 1* this upper part of a round shaft was found in 1875 and is now loose within the church. It is attributed to Sidebottom's North-western Regional School.



### Motifs



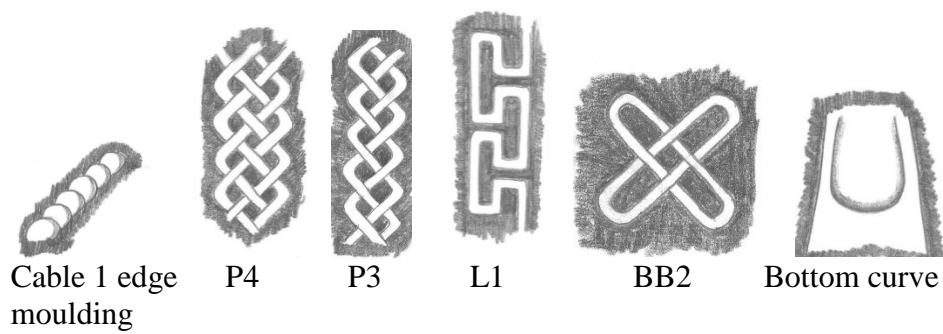
And, modelled carving technique, unidentified plait, single-stranded pattern, diagonal and square grid.

### Alstonefield 6: St Peter's

Now loose in church, this (upper) part of a round shaft was found in the fabric of the church as with *Alstonefield 1*, and is said to belong to the North-western Regional School.



### Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal and square grid.

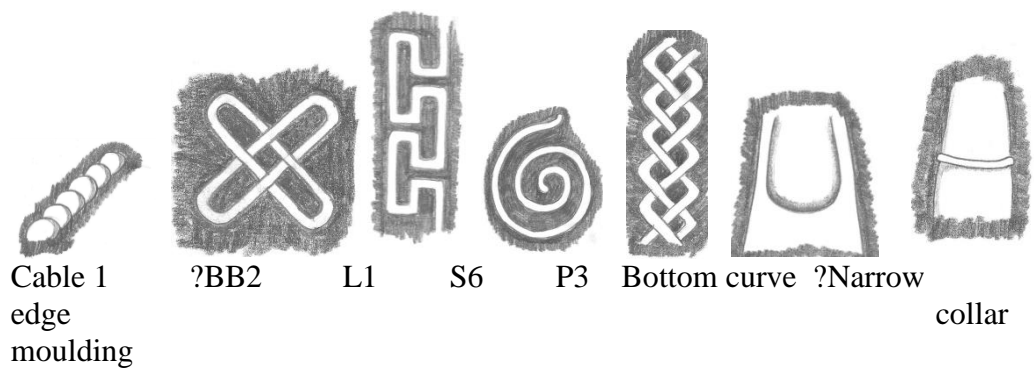


### Alstonefield 7: St Peter's

Upper portion of a round shaft, loose in the church, and found as *Alstonefield 1*. Said to be of Sidebottom's North-western Regional School.



### Motifs



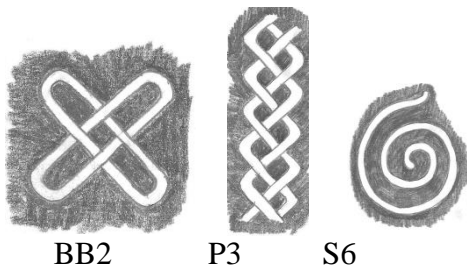
And, modelled carving technique, single stranded pattern, diagonal and square grid.

### Alstonefield 8: St Peter's

Another loose fragment in the church, an upper portion of a round shaft as *Alstonefield 1*, and of the North-western Regional School.



### Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

### **Alstonefield 9: St Peter's**

An upper part of a rectangular-sectioned cross shaft, found as *Alstonefield 1*, and now built into the tower wall.



### **Motifs**



Looped P4

And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

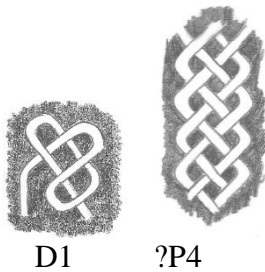


### **Alstonefield 10: St Peter's**

An unfinished piece of sculpture, this fragment of rectangular-sectioned shaft as *Alstonefield 1* is now loose within the church. The School is thought to be the West sub-division of the South-western Regional School.



### **Motifs**



And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.



### **Alstonefield 11-14: St Peter's**

Four pieces said to be parts of rounded shaft monuments, originally found built into the church fabric in 1875, now loose within the church. There are no attributes present to confirm styles, and, the fragments may not be early-medieval.



**11**



**12**



**13**



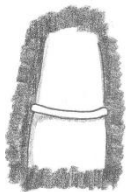
**14**

### Alstonefield 15: St Peter's

Unfinished round-shaft found in the churchyard of the North-western Regional School.



#### Motifs

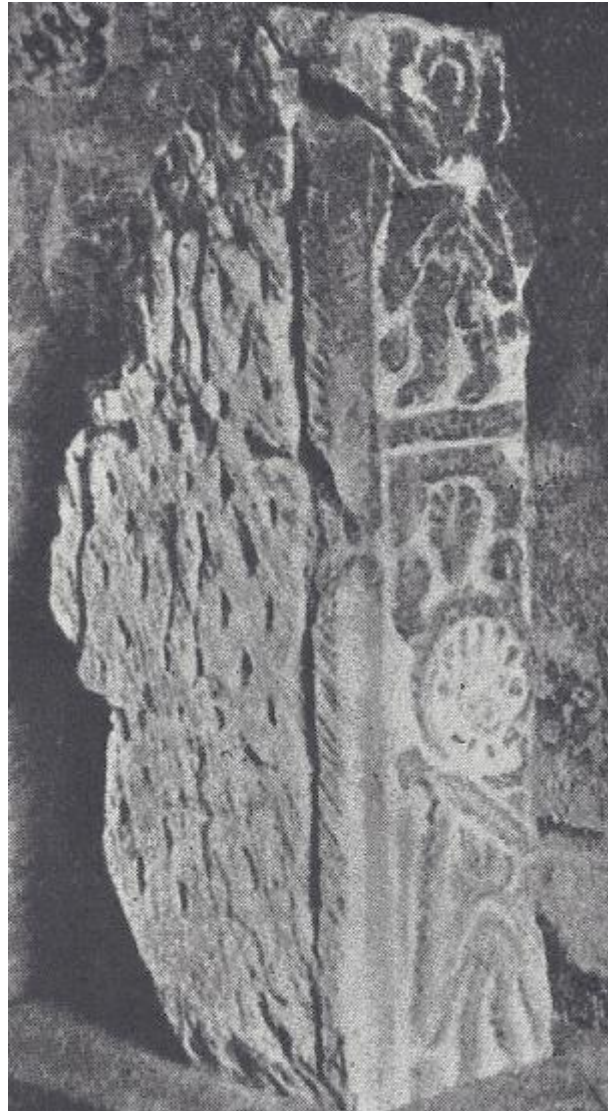


Narrow collar

And, modelled carving technique.

### Alstonefield 16: St Peter's

Now missing, this was recorded and photographed by Pape. It shows a rectangular-sectioned shaft with two faces missing. Said to be of the Dove Valley sub group of the South-western Regional School.



#### Motifs



E1 +1



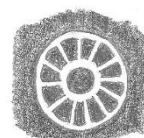
Flat banded  
edge moulding



Skirted figure



Pellet



Rosette

And, modelled carving technique, diagonal grid.

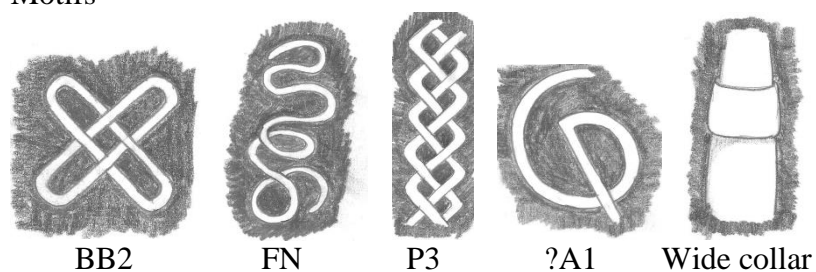


### **Chebsey: All Saints**

A circular shaft on a round base that tapers towards the collar. Sidebottom is uncertain to which school to attribute this monument, but suggests the North-western Regional School as a possibility. It is made of Triassic sandstone, and there are 'local outcrops of sandstone in the immediate area'.



### **Motifs**



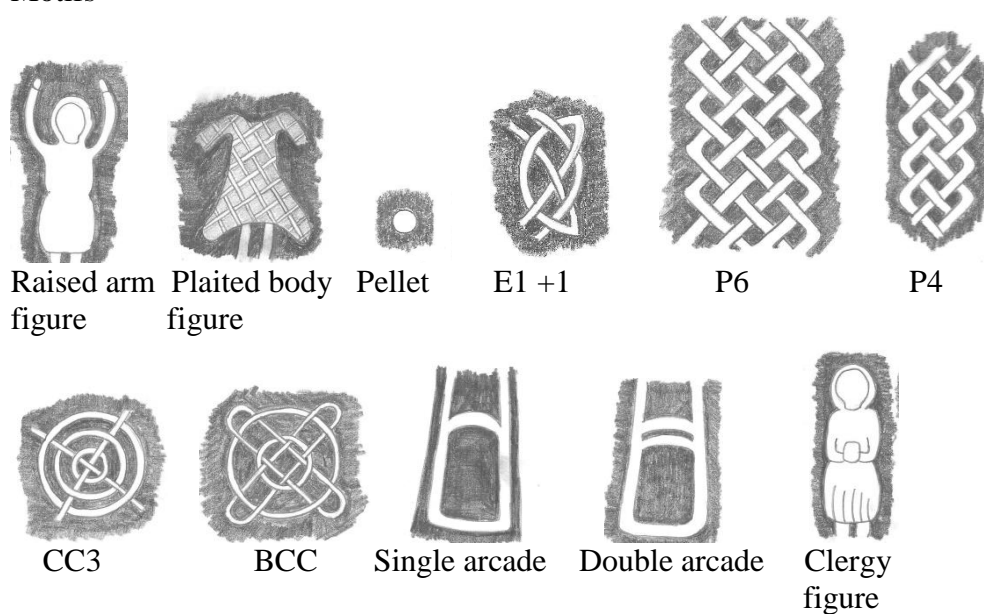
And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, irregular grid.

## Checkley 1: St Mary and All Saints

Said to be of the Dove Valley local school of the South-western Regional School, the three Checkley monuments are of Triassic Sandstone with local outcrops just over two miles away.



### Motifs

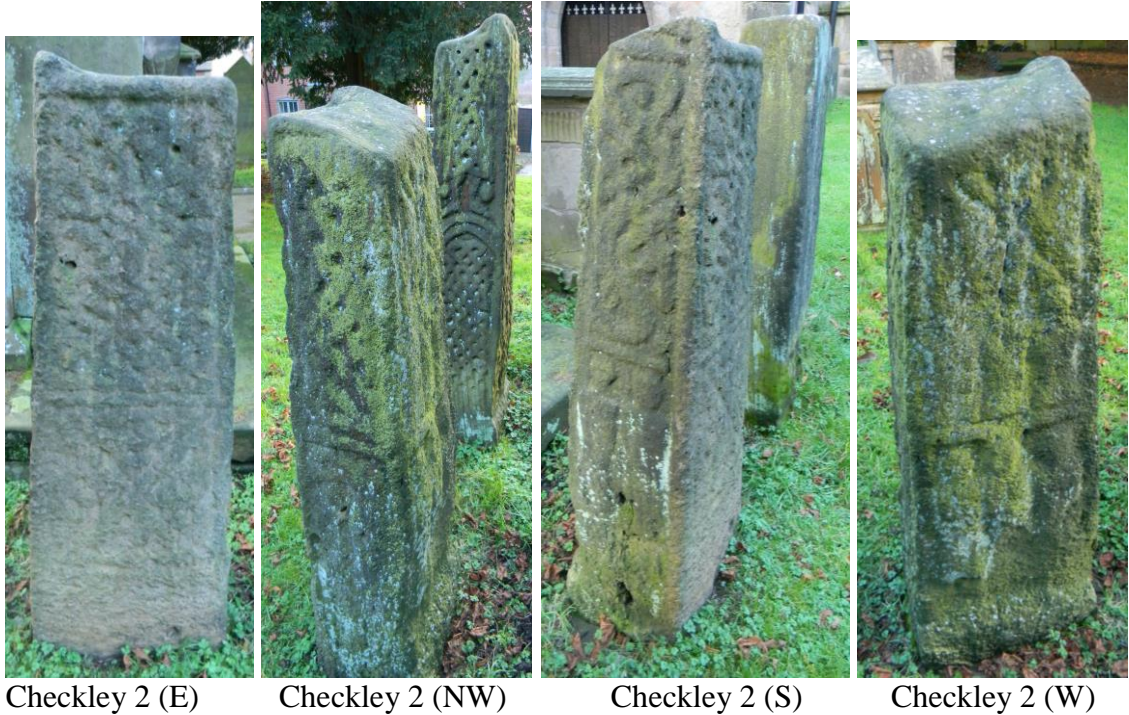


And, rectangular-sectioned shaft with roll edged moulding, modelled carving technique, single stranded pattern, and diagonal grid.

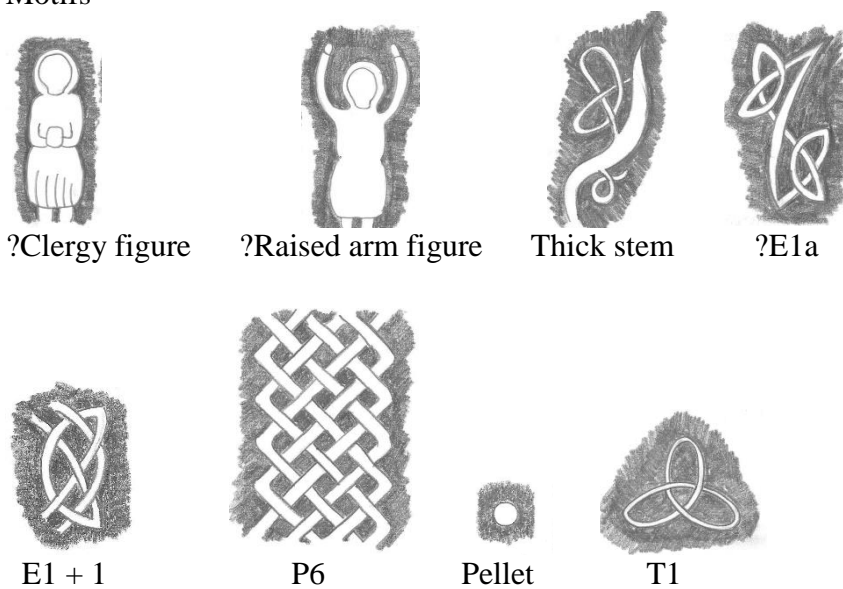


## Checkley 2: St Mary and All Saints

Sidebottom attributes this example to the Dove Valley local school of the South-western Regional School.



### Motifs



And, regular-sectioned shaft with rolled edge moulding, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal and square grid.

### Checkley 3: St Mary and All Saints

A badly worn rectangular-sectioned shaft not attributed to any school.



Checkley 3 (E)



Checkley 3 (N)



Checkley 3 (S)



Checkley 3 (W)

## Chesterton: Holy Trinity

This rectangular-sectioned shaft, was found in the 1950s being used as a feeding trough at a local farm. It has since been put into the entrance hall linking the church and parish hall. It was not possible obtain photographs of one side of the shaft due to its positioning. Said to be of the West sub-division of the South-western Regional School, it is of Millstone Grit with a local outcrop two miles away.



Chesterton (N)



Chesterton (W 1)



Chesterton (W 2)

## Motifs



Flat banded edge  
moulding



Skirted figure  
figure



?Side-shrouded



Ribbon beast



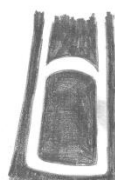
D1



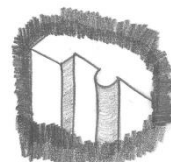
?S6



Thick stem



Single arcade



Inner rim frame



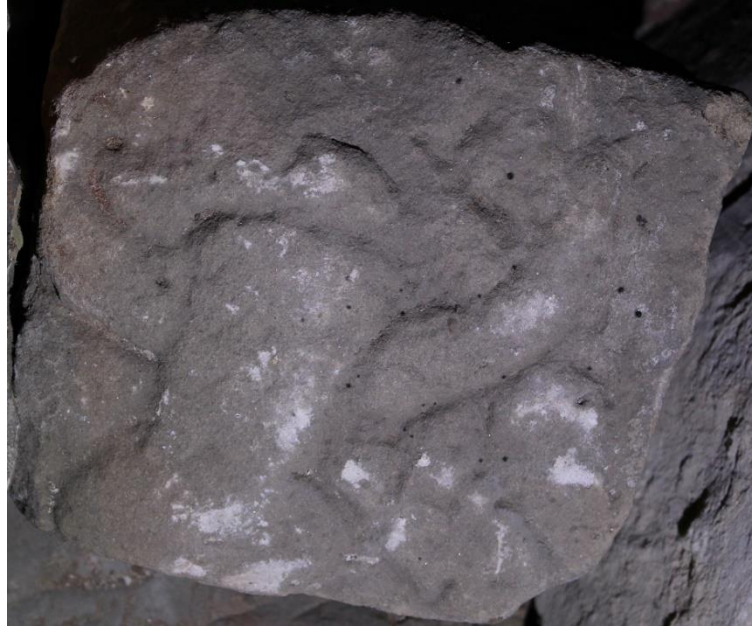
Pellet

And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal and irregular grid.



### **Eccleshall 1: Holy Trinity**

Recently found during archaeological survey, this piece is possibly architectural, but is too fragmented to be certain, and so is not attached to any school (loose in church). All 4 Eccleshall pieces are of Triassic sandstone with local outcrops nearby.



Sidebottom gives no motifs as the piece is too fragmentary.  
Modelled carving technique.

## **Eccleshall 2: Holy Trinity**

As with *Eccleshall 1* this fragment was found in a recent archaeological survey. Thought to be architectural, there is a possibility that it is not early-medieval (unlocated).

Motifs



P3

And, unidentified beast.

### Eccleshall 3: Holy Trinity

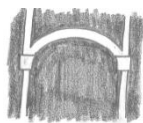
This fragment now built into the church wall, is not attributed to a school, although as far back as 1915 it has been associated with the Sandbach Crosses.<sup>899</sup>



#### Motifs



?Flat banded edge  
moulding



Capitalised arcade

And, modelled carving technique, unidentified figures said to be Adam and Eve and a horseman with a spear, possibly St Chad<sup>900</sup>.

<sup>899</sup> Pape, *The Rectangular-shafted pre-Norman crosses of North Staffordshire*, p. 32

<sup>900</sup> Pevsner p 153

#### Eccleshall 4: Holy Trinity

Fragment built into the church wall. Sidebottom suggests this is of his South-western Regional School. It has also been compared to elements found at Sandbach.<sup>901</sup>



#### Motifs



Cable 1 edge  
moulding



?Skirted figure



E1



Pellet



Inner rim frame

And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

<sup>901</sup> Pape, *The Rectangular-shafted pre-Norman crosses of North Staffordshire*, p.p. 32-35.

### **Ilam 1: Church of Holy Cross**

It is uncertain if this fragment is part of a rectangular or round shaft. It can be found built into the wall of the South Chapel. Sidebottom is uncertain which school this belongs to. It is of Millstone grit like the examples from Alstonefield with a local source some two and a half miles away.



West wall South Chapel fragment

#### **Motifs**



P2

And, modelled carving technique, diagonal grid.

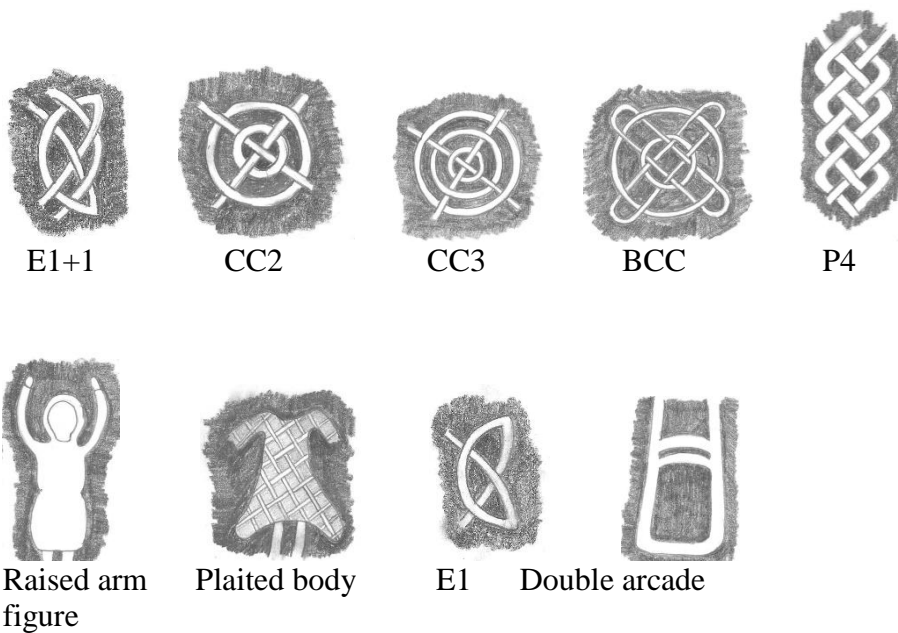
## Ilam 2: Church of the Holy Cross

This piece is known to have been in the churchyard by 1686, and the rectangular-sectioned shaft is still to be found in the churchyard. Said by Sidebottom to be of the Dove Valley local Group of the South-western Regional School, it is of Triassic sandstone with a local outcrop some two to three miles away.



Ilam 2 (E)    Ilam 2 (S)    Ilam 2 (W)

### Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal and square grid, roll edged moulding.



### Ilam 3: Church of the Holy Cross

A rounded shaft set up in the churchyard. It is of Millstone grit as with *Ilam 1*, and belongs to Sidebottom's North-western Regional School.



Ilam 3 (E)



Ilam 3 (N)



Ilam 3 (S)



Ilam 3 (W)

#### Motifs



L1



S6



USL



P3



P4



Looped P4

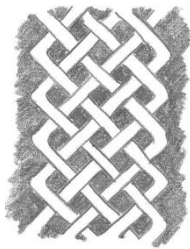
And, modelled carving technique, unclassified motif, narrow collar, boss, diagonal and square grid, possible crosshead type 10.

#### **Ilam 4: Church of Holy Cross**

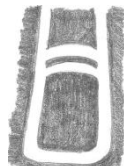
Fragment of a rectangular cross shaft built into the church wall. Sidebottom is uncertain of the school but suggests the South-western Regional School as a possibility. It is of Triassic sandstone as with *Ilam 2*.



#### **Motifs**



?P6+



Double arcade

And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

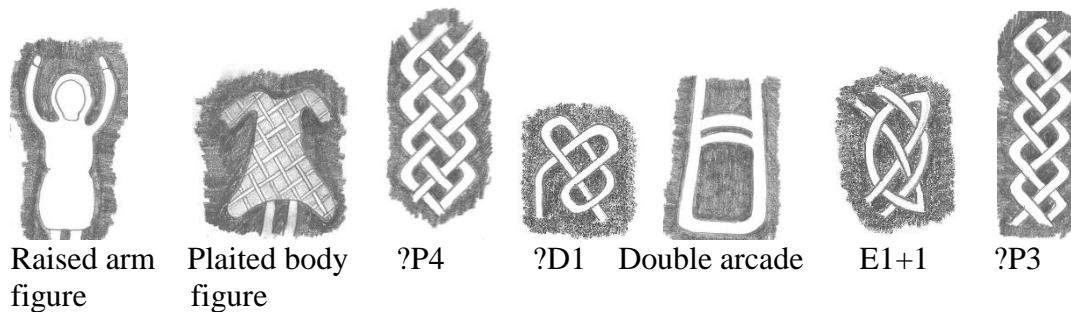


## Ilam 5: Ilam Hall

Rectangular cross shaft found embedded in a cottage wall in the village in the 1840's and moved to its present site south-west of Ilam Hall. Sidebottom attributes this to his Dove Valley local school of the South-western Regional School, and it is made of Triassic sandstone as with *Ilam 2*.



## Motifs



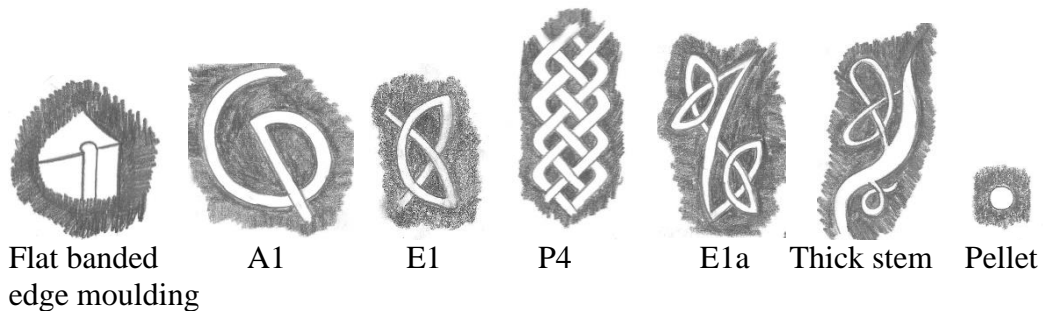
And, modelled carving technique, three figures in a row, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

### Leek 1: St Edward the Confessor

This rectangular-sectioned shaft was built into the church fabric but is now loose inside church. Said to belong to the South-western Region School, it is made of Millstone grit, of which there is a local outcrop less than one mile away.



#### Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, unidentified side-shrouded(?) figure (similar to those at Sandbach), single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

## Leek 2: St Edward the Confessor

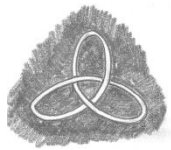
Crosshead (type 11e) built into the church fabric, now loose inside church.  
Sidebottom's North-western Regional School, made of Millstone grit as with *Leek 1*.



### Motifs



Flat banded edge  
moulding



T1



P2

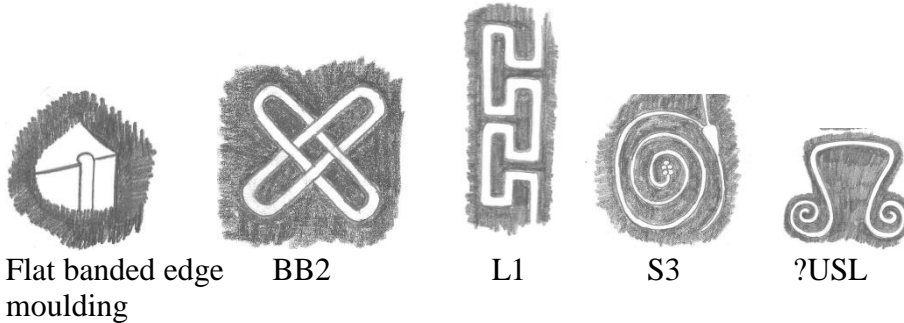
And, modelled carving technique, boss, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

### Leek 3: St Edward the Confessor

Rectangular-sectioned shaft built into the church fabric, and now loose inside church.  
Sidebottom's North-western Regional School, and of Millstone grit as *Leek 1*.



#### Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, cross, single-stranded pattern, diagonal and square grid.



#### Leek 4: St Edward the Confessor

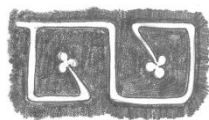
Rectangular-sectioned shaft loose inside church. North-western Regional School, of Millstone grit as *Leek 1*.



#### Motifs



?Flat banded  
edge moulding



S4

And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, ?square grid.

## Leek 5: St Edward the Confessor

Fragments of a rectangular-sectioned shaft rebuilt into a single shaft found in the churchyard. Said to be the West sub-division of the South-western Regional School. Made from Millstone grit as *Leek 1*.



Leek 5 (E)



Leek 5 (S)

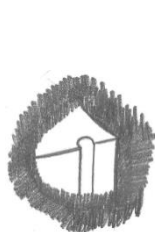


Leek 5 (W)



Leek 5 (N)

### Motifs



Flat banded  
edge moulding



E1a



CC1



Looped P4



B1



Inner rim  
frame

And, modelled carving technique, inscription, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

### Leek 6: St Edward the Confessor

Round shaft in churchyard, identified as Sidebottom's North-western Regional School and made of Millstone grit as with *Leek 1*.



Leek 6 (E)



Leek 6 (S)



Leek 6 (W)

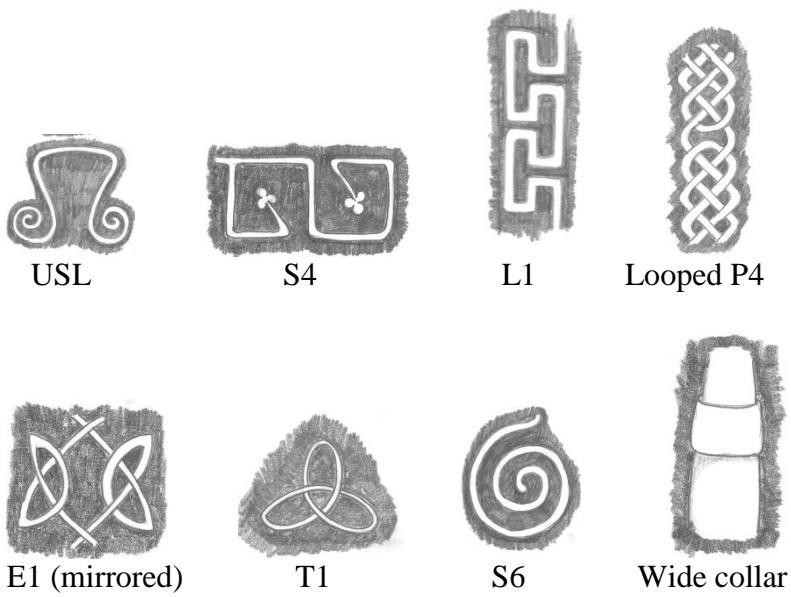


Leek 6 (N 1)



Leek 6 (N 2)

## Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, unclassified motif, single-stranded pattern, diagonal and square grid.



## Stoke, St Peter ad Vincula

Rectangular-sectioned shaft re-used in the fabric of the church, before being removed in the nineteenth century and erected in the churchyard. Said by Sidebottom to be of the North-western Regional School.



Stoke (E)



Stoke (N)



Stoke (S)

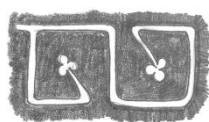


Stoke (W)

## Motifs



Flat banded  
edge moulding



S4



L1



E1 (mirrored)



P3

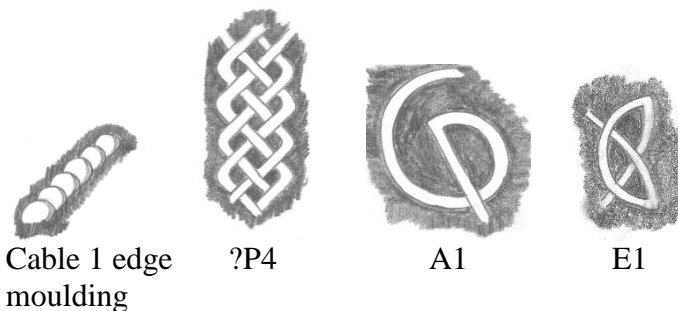
And, modelled carving technique, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

### Tatenhill (Now St Mary's, Rolleston on Dove)

A rectangular-sectioned shaft cross (type 9e) of Triassic sandstone (outcrops of which are found close to the site). It was being used as part of the church floor, before being removed to Rolleston Hall in 1880s, and then again to the churchyard of St Mary's, Rolleston on Dove in 1897. Said to be the South-western Regional School.



#### Motifs



And, modelled carving technique, boss, chevron, single-stranded pattern, diagonal grid.

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