Church Organisation and Ecclesiastical Landscapes in North Wales and Cheshire, c.800-1100: A Comparative Analysis

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Any PhD thesis is a substantial undertaking, but this rings even truer over six years since I took my first steps towards writing this text. In recent years thousands of candidates have no doubt found themselves in this position, reflecting upon the long road now behind them and the many challenges faced whilst walking it.

In this regard, my foreword will resemble many others, but there is an added sense of occasion when I look back over the decade I have now spent at Lancaster and the many people who have in their own ways guided me to where I now find myself. Chief amongst these must of course be my three doctoral supervisors, Fiona Edmonds, Patricia Murrieta-Flores and Clare Downham. All of them have shown patience and kindness to me almost without limit and I owe so much to their constant support and reassurance, year after year after year. Particular thanks are due to Fiona, who has supported this project from the very beginning, overseeing the MA dissertation which opened the door to the world of early medieval Wales for me, who pored over research proposals and funding applications before my research had even begun, and without whom I would never have started this project, much less completed it. Thanks are also due to my external examiners, Charles Insley and Thomas Pickles, whose comments have improved this final version of the thesis substantially and who made my viva a pleasure rather than an ordeal. Any mistakes and errors of course, remain entirely my own.

Beyond these three, I have had the enormous pleasure and privilege of knowing so many members of the history department at Lancaster who have helped me in so many ways. For their enormous empathy and kindness at several difficult points, I owe a great deal to three successive Directors of Postgraduate Research within the department, namely Corinna Peniston-Bird, Mark Hurst and Eleri Cousins. For their timely and invaluable perspectives on my research as it progressed, I must also thank all those who appraised my work over the years, particularly Paul Hayward and Alex Metcalfe. For their boundless curiosity and interest, whether they were medievalists or not, I could name the entire staff of the department, but my gratitude extends especially to Sophie Ambler, Christopher Donaldson, Mercedes Camino Moroto and John Welshman. I must also highlight Deborah Sutton, not only for lifting my spirits with every conversation, but also for serving as my undergraduate dissertation supervisor; all of them have in their own way helped me reach this point today. Most importantly, the person without whom this PhD would be nothing is the wonderful and irreplaceable Rebecca Shepherd; utterly unflappable, endlessly dependable and kind beyond measure, she has steered dozens of my contemporaries and I through the mire of researching, teaching and working with a smile, and she is the glue which holds together postgraduate history research at Lancaster.

Most of all though, what has kept me here at Lancaster for so long, and helped me keep going when I doubted if I could, was the fantastic company I have been able to keep over these many years. To name them all would be impossible, but the friends I have gathered together, from my fellow history students at all levels of study to those I know through university clubs and societies, from those I met in the Student Ambassador programme to some of my current colleagues at the university, all mean more to me than I can ever say. To name at least a few, in no particular order, it is my great pleasure to thank Adam Fletcher, Joseph Cassidy, Jonathan Parks, Adam Tutt, Alex Grebenar, Sean Dewar, Alice

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Jacob O'Neill

April 2025

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Declaration

This thesis has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree at this or any other university. It is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated. Many of the ideas in this thesis were the product of discussion with my supervisors Professor Fiona Edmonds, Professor Patricia Murrieta-Flores and Professor Clare Downham.

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Abstract

Church Organisation and Ecclesiastical Landscapes in North Wales and Cheshire, c.800-1100: A Comparative Analysis by Jacob O'Neill

This thesis uses a topographical approach to explore the organisation of the early medieval Church in both Wales and north west England through the lens of three regional case studies. It seeks to uncover what kinds of churches existed in these places prior to the Norman Conquest, when they were founded and how they related to each other. Some of the pre-existing frameworks for analysing Church organisation in Britain and Ireland are explored and described, followed by three regional case studies, namely Tegeingl in north east Wales, broadly coterminous with the later county of Flintshire, then the hundreds of Wilaveston or Wirral in the north west of Cheshire and then the hundreds of Warmundestrou and Mildestuic in the east of that county. The history of each identified church site is explored through several different bodies of evidence, though art historical evidence, toponomy, and archaeology feature most often as a result of the relative lack of written evidence from these regions. The thesis argues that whilst each site has its own biography and is worthy of individual study, the broad pattern of a small number of early mother-parishes breaking down into smaller units over subsequent centuries is valid on both sides of Anglo-Welsh border, and that there are essential similarities in Church organisation across the study areas, though their cultural expression and appearance remained diverse.

Contents

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AC - (Prior to 682), Paul Martin Remfrey, ed. and trans., *Annales Cambriae: A Translation of Harleian 3859: PRO E 164/1: Cottonian Domitian, A1: Exeter Cathedral Library MS. 3514 and MS Exchequer DB Neath, PRO E. 164/1* (Castle Studies Research and Publishing, 2007); (from 682 to 954), David Dumville , ed. and trans., *Annales Cambriae, AD 682-954: Texts A-C in Parallel* (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2002)

A Corpus, Volume III - Nancy Edwards, ed., *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture Volume III: North Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013)

ASC A - Janet Bately, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle : A Collaborative Edition 3 MS A* (Cambridge : D.S. Brewer, 1986)

ASC B – Simon Taylor, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle : A Collaborative Edition 4 MS B* (Cambridge : D.S. Brewer, 1983)

ASC C – Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle : A Collaborative Edition 5 MS C* (Martlesham : D.S. Brewer, 2001)

ASC D – G.P. Cubbin, ed. *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle : A Collaborative Edition 6 MS D* (Cambridge : D.S. Brewer, 1996)

ASC E – Susan Irvine, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle : A Collaborative Edition 7 MS E* (Cambridge : D.S. Brewer, 2004)

CASSS, II – Rosemary Cramp and Richard N. Bailey, eds., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume II: Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988)

CASSS, VI – James Lang, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume VI : North Yorkshire* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2001)

CASSS, IX - Richard N. Bailey, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume IX: Cheshire and Lancashire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009)

CASSS XIII – Jane Hawkes and Philip Sidebottom, eds., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume XIII: Derbyshire and Staffordshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2018)

ChANEC – Geoffrey Barraclough, ed., *The Charters of the Anglo-Norman Earls of Chester, c.1071-1237* (Manchester: Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1988)

DB Cheshire - Philip Morgan, ed., *Domesday Book: Cheshire, Including Lancashire, Cumbria and North Wales* (Chichester: Philimore, 1978)

De Excidio - *Gildas, De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae,* ed. and trans. by Michael Winterbottom (Chichester: Phillimore, 1978)

eDIL – *An Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, based on the Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1913-76) <www.dil.ie/browse>

FAI - Joan Newlon Radner, ed. and trans., *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978)

EPNS Cheshire -, John McNeal Dodgson and Alexander R. Rumble, eds, *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, 5 vols (Cambridge and Nottingham: English Place-Names Society, 1970-97)

GPC – Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru Online (Aberystwyth: The Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies) <www.geiriadur.ac.uk/gpc/gpc.html>

HE – Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Maynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969)

PAS – Portable Antiquties Scheme <www.finds.org.uk>

RIB – Roman Inscriptions of Britain Online <www.romaninscriptionsofbritain.org>

Tait, St Werburgh's – James Tait, ed., *The Chartulary or Register of the Abbey of St Werburgh Chester*, 2 vols (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1920-3)

Taxatio – Jeffrey Denton, and others, *Taxatio* (Sheffield: Digital Humanities Institute, University of Sheffield, 2014) <www.dhi.ac.uk/taxatio/>

VCH - Victoria County History (see bibliography for details of specific volumes)

1 Introduction

The study of Welsh and northern English history in the early medieval period is often an exercise in gauging the relative probabilities of a wide range of possible scenarios, grafted onto a sparse chronological framework made up of a few temporal hard points for which certain (or near-certain) dates are known. Scholars in this area often find themselves working from a baseline of firmer dates as noted in chronicle sources including the Latin *Annales Cambriae,* Welsh language *Brut y Tywysogyon* and the Old English *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*; sources like these provide a slim but crucial series of dates of rulers, obits and major political events. For Wales we may have one or two such pieces of information per year in the eleventh century, with the records becoming increasingly terse and the dates increasingly uncertain as one looks further back in time; the north west of England is even more poorly documented. Together these sources allow for a coherent narrative of political developments in the early medieval period to be constructed in reasonable detail, but the written record quickly displays its limitations when one moves to other themes, or when one hopes to look beneath the intrigues of kingdom-level politics and investigate history though a regional or local lens.

These challenges will be very familiar to scholars of the early medieval period in all sorts of places and settings, and they are particularly apparent when considering the issue of Church organisation and the construction of a local network of churches. By Church organisation, I refer to the spatial distribution of churches, their individual status and mode of organisation (they might have been a monastery in the strict sense, a collegiate

church or *clas*, or an ordinary 'local' or parochial church), their position in a wider church hierarchy, their relationship with episcopal authority and their broader cultural significance. Compared to the core Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, we do not have nearly as many charters or legal documents in these regions, whilst prose histories, contemporary lawcodes and hagiography are much rarer and usually occur in later medieval source contexts. Nevertheless, it is precisely this theme which is the primary concern of this thesis, which will apply existing knowledge on the development of organised Christianity in Britain and Ireland to three regional case studies both in Wales and on the opposite side of the Anglo-Welsh border, in Cheshire. Together these districts form a coherent whole, united by their geographical proximity and a shared history of conflict between Welsh and Mercian rulers which allows us to test the validity of the distinction between the two kingdoms. Clearly they were separate polities with different cultures, languages and identities, but the precise boundary between them was fluid at this time and they were still united by a common religion; what this thesis explores is whether that faith found a common institutional expression in the organisation of the Church in these places, or whether the cultural divide between them was reflected in the way churches were founded and in the nature of the communities who lived and worshipped there. This adds a comparative aspect to what follows, exploring similarities and differences between Wales and nearby parts of England, placing the evidence from the three study areas in their context in a part of Britain which was in many ways dominated by frontiers, both on the shifting border between England and Wales and the more fluid boundary which marks the edge of an Irish Sea Zone. In this respect I aim to shift focus away from some of the major ecclesiastical sites and to look more at the development of smaller churches.

My decision to focus on the period 800-1100 is the result of several different considerations. Firstly, this period marks a series of important transitions in the ecclesiastical history of Britain and Ireland. The arrival of Scandinavian populations in the ninth century brought disruption, but also new cultural and economic stimuli to these regions, and this presents an important opportunity to place early medieval Wales and Cheshire in a Viking Age context. There is clear potential to contribute to the field given that dedicated studies of Scandinavian influence in Wales remain fairly limited compared with the voluminous literature on their effects in Ireland and elsewhere in Britain,

although more recent work has begun to correct this by taking the Irish Sea as its scope.[1] I hope to discuss the complex ways in which Scandinavians may have interacted with Christian institutions in Wales and Cheshire at this time. This period also includes a fascinating but difficult time for the crystallisation of local church networks. In England, it is often assumed that the network of local churches first reached something approximating its high and late medieval form in the early twelfth-century and that after that point, parish fission and similar processes are sufficiently well-documented that we can reverse engineer the parochial situation in preceding centuries.[2] However, these developments were very gradual and the process of defining what tithes were owed to a church, their relative status and the rights of mother-churches over their daughters is apparent in royal lawgiving in England as early as the reigns of Æthelstan (r.924-39) and Eadgar (r.955-75).[3] This suggests that these processes occurred gradually over a period of many centuries. There is also the question of regional variation to contend with, in that these changes may have affected Wales and nearby regions at different times and in different ways, something which can easily be forgotten if theoretical models of Church organisation are applied too rigidly. That being said, the context of earlier centuries is crucial, and the disposition of the Church in the Viking Age can only be adequately explained with some reference to prior developments, especially the question of how far organised Christianity survived the end of Roman rule in Britain and how far decisions around which sites were most auspicious to found churches were shaped by older patterns of economic development and settlement in the Roman period and back further into prehistory. Therefore, where the evidence is sufficiently dense to allow it, it is the ninth to eleventh centuries which take precedence in what follows, but where necessary, discussion of earlier centuries is included, especially at sites with Roman settlement history such as the Cheshire salt-wiches. Likewise, some developments may only become apparent in much later sources, particularly chronicles and charters, which at times take us into the twelfth century and beyond. The evidence of dedications is also of use and can

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[1] Henry Loyn, *The Vikings in Wales* (London: Viking Society for Northern Studies, 1976), p.4; Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons, 350-1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.550-1; David Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea: Conflict and Assimilation AD 790-1050* (Stroud: The History Press, 2010), pp.54, 64-5.

[2] John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp.368-9.

[3] I Æthelstan in *Councils and Synods, with Other Documents Relating to the English Church*, I, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock, Martin Brett and Christopher N. Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp.43-7; II Eadgar, in *English Historical Documents c.500-1042*, ed. by Dorothy Whitelock (London: Eyre & Spottiswode, 1955), p.431.

give an indication as to how ancient a particular dedication at a specific church might be, whilst a large and valuable benefice may also be a useful indication of a church's ancient primacy in its local district.

Nevertheless, despite recent progress there remains a tendency in the existing scholarship to compartmentalise the question of Church organisation into national silos, taking England, Ireland or Wales as the individual focus of a study. Such an approach can be extremely productive and this thesis builds on some of these foundational texts which have shaped our understanding of the churches of England and Ireland especially. John Blair's *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* published in 2005, is a key text for the study of the Church in England prior to the Norman Conquest, building on many years developing what has become known as the 'minster hypothesis' or 'model', whilst Colmán Etchingham's enormously detailed *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650-1000*, published in 1999, did much to clarify the inner workings of Irish churches, helping to re-establish the importance of bishops, to illuminate how Irish monasteries were ruled and how they were enmeshed in Irish political society and kin groups. Studies dedicated solely to the Welsh Church are rarer and it is more difficult to point to such foundational works, although great progress has been made especially in south east Wales where the reputation of the Llandaf charters has been thoroughly redeemed in Patrick Sims-Williams's *The Book of Llandaf as a Historical Source* published in 2019, largely resolving a crucial debate which rumbled on ever since the charters' veracity was championed in Wendy Davies's publications on the subject in the late 1970s.[4] Other works of note have studied the Church on a much larger scale, far beyond Britain and Ireland. One example is Susan Wood's *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* from 2006, which takes in most of western Europe albeit with a focus on the Frankish kingdoms and their successor states. Wales does not particularly feature as the charter evidence on which Wood mainly draws is largely (though not entirely) absent prior to the twelfth century due to poor rates of survival. Nevertheless, on a continental scale this work demonstrates the value of ranging across political and cultural borders when investigating Church organisation and tracks the development of the idea of the proprietary church and how a church could be treated as property by lay owners and

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[4] Wendy Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm: Studies in the Llandaff Charters* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978); Wendy Davies, *The Llandaff Charters* (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1979).

patrons. This thesis aims to contribute to this literature in two key ways; firstly by studying the early medieval ecclesiastical sites of Wales and England side by side in order to interrogate questions of mutual cultural influence and of similarities and differences, and secondly, to embrace the challenges of working across a political and cultural border. Such themes are increasingly popular amongst medieval historians and have begun to influence scholars of early medieval Britain, though on the Anglo-Welsh border the focus is often on the political dimension and the history of the great linear earthworks such as Offa's Dyke.[5] In this thesis a cross-border approach is deliberately adopted and is a defining characteristic of this study. The choice of Tegeingl is especially appropriate here given that within the chronological span of this study, it experienced alternating periods of Welsh and Mercian political control. Forcing such a complex political and cultural history into the straitjacket imposed by modern conceptions of political borders is likely to oversimplify the different influences and contexts which conditioned the development of churches in this region. Instead, I aim to consider the regional histories of each case study afresh, without assuming that they followed the prevailing patterns seen elsewhere in Wales, England and Ireland but whilst remaining alert for similarities and cultural intermixing and embracing the porosity of early medieval borders.

Regarding the structure of the thesis, our first topic of discussion is the current state of scholarship on Church organisation in Britain, Ireland and Western Europe more generally, which will provide a conceptual and theoretical framework within which to interpret the Welsh evidence. The breadth of this opening chapter is necessary because of the wide variety of cultural and ecclesiastical influences which affected the development of Christianity in Wales between the fifth and eleventh centuries. It is also because the difficulties of the Welsh source material makes comparison with other countries and argument by analogy a productive way of compensating for and illuminating these gaps. In this respect the comparison with the neighbouring kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex may seem obvious given their shared border with Wales, but other places remain important. Ireland offers particular areas of interest in that it possessed a model of Church organisation which, whilst less alien to the mainstream of Latin Christianity in the early

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[5] Keith Ray, 'The Organisation of the Mid-Late Anglo-Saxon Borderland with Wales', *Offa's Dyke Journal*, 4 (2022), pp.132-53 (pp.132-3).

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medieval Europe than was once widely thought, has certain unusual features in the way that abbatial and episcopal authority was configured and in the especially close connection between churches and local kin groups.[6] This had important consequences for the way in which the landscape was divided and arranged for the purposes of local parochial services to the laity, which is another area of interest for this study. Likewise, scholars working on the English Church have been gradually approaching a consensus in recent decades around the so-called 'minster-thesis', an idea developed in response to the work of John Blair.[7] This model sees the development of the English church network as beginning with a series of wealthy, para-monastic communities of clergy in the seventh and eighth centuries which oversaw a large parish; any preceding religious institutions amongst the Britons either fell into abeyance or were so thoroughly appropriated that their true origins are now extremely difficult to trace. Continuing, these units gradually broke down in the following centuries in response to a decline in royal patronage, the building of private churches by aspiring aristocrats and a demand for improved access to the sacraments and other ecclesiastical services on the part of the laity. This is important because an older view of the 'Celtic' Churches of Wales tends to emphasise their origin as small oratories associated with confessors or holy men, some who may have travelled extensively throughout Britain, while others were of more local significance; the result was a dense patchwork of small churches and parishes at an early (sixth or seventh century) date.[8] Just as in Ireland, since at least the 1980s and 1990s scholars have argued that the distinctiveness of the Welsh situation was overstated by previous generations of historians, but the idea that different circumstances of foundation led to different patterns of church organisation in Wales and England is supported by the relative weakness of Welsh kings in the seventh and eighth centuries compared to the rulers of Northumbria and Mercia, which made a royally-directed and funded program of church foundation on the Anglo-Saxon model highly unlikely in Wales.[9] Therefore, this thesis seeks to engage with these frameworks by comparing local case studies in both England and Wales in order to test the validity of some of these models. An important contribution to the early

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[6] Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland A.D. 650-1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999), p.143.

[7] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.4-5.

[8] E.G. Bowen, *The Settlements of the Celtic Saints in Wales*, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1956), pp.72-4.

[9] Wendy Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church', in *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, ed. by Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1992), pp.12-21 (pp.13-4); Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.84-90.

history of the Welsh Church arrived in the summer of 2023, subsequent to the drafting of this introduction, in the form of Nancy Edwards's *Life in Early Medieval Wales*. The timing of its publication has not allowed it to be integrated into the findings of this thesis, but its release is evidence of the potential for new discoveries and findings which still exist in the field of early medieval Welsh history.

Concerning non-textual sources, this study leads us to some important methodological points. As already stated, a thorough study of Church organisation in these regions must be as open as possible to all forms of evidence; this might be considered a virtue in all forms of history, but it is a particular necessity in this thesis given the state of the written record. Sources such as stone sculpture, toponymics and archaeological data greatly enrich our understanding of many areas of early medieval history and Church organisation is no exception. In this regard my work owes a great debt to previous scholars who have collected, catalogued and compiled much of this evidence, saving a great deal of effort and making it far easier to interpret these records. My hope is to build upon this work by viewing this information through a spatial lens wherever possible. I intend to take this evidence and ground it in its geographical and landscape context, allowing a deeper picture of a local ecclesiastical landscape to developed for each regional case study. What follows is therefore a predominantly topographical study, which is interested in themes of place and what the locations of confirmed or suspected early medieval churches were like. This also links to other issues around the economic and political ordering of the early medieval landscape which will also be touched upon; in particular the question of the economic basis of the Welsh Church network in the early medieval period is closely related to the economic basis of society more generally, particular amongst the aristocratic elite. This topographical approach draws on several bodies of source material. Principal amongst them is the corpus of early medieval stone sculpture. It is our good fortune that the corpora of stones in both Wales and Cheshire have in recent years been subject to a thorough reassessment and academic re-cataloguing, which has produced volume III of the *Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture from Wales* (published in 2013 and edited by Nancy Edwards) and volume IX of the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture* or *CASSS* for Lancashire

and Cheshire (published in 2009 and edited by Richard Bailey).[10] These relatively recent developments have placed our understanding of these sources on a new footing and have compiled decades of research on particular monuments into a concise and easily accessible format which has greatly facilitated further work on the subject. Likewise, toponomy and place-name studies play an important role in the thesis and here we are well-served also; John McNeal Dodgson's Cheshire volumes for the English Place-Names Survey have continued to be held in high regard since their publication in the 1970s, whilst in Tegeingl we owe much to Hywel Wyn Owen and Ken Lloyd Gruffydd for their 2017 volume *Place-Names of Flintshire*.[11] Progress has continued to be made in the sphere of archaeology, and several major reports or catalogues have emerged in the past ten or fifteen years on sites such as Irby and Meols, both on the Wirral, Nantwich in Warmundestrou hundred and Pentre Ffwrndan in Tegeingl.[12] These have not so far explored any explicitly ecclesiastical sites, but as evidence for broader patterns of settlement, economic activity and cultural developments, they are indispensable and help to address the gaps of the written record.

Turning to our written sources, whilst these are not as abundant as for later centuries, there remains a respectable corpus of charters, chronicles and other records pertaining to this period, albeit often compiled in subsequent centuries. Domesday Book features heavily here, and all three of the regional case studies were included in the survey, including Tegeingl which was, as far as the Norman administration was concerned, governed as Atiscros hundred within the county of Cheshire. Crucially Domesday made an effort to record the locations of priests and churches and is frequently the first precisely

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[10] Nancy Edwards, ed., *A Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Stone Sculpture Volume III: North Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013; Richard N. Bailey, ed., *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture Volume IX: Cheshire and Lancashire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009).

[11] John McNeal Dodgson, and Alexander R. Rumble, eds, *The Place-Names of Cheshire*, 5 vols (Cambridge and Nottingham: English Place-Names Society, 1970-97); Hywel Wyn Owen, and Ken Lloyd Griffith, *Place-Names of Flintshire* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017).

[12] Robert A. Philpott and Mark H. Adams, *Irby, Wirral: Excavations on a Late Prehistoric, Romano-British and Medieval Site, 1987-96* (Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 2010); David Griffiths, Robert A. Philpott and Geoff Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast: discoveries and observations in the 19th and 20th centuries, with a catalogue of collections*, Oxford University School of Archaeology Monograph 68 (Oxford: Institute of Archaeology, 2007); P. Arrowsmith and D. Power, *Roman Nantwich: A Salt-Making Settlement*, British Archaeological Reports British Series 557 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012); Nigel W. Jones, 'Roman settlement and industry along the Dee Estuary: recent discoveries at Pentre Ffwrndan, Flintshire' *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 169 (2020), pp.127-63.

dateable evidence for ecclesiastical activity in the study area, though the record it made was not exhaustive. Another source of information dating to the first decades of Norman rule are the charters of major churches and monasteries in the region. Chief amongst these are the charters of the abbey of St Werburgh in Chester, originally a collegiate church dating to at least the early tenth century and refounded as a Benedictine abbey under the patronage of Earl Hugh I d'Avranches of Chester around 1093. The abbey's cartulary survives only as a register, recording brief summaries of the content of each charter, but it has been painstakingly edited and many of the texts restored from later copies. Likewise, the Earls of Chester frequently granted churches and tithes to their barons or to other ecclesiastical establishments, and these charters are also of great use when trying to find the first attestation of a given church. Somewhat later in date, great use is also made of the 1291 *Taxatio Ecclesiastica*, a royal survey of the churches of England and Wales and their revenues compiled for the purpose of collecting the ecclesiastical tax which was due from the English kingdom to the Papacy and of which Edward I was promised a share by Pope Nicholas IV. Its principal value is as a tightly dated record of parish churches, their dedications, dependent chapels and associated revenues, and for less well-known church-sites it is sometimes our very earliest attestation. Even when this is not the case, the clear statement of which churches were still dependent chapels of a larger mother parish is extremely useful and cuts through what can be an uncertain distinction between the terms *ecclesia* and *capella* in earlier charters. This text was extensively edited by the late Professor Jeffrey Denton taking full account of the many different copies of the returns from each diocese, improving on the original 1802 edition from the Records Commission for the province of Canterbury; his death prevented the publication of a new edition in print but his findings were incorporated into the online version of the project published by the University of Sheffield in 2014. The evidence of dedications is also of use and can give an indication as to how ancient a particular dedication at a specific church might be, whilst a large and valuable benefice may also be a useful indication of a church's ancient primacy in its local district.

The bulk of the thesis will consist of a series of regional case studies, which have been chosen to maximise both the potential of the comparative approach I have outlined and

to ensure coverage of places and source material which have received less attention from historians. The three regions in question are all Domesday hundreds, partly as this provided a feasible scale for each section and partly to ensure a consistent approach in each part. The first region to be studied is in north east Wales, encompassing the area which was becoming the *cantref* of Tegeingl between 800 and 1100, known from an English perspective as Atiscros in Domesday, later given the name Englefield. This region is of particular interest because it was remote from any of the major political centres of Wales and is very poorly served by the Welsh chronicle evidence. This is partially redeemed however by its location so close to the border with Cheshire, which allows English material and Norman texts such as Domesday Book to be used to illuminate the status of churches in Tegeingl and its surroundings. Indeed, this was a disputed border region between the Welsh and Mercian kingdoms from at least the late eighth century and was under Mercian and then English domination for long periods during the period in question. This can present additional challenges, in that the changing political context might change our interpretation of certain pieces of cultural evidence such as stone sculpture and toponyms depending on which power was in the ascendant at any one time, and our dates for these kinds of evidence do not often allow us to be so precise in making these distinctions. However, it also provides an opportunity, in that the interplay of English and Welsh ideas of Church organisation between 800 and 1100 may help to illuminate the situation in both sets of kingdoms. In this way our corpus of source material for this case study is greatly expanded; for example, most of the coastal strip running from the Wirral to the river Clwyd was under English control in the first few years after the Norman Conquest and the churches and landholdings of this area were entered into Domesday Book. We also have a range of English charters from the first few post-Conquest decades (mostly associated with either the Earls of Chester, St Werburgh's Abbey Chester, or both) which also have valuable clues about the distribution, ownership and status of churches in north east Wales. Moreover, when looking at the non-textual sources, we see a variety of sculptural and toponymic evidence which speaks to the breadth of cultural influences present in this part of Wales which reveal links with England (particularly Wirral and the city of Chester), Ireland and Scandinavia. This grounds this thesis in Irish Sea studies, a vibrant field in its own right which offers a useful model for examining processes of migration, cultural exchange and political

change in the early medieval period in Britain, Ireland and beyond, and where the use of a wide range of textual and non-textual sources is common.[13]

The initial case study on north east Wales is followed by two further chapters of similar structure, looking at different areas of Cheshire, one on the Domesday hundred of *Hadlowe*, corresponding roughly to the peninsula of Wirral, the other on the hundreds of Warmundestrou and Mildestvic. These case studies have been selected for their potential to shed light on the theme of Church organisation below the national level. The two Cheshire case studies complement the north east Wales chapter, by exploring the nature of Church organisation on the opposite side of the Anglo-Welsh border. In this respect they build on some of the comparisons regarding shared cultural influences and the importance of Chester as a political and trading centre in the tenth century. However, they also provide something of a control on the north eastern Welsh material, in that they allow us to explore issues of Church organisation in a part of the Mercian and then English kingdoms which was very close to Wales, but which was under reasonably firm political control throughout the early medieval period. In this respect the three case studies represent a slice across the Anglo-Welsh frontier zone, allowing us to detect how these competing sources of cultural influence played out on the ground. It is hoped that this will illuminate whether there are any features which might be considered particularly Mercian or otherwise distinctive to this part of north western England. This would be a useful contribution in itself given that it would allow Cheshire's place within the established models of Church organisation to be assessed and hopefully clarified, as it has also received rather less attention than better-attested regions to its south and east. Furthermore, it is also highly important to the nature of Church organisation in north east Wales because it provides some way of distinguishing which features there might be considered more English in origin, and which more Welsh, which is potentially extremely important given the tangled nature of the political chronology of that region. Moreover, it would also allow us to assess what is shared or similar between them, and which

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[13] David Griffiths, 'Maen Achwyfan and the context of Viking Settlement in North-East Wales', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 155 (2006), pp.143-162.

features could be considered 'regional'. These perspectives are especially important given that more recent scholarship has tended to place Wales more firmly in the mainstream of western European Christianity in this period, even if there are some unusual features, rather than seeing it as a unique product of a 'Celtic' culture. Moreover, Cheshire has a similar range of sources to north east Wales, albeit with some differences; in particular the chronicle record is a little fuller and the corpus of sculpture begins somewhat earlier. Nevertheless, both Tegeingl and the Cheshire case studies are clearly amenable to a similar method and provide a useful comparison against each other which will benefit our understanding of both regions. As we shall see, the case studies also form a natural unit as the northernmost extension of the Mercian kingdom, and this question of how churches might develop in peripheral zones on the edge of established polities is also worthy of consideration.

At the outset, it is important to note one important and deliberate omission, namely the churches of the city of Chester itself. After its refoundation in the 890s, the city became an important political centre and trade entrepôt, and this is reflected in the wealth of archaeological evidence the city as produced from this period. This includes a large number of cellared buildings of similar type to examples from Dublin and York, as well as a wealth of silver hoards deposited as the city began to decline economically in the later-tenth century.[14] Ecclesiastically, the city had at least two major churches by the end of the eleventh century, namely St John's and St Werburgh's, and some of the other smaller churches such as St Olave's may also have pre-Norman origins.[15] Direct analysis of these churches is here left to others, partly for reasons of space and partly because Chester has already received more scholarly attention that the regions which surround it.[16] That is not deny the connections between the study areas and the city, which are clear from the chronicle evidence and even more so from the stone sculpture which occurs at so many church sites in the thesis; indeed Chester may have been an important centre of production for these.[17] To strike this balance, evidence from Chester is freely deployed

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[14] Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea*, pp.129-35.
[15] Griffiths, *Vikings of the Irish Sea*, p.135.
[16] *VCH* Cheshire¸ I, pp.257, 268-9.
[17] Paul Everson and David Stocker, 'Transactions on the Dee: the 'exceptional' collection of early sculpture from St John's, Chester' in *Crossing Boundaries: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Art, Material Culture, Language and Literature of the Early Medieval World*, ed. by Eric Cambridge and Jane Hawkes (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2017), pp.160-78 (pp.160-1).

when it can illuminate the situation in the designated study areas, and its influence will be apparent throughout the thesis, but the city's churches are not discussed to the same level of detail.

The focus on north Wales is also very deliberate. It has long been realised that of the surviving written sources from early medieval Wales, a disproportionate number of texts have their origins in south Wales. In the south west, it was at St Davids that the core of the *Annales Cambriae* was recorded, and for much of south Wales we can call on the Book of Llandaf and its many charters, whose validity as historical sources for the early medieval period is now widely accepted.[18] Other sources also from this region include the charters appended to the *Vita Cadoci,* composed at Cadog's *clas* at Llancarfan, and the charters entered as marginal additions in the *Llyfr Teilo*, known to English scholarship as the Lichfield or Chad Gospels, which are known to have resided at Llandeilo in the ninth century and may have been originally produced there.[19] This is not to draw too binary a distinction between north and south Welsh sources; several Welsh rulers united both regions under their lordship and it is highly likely that this information was transmitted across Wales and beyond. Indeed there may be an association between the kings of Gwynedd and the the *Historia Brittonum*, which explicitly gives a date in the fourth year of the reign of Merfyn Frych of Gwynedd (829), although how closely it reflects a Gwynedd-centric viewpoint is still a matter of debate.[20] How far this contrast reflects the vibrancy of intellectual activity in the south compared to the north is not certain, but it is clear that the rate of survival for early medieval texts from north Wales is poor. This has important consequences for the study of Church organisation in Wales. In particular, incredibly valuable as the Book of Llandaf and other sources like it are, they pose a danger in that this abundance of material from one part of Wales may lead historians to develop arguments from analogy that may not hold weight outside of the south east. This is especially problematic when one considers the legacy of Roman settlement in the area which may well have affected the development of organised Christianity in the area in the post-Roman period, resulting in different patterns of land

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[18] Patrick Sims-Williams, *The Book of Llandaf as a Historical Source* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp.4-5.
[19] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.245.
[20] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp.451-2.

use and organisation which one would expect to be reflected in the distribution and nature of the region's churches, as has been explored in south east Wales.[21] However, to reject the applicability of this evidence to the rest of Wales entirely would deprive us of potentially crucial information concerning those regions where equivalent records have not survived. One objective of this thesis is therefore to attempt to balance out this disparity in source material by foregrounding Tegeingl, which is comparatively little-known and neglected, but therefore has great potential for further study.

Before diving into the individual case studies, some political and chronological context is required. The regions in question lie on the periphery of at least two early medieval polities, in the northernmost parts of Mercia and, for Tegeingl, the northern parts of Powys. However, a simple geographical statement such as that overlooks a complex series of political developments. Both these units originated in the particularly obscure century or two which immediately followed the withdrawal of Roman power from Britain around 410, and the nature of the Roman inheritance in these places has a bearing on both their political and ecclesiastical organisation. This in turn hinges on how one interprets the evidence for Christianity in Roman Britain, which was the official religion for barely a century and which was not universally adopted. Once imperial rule in Britain had faded away, we must contend with different patterns of political development in the subsequent centuries. From the first half of the fifth century, the provinces of Britannia were divided again, between Anglian, Saxon and Jutish migrants on the one hand, and the Britons on the other; initially confined to the south east, these new arrivals would roll back the frontiers of British rule over the Middle Ages until it was confined to more or less the modern extent of Wales and Scotland. These rulers also faced other threats, not least the incursion and settlement of south west Wales by an Irish-speaking population known to later scholarship as the Déisi, who may have supplied the earliest kings of Dyfed as early as the late-fourth century.[22] This movement of people across the Irish Sea created cultural connections between Ireland and Britain, and is a feasible conduit for the transmission of different ecclesiastical practices and modes of organisation between them; that St Patrick

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[21] Davies, *An Early Welsh Microcosm*, p.161.

[22] Iwan Wmffre, 'Post-Roman Irish Settlement in Wales: New Insights from a Recent Study of Cardiganshire Place-Names' in *Ireland and Wales in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Karen Jankulak and Jonathan Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp.46-61 (pp.49-50).

was a Briton is well-known and the model he knew from his homeland was a late-Roman, diocesan one and so the revisionists of recent decades have highlighted that bishops and dioceses continued to be of great importance throughout the early medieval period and into the Viking Age.[23] It is connections such as these which originally drew scholars to the idea of a common Celtic Church, now discredited, but the potential for Irish influence in Wales remained possible.

The Britons were themselves organised into a patchwork of competing petty kingdoms, and the names, territorial extent and rulers of these territories are not recorded contemporaneously until Gildas' invective *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae* was composed at some point in the very late fifth century or in the first half of the sixth century.[24] Here we have our earliest attestation of the new breed of rulers who had come to power in western Britain, figures such as the '*insularis draco*' Maelgwn Gwynedd, who drew Gildas's particular ire as a tyrant and usurper.[25] For the future of Powys, the most important figure in *De Excidio* is the '*superbo tyranno*' who, at a century's distance, he blames for first inviting the Anglo-Saxons into Britain and beginning the downfall of the Romano-British culture in which Gildas had been raised.[26] Whether Gildas actually named this man is uncertain, but in the eighth century Bede calls him *Vurtigernus*, or Vortigern in most modern scholarship.[27] The extent of his rule is unclear, and most of his activities in Bede or in the *Historia Britonnum* occur in the south east of Britain, but it is clear that the dynasty of Powys, which ruled a broad swathe of what is now eastern Wales, claimed descent from him; if later sources can be believed, he eventually fled in defeat to north Wales. There is then a difficult lacuna of close to 150 years in which the political chronology of Powys and its rulers rests on a very fragile evidential basis. Later genealogies supply a complete list of rulers throughout this period, and kings frequently feature in hagiographies of saints who apparently lived and were active at this time, but this information often survives only in much later compositions or copies of texts, and,

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[23] Colmán Etchingham, 'Bishops in the Early Irish Church', *Studia Hibernica*, 28 (1994), pp.35-62 (pp.36-40)

[24] David Dumville, 'Gildas and Maelgwn: Problems of Dating' in *Gildas: New Approaches*, ed. by Michael Lapidge and David Dumville, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1984), pp.51-9 (pp.51, 58-9).

[25] Gildas, *De Excidio*, §33.1, p.102.

[26] Gildas, *De Excidio*, §23.1, p.97.

[27] Bede, HE, i. 14-15, pp.48-9.

with the partial exception of kings and rulers who were themselves remembered as saints, the activities of kings are often incidental to the life of the saint being described.[28] Nevertheless, with little other evidence to work from, it is the tales of these holy men and confessors which contributed to the concept of an 'Age of Saints' in Wales during the fifth and sixth centuries, which to nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars explained the perceived prevalence of small modest churches, often in settlements compounding the word *llan* meaning an ecclesiastical enclosure with a personal name.[29] This idea is not immune to criticism, for it generalises the whole of Wales and leaves little room for regional variation, and it assumes that all such churches are early whereas many of them may derive from subsequent centuries, but clearly this material has a bearing on the question of when and where churches were founded in Wales during the early medieval period and the Viking Age. As shall be seen, there is now a growing consensus that the prevalence of *llan* names, particularly those compounded with the name of a saint, are not as ancient as was once thought.[30]

The degree of political continuity during this period and the end of Roman rule is a matter of ongoing debate and each local case needs to be considered separately; in the case of Powys, the closest administrative precursor that can be identified is the Roman-era *civitas* of the Cornovii. Exact borders are difficult to draw, but it was governed from the town of Wroxeter in modern Shropshire and probably extended across most of the central and north Welsh marches on both sides of the modern border. However, total continuity between the Cornovii and Powys seems unlikely based on the derivation of the word Powys from Latin *pagus,* here meaning rural-dweller.[31] On this basis Thomas Charles-Edwards has suggested a distinction between the more rural inhabitants of the emerging Powys versus the Roman-era urban centre at Wroxeter, suggesting the division of the Cornovii into different political units during the fifth or sixth centuries.[32] This is potentially compatible with Nick Higham's preference for linking the dynasty of Powys

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[28] Rice Rees, *An Essay on the Welsh Saints, or the Primitive Christians, Usually Considered to be the Founders of Churches in Wales* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green and Longman, 1836), pp.11-12

[29] Rees, *An Essay on the Welsh Saints*, pp.11-12.

[30] David Parsons, 'Warning: May Contain Saints. Place-Names as Evidence for the Church in Early Medieval Wales', Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lecture 17 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, Cambridge University, 2019), pp.12-3.

[31] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* pp.14-16.

[32] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* pp.14-16.

with the Deceangli and this new dynasty may have succeeded in annexing lands previously linked to the Cornovii, whilst the remainder of that civitas endured as the territory of the Wreconsǣtan.[33] The Deceangli were another people group which existed under Roman rule; as we shall see they are best-known for production of lead and their name appears on a series of cast lead pigs from north Wales and north west England, particularly from the first century AD. This seems to have been centred on the lead mines around Halkyn Mountain, later in Flintshire, and the Roman arrival appears to have greatly stimulated the production and export of lead. Much later, in 822, text A of the *Annales Cambriae* describes a Mercian invasion of north Wales, during which they destroyed the *Arx 'Decanntorum'*; similar annals appear in the B and C texts.[34] One translation of this would be the fortress of stronghold of the Decanti, which appears to be a spelling variation of the same name Deceangli. On place-name grounds, and being aware of its use and re-use as a stronghold over many centuries, this *arx* is most often placed at Degannwy by modern scholarship, in which case the territory of the Deceangli stretched to the River Conwy at the time that name was coined.[35] They inhabited the north east of Wales, taking in the later *cantref* of Tegeingl to which they gave their name.[36] Alternately, Powys may descend straightforwardly from the Westerne, another people also mentioned in the Tribal Hidage, though the exact border between these two units is not known, and this may instead refer to the territories under the rule of the kings of Gwynedd, the leading power in western Britain in the seventh century, when it is thought the information in the Tribal Hidage originates.[37] Clearly then, there were many kings in Britain between the fifth and ninth centuries, whose territories were gradually consolidated over time, though this process occurred more completely in England than in Wales which continued to be divided into several independent kingdoms well into the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These kings could vary greatly in status and the size of their realms, but the greatest Anglo-Saxon are rulers clearly known to have acted as benefactors and patrons of the Church, encouraging the conversion of their kingdoms and the building of churches; examples include the baptism of king Æthelberht of Kent around 601 and the establishment of major monasteries and churches at royal vills by successive

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[33] Nick Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp.73-5.
[34] AC ABC 822, ed. and trans. Dumville, pp.10-11.
[35] AC ABC 822, ed. and trans Dumville, pp.10-11.
[36] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.20.
[37] Margaret Gelling, 'The early history of western Mercia' in *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, ed. by Steven Bassett (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1989), pp.184-201 (p.191).

kings of Northumbria. Welsh kings clearly acted in a similar manner, founding or endowing churches in a similar manner, because such grants are attested beginning in the sixth century in the Book of Llandaf. However, these charters originate in the south east of Wales, in an area that had been more economically developed under the Romans and which was more fertile for agriculture. The difficulty in both Tegeingl and Cheshire is that it is difficult to assign these regions to a particular kingdom; the kings of Powys likely ruled Tegeingl until it came under pressure from Mercian attacks later in the eighth century, whilst Wirral and the rest of Cheshire were gradually incorporated into Mercia over the seventh century. The details are included in the introduction to the relevant case studies, but one consequence is that the role played by local rulers in these areas is obscure, because we may not know which rulers were active in these regions and even when we can assign them to a political unit, they were all peripheral to the units to which they belonged and there is little direct evidence for royally-founded churches or endowments in these places. This of great importance to this study, because the connection between the political structures of early medieval kingdoms and the Church is clearly of consequence for what types of church were founded, how richly they were endowed and where they were built. In the absence of a secure political history, it is difficult to know whether or not local rulers aped their better-known counterparts, whether that role was instead filled by local nobles or lesser rulers, or whether this was a countervailing factor which slowed the growth of local church networks in these places and hindered the development of grander, more complex forms of religious life.

The early history of Mercia is similarly difficult. Textual references for events in the fifth and sixth centuries are even rarer than for Wales and so most of our knowledge on the subject is derived from archaeological investigations. In particular, it has been common practice for most historians of the period to trace the Anglo-Saxon migration into what would become the midlands of England through the evidence of human burials, particularly furnished burials which are taken to be a clear sign of pagan religious practice. The density of these finds gradually tails off as one looks further north and west, away from the south east of England and the eastern coasts where the first Germanic migrants arrived.[38] Indeed, this idea of a gradually advancing frontier, settled piecemeal

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[38] Blair, Building Anglo-Saxon England, p.11.

rather than through dramatic military campaigns, may explain the name of the Mercians, which translates as 'the borderers' or 'dwellers on the march', from OE *Mierce*.[39] This drawn out and gradual process is therefore difficult to ascribe to a particular date and presumably occurred gradually over the fifth and sixth centuries. It is at this stage that the core of kingdom can be identified, the area ascribed to Mercia proper in the Tribal Hidage in the seventh century, which encompassed the upper Trent Valley with its principal centre at Tamworth.[40] The first known Mercian kings are named at the very end of the sixth century, but it is in the seventh that we can begin to construct a detailed political history of the kingdom, thanks largely to the writings of Bede, as well as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and the *Life of St Wilfred*. This was the period where Christianity began to spread amongst the Anglo-Saxons, spurred on largely by the mission led by Augustine at the command of Pope Gregory I. Whilst he enjoyed initial successes in southern England, the rulers of Mercia remained pagan for several decades, most famously under one of its greatest kings, Penda (d.655).

Some clarity begins to emerge at the very beginning of the seventh century, when we have the battle of Chester to use as a chronological touchpoint, one which illuminates both political and chronological developments. Our principal source for the engagement is once again Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which contains the most detailed account of the battle; much of its evidence is corroborated by the core text of *Annales Cambriae* and the reconstructed Chronicle of Ireland.[41] The dating of the battle is not certain, but it is recorded under the annal for 613 in both the *Annales Cambriae* and the Chronicle of Ireland, though there is some reason to suspect that the latter is two or three years behind the true date at this point.[42] On one side were a pair of Welsh rulers, Selyf ap Cynan of Powys and Iago ap Beli of Gwynedd; facing them was the invading force of Æthelfrith of Northumbria, one of the most powerful of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms which was already on its ascent at this time. [43] Æthelfrith's motivation for the attack is not entirely clear, but Northumbria would later emerge in clear control of north west England above

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[39] Nicholas Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom' in Bassett (ed.), *The Origins of the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms*, pp.159-70 (pp.160).
[40] Brooks, 'The formation of the Mercian kingdom, pp.160-1.
[41] AC ABC 613, ed. and trans. Remfrey, p.45.
[42] CoI, 613.3, ed. and trans. Charles-Edwards, I, p.128.
[43] AC ABC 613, ed. and trans. Remfrey, p.45.

the Mersey, and so the invasion may represent an attempt to secure his borders and either subjugate the north Welsh rulers, or extort economic resources from them as tribute. For the ecclesiastical historian, the crucial detail is in Bede's account, which dwells on the monastery of *Bancornaberg* and its fate.[44] Based on the similarity of the place-names and its proximity to Chester, this is customarily identified with the village of Bangor-on-Dee, though the site has not been identified archaeologically. Despite his dismissive attitude towards the British Church at points, Bede describes in fantastic terms the wealth and size of the monastery, making outlandish claims that it housed over 2,000 monks.[45] He then recounts how, having come to Chester to pray for the British forces in the battle, Æthelfrith put them to death.[46] There is some archaeological evidence which may corroborate Bede's account. The substantial early medieval cemetery discovered at Heronbridge, just over a mile south of Chester, has produced a large number of graves, including carbon dates consistent with death some point in the seventh century and could be the remains of those killed in the battle, or the massacre of the monks form *Bancornaberg.* The significance of the event to our study is that it proves, even in a source which is at times contemptuous of British ecclesiastics and their activities, that the broader region under consideration in this study hosted not only a basic level of organised Christianity, but was in fact capable of sustaining complex and prestigious forms of monastic church organisation. This is a valuable riposte to the idea that the lack of written information for north east Wales was due to its lack of economic development or backwardness; whilst these are likely to have conditioned the way in which churches developed, it did not preclude the establishment of a costly and high-status ecclesiastical institution.

What the battle of Chester cannot tell us is at what point did the region around the city fall under Mercian control; in the eighth and ninth centuries Cheshire was firmly under Mercian and not Northumbrian rule, and despite the latter's victory at Chester, the boundary between the two kingdoms appears to have lain on the 'river at the boundary', the Mersey, to the north of Cheshire.[47] As we shall see, by the 890s Chester itself would

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[44] HE ii.2, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp.138-41.
[45] HE ii.2, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp.140-1.
[46] HE ii.2, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp.140-1.
[47] EPNS Cheshire, I, pp.31-2.

become a Mercian *burh.* Instead, it seems likely that any Northumbrian control in the area was fleeting. Furthermore, the origins of Mercian power in the region may lie in the same process of post-Roman political fragmentation which produced Powys as we have seen. It is clear from Mercia's expansion in other parts of England, particularly in its south west corner, that in addition to annexation through settlement, some blocks of territory were taken by the subjugation, either militarily or diplomatically, of neighbouring peoples. The strongest examples of these happened somewhat later, in the mid and late seventh century, when we have good written records to suggest that the kingdoms of the Hwicce and Magonsætan were gradually incorporated in the Mercian kingdom over a number of decades. In particular, surviving charters from these areas record how the named rulers and leaders of these territories gradually lost their status, having begun as kings, then demoted to the title of *regulus*, until eventually named leaders of these groups simply disappear in the written record having presumably become indistinguishable from the rank and file of the Mercian thegnly classes.[48] This idea is explored more fully in the Wirral case study, though many of its findings could apply also to the case of Warmundestrou and Mildestuic hundreds.[49] No such group and no such rulers are recorded in the case of seventh century Cheshire, but to extend our earlier logic about the gradual evolution of Roman-era *civitates* into early medieval petty kingdoms, one must wonder whether the annexation of Cheshire involved a similar diplomatic subjugation to that of the Hwicce and Magonsætan, only this time with the Wreconsætan as its target. As I argue later, such a process is of more than purely political significance, because it is much more likely to have left elements of the preceding British superstructure in place, including its churches, a process which has also been suggested in the cases of the Hwicce and Magonsætan.[50]

Further chronological context is included in the introductions to various case studies, covering the subsequent period from 800 to 1100, the arrival of Scandinavian groups in the study area and the impact of the unified English kingdom established in the early tenth century. This moves us into the core period of the study, and an era where our chronicle

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[48] Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.50-1.
[49] See below, pp.158-9.
[50] Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp.79-83.

sources are more detailed. As is widely known, Viking raids in Britain and Ireland first appear in chronicle sources in the 790s, with monastic sites like Lindisfarne in Northumbria and *Rechrann* (traditionally identified with Rathlin Island) off the northern coast of Ireland being favoured targets.[51] The intensity of this raiding activity built up over the subsequent decades, until by the 830s and 840s raids are attested almost every year, and it became common for raiding parties to overwinter in Britain and Ireland in fortified camp, known as longphorts in Ireland.[52] A second phase of activity began with the arrival of the '*micel here*', the Great Heathen Army as it is often known to scholars; this force sailed to Britain from northern Francia or Frisia and proved extremely disruptive to the pre-existing political order in Britain. Over the next decade or so they would inflict major defeats on the kingdoms of East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria, extinguishing the first, accelerating the decline of the second and taking the kingship of the third for themselves. Only the western kingdom of Wessex eventually succeeded in resisting, under its ruler Alfred the Great, though even he was forced to accept a political settlement which left the newcomers in control of a swathe of eastern Britain. The family which led this force, the dynasty of Ívarr, was active also in Ireland, having come to dominate the longphort of Dublin which was beginning to assume the character of a town by the 870s, and this led to the creation of a new political axis, in form of an alliance of the related Norse kings of Dublin and Northumbria.[53] Western Britain was initially shielded from the worst of these attacks, although some of this may reflect a lack of source survival in these regions than a genuine period of peace. This would change in 902, when a coalition of Irish kings successfully deposed the rulers of Dublin, who would not return to Ireland until 914.[54] Temporary forced from their powerbase, many Viking leaders appear to have made the short trip across the Irish Sea to Wales and north west England, and it is at this stage that they appear in our histories of Wirral, although the presence of Vikings in north west England is unlikely to have been entirely new given they had been ensconced in York for over thirty years in 902.[55] The signs of their influence in these

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[51] CoI, 795.3, ed. and trans. Charles-Edwards, I, p.258.
[52] John Sheehan, 'The Longphort in Viking Age Ireland', *Acta Archaeologia*, 79 (2008), pp.282-95 (pp.282-3).
[53] Clare Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland: The Dynasty of Ívarr, to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2007) pp.17-23, 64-74.
[54] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, pp.27-32; CoI 902, ed. and trans. Charles-Edwards, I, p.344.
[55] Nick Higham, 'Viking-Age Settlement in the North-Western Countryside: Lifting the Veil?', in *Land, Sea and Home: Settlement in the Viking Period*, ed. by John Hines, Alan Lane and Mark Redknap (Abingdon: Maney Publishing, 2004), pp.297-311 (pp.299-300).

places is discussed later, but it is clear that they took new lands in these regions, settled as members of a new landed elite and made a conspicuous mark on the landscape in the material culture, stone sculpture and Norse toponyms which they left behind.[56] In terms of Church organisation on a local level, the impact of this migration must be considered; based on the relative abundance of stone sculpture of tenth century date, it is clear that these new landholders were brought changes in the patronage of such artworks, and this may extend to patronising and owning churches more broadly. This may have encouraged the further growth of proprietary churches, and therefore has a clear bearing on the question of church foundation in the Viking Age, especially the foundation of smaller local churches.

Overall, the key questions with which this thesis engages are what kind of churches were present in north east Wales and Cheshire in the early Middle Ages and the Viking Age, where were they, what were the hierarchies between them, and how did these factors change during the period in question. In so doing it aims to engage with some of the generalised models which have been developed to answer these questions on a national level by placing these theories in dialogue with a detailed image of the situation on the ground as viewed through a local and in-depth approach. Where possible this includes a wide range of source material, drawing together the limited written record with archaeological and toponymic evidence in manner which embraces the importance of reading across different specialisms in order to illuminate otherwise obscure and difficult parts of early medieval past.

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[56] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.108.

2 Concepts and Terminology

If a study of Church organisation in Tegeingl and Cheshire is to be successful, we must review the available frameworks which we might apply to the evidence. The theme of ecclesiastical history has often played a prominent role in studies of the early Middle Ages and the Viking Age, not least because so many of the available sources were authored by monks and other ecclesiastics. As alluded to in the introduction, recent decades have seen a refinement of our understanding of the Church, especially in England and Ireland, and to a certain extent in Wales. In order to properly engage with evidence on either side of the border between Wales and Mercia, we must try and establish how churches were organised in these places so that we might compare the similarities and differences between them. Likewise, the influence of Irish ecclesiastics is clear in the seventh century and may have enjoyed a resurgence in the Viking Age; recent debates in the structure of Irish churches are therefore summarised below. A similar need exists to cover the terminology of different kinds of churches, especially given that these might occur in several different languages, particularly Welsh, English, Irish, and Latin. Sources in these languages all use different words to denote a church, and whilst some of these terms are roughly equivalent, they often have meanings which are specific to their national context, or sometimes the exact same word has a different meaning in different places. The latter is especially true of the common Latin terms which all Insular Churches inherited. Furthermore, there is the question of variation and hierarchy within this vocabulary, where certain words seem to have more precise technical meanings to express particular categories of church. The same also applies to the administrative and special aspects of ecclesiastical organisation, particularly the units we now call parishes or

dioceses in modern English and their early medieval antecedents. Therefore, by close analysis of these terms, we can perhaps hope to glean some knowledge of the different ways in which churches in the Anglo-Welsh border area, and indeed across Britain and Ireland, were organised and distinguished from one another, which features were considered to be distinctive or noteworthy, and the differences of the churches of various regions based on the similarity of their ecclesiastical vocabulary and the meanings conveyed by their words for ecclesiastical establishments.

These words survive predominantly in two different ways. Either they are attested in medieval manuscripts, in which case the surrounding text can illuminate the idea conveyed by these words, or they survive as parts of place-names. This second scenario requires a different approach; in particular place-names can be hard to date and are subject to change throughout the centuries. Place-names can therefore be deceptive, but the size of the corpus is large compared to the body of textual sources, and so they are also a crucial part of this exercise. What follows is a summary of terms for churches, beginning with those used in Wales (first in Welsh and then in Latin), then the same again for Irish and then English, but by necessity the complexities of this subject require us to venture into the different frameworks of Church organisation which scholars have applied in different parts of the Insular world. In so doing, we can explore what these different terms meant and whether they distinguished specific categories of churches and explore the nature of individual church sites.

2.1 Wales

The most recent large-scale attempt to survey existing knowledge about the early medieval churches of Wales was the research project *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Sites*, conducted by the four Welsh regional archaeological trusts of the day and which finished reporting in 2004.[1] This project involved the review and collation of the existing evidence for ecclesiastical activity in early medieval Wales and led to the re-evaluation of a wide range of sites, including a comprehensive updating of the relevant Sites and Monument

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[1] Edwards, The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches', pp.6-7.

Records (SMRs) as they were then called (the term Historic Environment Record or HER is now preferred).[2] Within the output reports for the project, lists of likely early medieval ecclesiastical sites were compiled, categorised according to how confident the authors could be about the likelihood of early medieval ecclesiastical activity. The ECMS project was itself inspired by an earlier Cadw project, The Welsh Historic Churches Project, which sought to assess the condition and archaeological potential of all pre-nineteenth-century churches in Wales, and which concluded in 2000.[3] Taken together, this valuable work has placed our understanding of the evidence on a stronger footing, making the material more accessible and better organized than before. Combined with other, concurrent work such as the updated *Corpus of Early Medieval Inscribed Stones and Sculpture in Wales*, this work has revealed the full size of the available body of textual and archaeological material which, while still relatively slight, is larger than was often previously accepted.

The study proceeded by drawing up three categories of ecclesiastical sites, named Grade A-C, with A being the most well-attested early medieval church sites and C being the most tentative. The list of characteristics assigned to each grade is informative and worth repeating here. Grade A sites, described as 'incontrovertible' early medieval church locations, were identified according to five main indicators: documentary evidence dating prior to 1066; evidence that a church was portionary or had been a *clas*; direct archaeological evidence (i.e. excavated cist graves or securely radiocarbon dated remains); the presence of a saint's grave or *capel y bedd*; and locations within Roman forts or similar Roman remains.[4] Grade B, described as 'likely' early medieval church sites, had seven indicators: multiple churches contained in a single churchyard; a typically early medieval plan form; archaeological evidence which was undated but consistent with an early medieval date; in situ decorated stones; in situ inscribed stones; artefacts dated

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[2] Robert Silvester and Richard Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: An Interim Report*, CPAT Report 468 (Welshpool: The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, 2002), pp.2-3.

[3] Edith Evans, Andrew Davidson, Neil Ludlow and Robert Silvester, 'Medieval Churches in Wales: The Welsh Historic Churches Project and its Results', *Church Archaeology*, 4 (2000), pp.5-26 (p.20).

[4] Silvester and Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales*, pp.22-3.

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to the early medieval period; and associations with nearby prehistoric features.[5] The final category, Grade C, includes sites considered to be 'possible' early medieval church sites. Five indicators were chosen, namely: churchyard morphology (especially curvilinearity); dedications to British saints; place-names containing the elements *merthyr or eglwys*; proximity to wells associated with the names of British saints; and the attestations of antiquarians that a site hosted early medieval religious activity.[6] Each of the four archaeological trusts then drew up a regional report for their area, based on this common framework; for the purposes of this thesis, the most important of these reports is therefore the one compiled by CPAT, the Clwyd and Powys Archaeological Trust. This choice of characteristics remains a highly relevant framework for assessing the likelihood of early medieval ecclesiastical activity at a given location, and whilst this study does not follow rigidly the three-part classification of the project, it is largely these kinds of evidence which are used in what follows to date the beginning of religious activity in the chosen case studies. Another strength of the study is that it considered both present day and former church-sites, with the latter including abandoned churches, and also made allowances for different types of religious sites including chapels, hermitages, holy wells and cemeteries. Reading the reports does however indicate that the best evidenced sites came from the southern parts of CPAT's area and are the focus of discussion in the final report, again highlighting the challenges posed by choosing Tegeingl as a case study. This is not to say that mid-Wales is especially well-served either, as is admitted in this slightly pessimistic sentence towards the end of the final report:

> *North-east and central Wales are not overly rich in the remains of early medieval ecclesiastical sites and features. Despite its size it is probably the poorest of the four Trust regions in this respect. It is probably reasonable to conclude that in academic terms not a great deal of new information or fresh ideas has been derived from the study.[7]*

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[5] Silvester and Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: An Interim Report*, pp.22-3.

[6] Silvester and Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: An Interim Report*, pp.22-3.

[7] Robert Silvester and Richard Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: The Field Assessment and its Impact on the Overall Study*, CPAT Report 612 (Welshpool: The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, 2004), p.20.

The principal outputs of CPAT's work on the project was a trio of reports, namely an desk-based assessment of the existing evidence for these sites in the first, interim report, followed by a second report outlining progress on the program of field work; the third and final report summarises the findings of the program after its completion with a summary of newly-identified or reinterpreted sites and a comprehensive gazetteer.[8] Combined with the work of the other three Welsh archaeological trusts, many of these findings were presented at The Archaeology of Early Medieval Celtic Churches conference in 2004, the proceedings of which were published in 2009 under the editorship of Nancy Edwards.

What was not included in the project however was an attempt to synthesize this material in a broader historical narrative or analysis of how these sites developed and what factors conditioned the forms which they took. The *clas* model of portionary churches was taken account of and evidence of such churches on the ground was recorded, but the implications of the evidence regarding wider questions of Church organisation and the economic and political roles which churches could fulfil in their local contexts were beyond the scope of the project.[9] In their defence however the authors in the CPAT report note that archaeological confirmation of *clas* sites is extremely difficult and other than a vague assumption of greater size or greater complexity in earthworks or structural remains (the latter being almost totally lacking for early medieval sites in Wales), there is an open question as to how the physical form of a *clas* may have differed from an ordinary parish church.[10] In this regard the edited volume which followed was important in that the authors there do begin to ask more searching questions about the implications of these findings for the organization of churches in Wales, but the focus within the ECMS project on recording and gathering evidence for the SMR meant that these kinds of research questions were not foregrounded in the reports.

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[8] Silvester and Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: An Interim Report*; Robert Silvester and Richard Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: The Second Report*, CPAT Report 534 (Welshpool: The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust, 2003); Silvester and Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: The Field Assessment*.

[9] Silvester and Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: An Interim Report*, pp.5-6.

[10] Silvester and Hankinson, *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical and Burial Sites in Mid and North-East Wales: The Field Assessment*, pp.11-2.

Other limitations have been noted in subsequent publications, such as a tendency for this project and other research to focus disproportionately on the earliest period of Welsh Christianity, between the fifth and eighth centuries, to the neglect of the later period from the ninth to the twelfth centuries.[11] Understandably for a project led by Cadw, the project was also strictly national in its scope, looking only at Wales; there is here however a drawback in that useful or informative parallels with England or Ireland were not routinely addressed and this comparative approach is another new avenue which this thesis aims to follow. Finally, reading each of the four reports in turn reveals again one of the challenges facing a scholar of north east Wales in particular; whilst the south, especially the south east, has a solid baseline of early churches attested textually in the Book of Llandaf, and a few further examples from early medieval hagiography, the north has much less material of this kind available. Instead, we are more reliant on more ambiguous source material such as toponyms, late documentary sources such as Domesday Book and archaeological excavations which, whilst benefitting from the growing precision of radiocarbon dating, have so far revealed few early medieval buildings of an explicitly religious type in Wales. The project is nevertheless a valuable baseline and jumping off point for future research, and its identification of the relevant types of evidence and their relative value is, in retrospect, an important foundation for much subsequent work.

One of the most useful aspects of the *Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Sites* project is its succinct and clear summary of the kinds of evidence we might use to identify the earliest and most important ecclesiastical sites in Wales, and what follows in this chapter is a discussion of some of the most important factors noted in that study, beginning with toponomy. Wales has a wide range of place-name elements which refer to different kinds of churches and this can be valuable evidence when trying to identify what sort of religious activity took place at those settlements. By far the most common Welsh term for a church is *llan*, which is a ubiquitous place-name element across Wales, and one which can be used in a wide range of contexts, some of them rather misleading for a historian of the early Middle Ages. The word itself derives from an Old Celtic root

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[11] David Petts, *The Early Medieval Church in Wales* (Stroud: The History Press, 2009) pp.20-21.

'*landa*', which is cognate with the Proto-Germanic '*lando*'; the two share an unidentified Indo-European root.[12] In turn there are also corresponding words in Cornish, Breton and Irish (spelt either *lan*, *llan* or *lann*) with related meanings.[13] Furthermore, the term seems to have a long history; the first usage cited in the *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* is found in the tenth-century Old Welsh glosses on the Cambridge Juvencus, which is significant given the very small corpus of surviving Welsh texts of that period.[14] When used to denote a place, *llan* carries with it the idea of an enclosed place, and by extension often referred in the early medieval period to an enclosed cemetery within a churchyard; it then also evolved further to describe the whole area or parish served by that church complex.[15] From this several llan place-names then became associated with the township or vill surrounding the church, and consequently they survive in great numbers across western Britain;[16] In a Cornish context Oliver Padel has appropriately defined a *lann* as a ''church-site or churchtown'', and this idea would seem to match the high and late medieval usage of *llan* place-names.[17] The idea of enclosure also is apparent in surviving compound words in modern Welsh, such as *perllan* ('orchard'), which suggests that it was the cemetery which was seen as the distinctive feature of these settlements when they were first named.[18]

This also complements the model of the 'developed cemetery' proposed by Charles Thomas, which is attested archaeologically in sixth-century Britain by existing burial grounds which had acquired fixed boundaries, mausolea and eventually church buildings and chapels; the presence of a church is seemingly less notable than the presence of a cemetery.[19] The archaeological context of these settlements will be discussed elsewhere, but this might provide a point of contrast with early Irish churches which appear to have

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[12] Tomos Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names and Archaeology' in *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, ed. by Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1992), pp.41-5 (p.43); 'llan', *GPC Online*; 'land, n.1' *The Oxford English Dictionary* 2nd revised edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

[13] O.J. Padel, 'Local Saints and Place-Names in Cornwall', in *Local Saints and Local* Churches *in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.303-60 (p.307).

[14] 'llan', GPC.

[15] Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names, p.43.

[16] Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names, p.43.

[17] Padel, 'Local Saints and Place-Names in Cornwall', p.307.

[18] Thomas-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.599.

[19] Charles Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp.51, 67-68.

been built on virgin sites which then attracted burials; however diversity and local variation seem common across the Celtic regions. Thomas's model has been most strongly contradicted by Tomás Ó Carragáin's work on the Iveragh and Dingle peninsulas of Co. Kerry, where the prevalent method of drystone construction has preserved a remarkable density of early churches. [20] Ó Carragáin emphasises that many Irish ecclesiastical sites possess subsidiary shrines built apart from the church, suggesting that they were built after the church, whereas in the idealised sequence of the developed cemetery a *cella memoria* is usually built directly over the grave of a saint in an existing late or sub-Roman cemetery; Irish churches are therefore distinctive in possessing 'a separation between the reliquary focus and the principal liturgical space'.[21] Thomas' model has retained more currency in Welsh ecclesiastical studies, but is now recognised as one of several possible sequences for the development of early medieval church sites, albeit one which possesses some favourable archaeological evidence. [22] The Irish evidence adds an extra level of complexity in that some pre-Christian graveyards, which never acquired churches but which were enclosed, were protected by the similar penalties for breach of sanctuary within and without the enclosure by Irish canon law by the eighth-century; it has been argued that such provisions reflect pre-conversion practice which was then codified by Christian jurists, and this reminds us of the possibility of lingering pagan practice and influence on religious life in the early medieval period.[23]

It may therefore be relevant that *llan* appears to reflect the primacy of the enclosed cemetery, because it acquired the sense of an entire church complex with its cemetery, and not merely the church building alone. Tellingly, *llan* as defined in the *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* is described variously as a 'church', a 'churchyard', and as a 'small town or village whose name is compounded with llan'.[24] *Llan*-names have sometimes been

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[20] Tomás Ó Carragáin, 'A Landscape Converted: Archaeology and Early Church Organisation on Iveragh and Dingle, Ireland', in *The Cross Goes North: Processes of Conversion in Northern Europe, AD300-1300*, ed. by Martin Carver (York: York University Press, 2003), pp.127-52 (pp.129-130).
[21] Tomás Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland: Architecture, Ritual and Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), p.70.
[22] Nancy Edwards, 'The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches: An Introduction' in *The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches*, ed. by Nancy Edwards (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2009), pp.1-18 (p.10); Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane, 'The archaeology of the early church in Wales: an introduction', in *The Early Church in Wales*, ed. by Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane, pp.1-11 (p.10).
[23] Ó Carragáin, *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland,* p.59; Roy Flechner, ed. and trans., *The Hibernensis*, 2 vols (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), I, pp.184-90.
[24] 'llan', GPC.

taken as evidence that the place in question once had a church at an early date, perhaps in the sixth century or before in a period once viewed as an 'Age of Saints' in which the Church (or perhaps churches) first established itself across Wales, and indeed in other 'Celtic' regions, though it is also apparent that diversity in ecclesiastical practice, beliefs, culture and institutions tended to grow between the Celtic regions throughout the early medieval era.[25] There is some merit to this as a general rule of thumb, but the foundations of this assumption are not entirely stable; it rests partly on common tropes in British saints' lives which depict their subjects travelling around founding churches as they went. Whilst this may give a reasonable picture of early evangelising activity in fifth- and sixth-century Wales, these texts were composed in later times, and it should not be assumed that all *llan*-named sites are early; the example of Llangaffo, Anglesey and the evidence for its original place-name in the Life of St Cybi is discussed below.[26] However, the named individual need not necessarily have been a priest, even if they were later commemorated as one, and they could just have easily have been lay noble patrons, rulers or outright owners of the *llan* in question.[27]

The local church network in Wales did not become static in the seventh century and beyond, and there is no reason why newly founded churches in the seventh to eleventh centuries would not also be referred to as *llannau*. Furthermore, as we will see the rich variety of terms used for churches in Ireland suggests that the Welsh vocabulary for these places was once more varied, and that many *llan*-names acquired their distinctive prefix after the early medieval period. Continuing, the predominance of *llan*-names was established over several centuries, and a more varied toponymicon of available place-name elements was previously in use. Therefore the ubiquity of this word, with its connotation of enclosure, might suggest that these sites were named mainly for their cemetery, which may have been built before any church. However the possibility that many *llan*-sites were not so-named before the high or late Middle Ages should caution

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[25] Owen Chadwick, 'The Evidence of Dedications in the Early History of the Welsh Church' *Studies in Early British History*, ed. by H.M. Chadwick et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954), pp.173-89 (pp.187-188); Wendy Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church' in *The Early Church in* Wales, ed. by Edwards and Lane, pp.20-21; Rees, *An Essay on the Welsh Saints*, pp.11-12.
[26] See below, pp.46-7.
[27] David N. Parsons, *Warning: May Contain Saints. Place-Names as Evidence for the Church in Early Wales*, Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lecture 17 (Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic, 2019), pp.20-1.

against trying to use this name to make assumptions about the purpose, layout and organisation of Welsh churches prior to the Norman Conquest, as these were varied within Wales, and even more so between Wales, Ireland and elsewhere. It also begs the question whether a medieval Welsh-speaker had a single building in mind when using the word *llan*, or if they thought of it as a place or space, which might be territorially defined in various ways, such as the ditch and bank of a typical enclosed cemetery, or even the lands attached to the said church (which one might expect to be marked with inscribed boundary stones or crosses), which may or may not be coterminous with a sphere of pastoral and spiritual rights and jurisdiction. Certainly the Welsh had strategies for apportioning space and land between churches, and then sub-dividing it further as made clear in the extensive sections in the secular law-codes on the concept of *nawdd / refugium* ('sanctuary') and the territorial limits within which a church or clergyman might grant *nawdd*; this is in addition to a clear secular system of administrative units based round the *cantref*, which may have been reformed and regularised under Gruffudd ap Llywelyn during his hegemony over all of Wales (1055-1064), but building on the foundation of earlier kingdoms and political divisions.[28] If the sense of *llan* is categorically linked with a territory, which one would expect to some kind of jurisdiction akin to a the parish, this may help to explain how it replaced a multiplicity of other terms, because it may have spread alongside the establishment of a true parish system in Wales as it was recognised in England, where the 'crystalization' of the parish occurred in the century or so after the Norman Conquest.[29]

Returning to the conversion period, the tendency for historians to ascribe early dates to many *llannau* was especially strong when *llan* was compounded with the name of a saint, as it was taken that the earliest church on the site was established by that person, or that they patronised that church in some other way.[30] However, it is now argued that such dedicatory place-names are likely to reflect the situation in tenth and eleventh centuries, and that they indicate the spread of more major saints' cults; this is especially apparent in

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[28] Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church in Medieval Wales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp.169-170; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp.568-569; Aneurin Owen, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Wales* (Londond: Record Commission, 1841), p.67 (V.C. x. 8).
[29] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.506-507.
[30] E.G. Bowen, *Saints, Seaways and Settlements in the Celtic Lands*, 2nd edn (Cardiff: University Wales Press, 1977), pp.67-69.

south Wales, where large groups of churches can be identified as belonging to famous saints such as David and Teilo, whilst smaller assemblies are also found, including that of St Beuno in Gwynedd centred on Clynnog Fawr.[31] These networks may have had fifth- or sixth-century people and churches at their core, but their growth is difficult to date and could have occurred over many centuries. There is also the question of the archaeological background to these major sites, which often claim to possess the body of their patron, and some examples of this may include the burial found beneath a sixteenth-century mortuary chapel at Clynnog Fawr, though this was excavated in 1913 and therefore could not be carbon-dated; nevertheless the clustering of burials around this cist and the chapel built atop it suggest that it commemorated some esteemed holy figure.[32] There is also the example from the church of Pennant Melangell in northern Powys, where a twelfth-century Romanesque apse was built over an earlier cist burial, which probably formed an early memorial focus in the churchyard and may represent the supposed grave of St Melangell herself.[33] Other features indicative of early date at Pennant include a curvilinear churchyard and further burials which are cut by the twelfth-century church.[34] This demonstrates how power to offer burial alongside a saint, under their protection and with their intercession, was another key way in which churches could attract burials, along with the concomitant fees, which might then develop into a formal obligation for local populations to bury their dead at that church. Furthermore, *llan*-saint names could also reflect a grouping or alliance of saints who were often ascribed close relationships in the relevant hagiography of the period; of particular interest in a north Welsh context is the link between Llangaffo (where there is an abundance of early medieval stone sculpture) and several nearby churches dedicated to St Cybi and his followers (of whom Caffo was one).[35] Specifically, Caffo is named in two sections in both versions of the *Vita Sancti Kebii*; in the first Caffo carries fire back to Cybi and is miraculously unharmed:

> *et confestim reuersus est Caffo ad magistrum suum, Kepium, portans ignem*
>
> *positum in sinu suo et non combusta est saltem fimbria de cocula eius*

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[31] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p.601.

[32] Basil Stallybrass, 'Recent Discoveries at Clynnogfawr', *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 6th series, 14 (1914), pp.271-96 (pp.275-279)

[33] W.J. Britnell, 'Excavation and Recording at Pennant Melangell Church', *Montgomeryshire Collections* 82 (1994), pp.41-103 (pp.52-72)

[34] Britnell, 'Excavation and Recording at Pennant Melangell, p.43 .

[35] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p.601.

> And straightaway Caffo returned to his master, Cybi, carrying the fire put in
> his bosom, and not even the hem of his cloak was burnt.[36]

In the next section we also learn of Caffo's death at the hands of *Rosuir pastores* / 'the herdsmen of Rhosyr' in *opidum quod dicitur hodie Merthir Caffo* 'the town, which today is called Merthyr Caffo', which appears to refer to Llangaffo on Anglesey (Rhosyr being one of the three *cantrefi* on the island).[37] Clearly in this case *llan* has supplanted an earlier place-name beginning with *merthyr*, derived from Latin *martyrium*, which would be consistent with the idea Caffo's remains being interred and venerated there from an early date.[38]

Conversely, dedications to rare, little-known saints are more likely to reflect a long-lasting cult of the initial founder or patron of the church, though again not necessarily one dating back to the fifth or sixth centuries.[39] On a few sites extra evidence for the origin of the patron saint is available, such as at Llansadwrn, Anglesey, where a sixth-century inscribed stone once marked the grave of St Saturninus; 'HICBEA[*TUS*-] / SATVRNINVSS[*E*-] / IACIT · ETSVAS[*A*-] / *CONIVX* · PA[-] / *(CVIS)*- / 'Here lies buried blessed… Saturninus. And his saintly wife…'.[40] Once again though caution must be urged because there are several examples of dedicatory place names which mention a different person from that to whom the local church is dedicated; therefore the personal names in *llan* place-names may not always refer to saints, or it may be that an initial secular founder has been transformed into a saint as the traditions of that church evolved over time; in the case of Llansadwrn there is some speculation as to whether the Saturninus commemorated in the inscription is the same as the saint to whom the church is dedicated, or whether the former was a follower or pupil of the latter.[41] Furthermore, the evidence form Brittany suggests that some local saints may have been concatenated and then replaced with more famous or even universal saints, showing the importance of

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[36] Arthur W. Wade-Evans, *Vitae Sanctorum Britanniae et Genealogiae* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1944), *Vita Sancti Kebii* §16, pp.244-245

[37] *Vita Sancti Kebii* §17, pp.246-247; Melville Richards, *Welsh Administrative and Territorial Units: Medieval and Modern* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1969), p.233.

[38] 'merthyr[2]', GPC.

[39] Nancy Edwards, 'Celtic Saints and Early Medieval Archaeology', in *Local Saints and Local Churches*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe, pp.225-66 (p.225).

[40] *A Corpus Volume III* pp.206-209.

[41] Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names, p.44; *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.206-209.

tracing dedications throughout the Middle Ages; for example the church of Plougoulm in northwestern Brittany is now dedicated to either St Columba of Iona or Columbanus of Luxeuil and Bobbio, rather than the obscure St Coulm from which the place-name derives.[42] Similarly, the exchange of culture and saints' cults across the Irish Sea between the ninth and eleventh centuries will have caused the body of suitable saints' names to change over time, which is evidence both for cultural interaction and dating as has been demonstrated in Cumbria and Galloway.[43] This approach does carry some risks however as exemplified by the presence of Irish saints' names on fifth-century ogham-inscribed stones seen in Ceredigion. Pádraig Ó Riain associated these place-names (and consequently the local churches) with fifth-century Irish settlement in the area, making them extremely early, but Iwan Wmffre has since pointed out that there is little reason why these place-names could not have been coined throughout the subsequent centuries.[44] Both of these are possible interpretations and should remind us that whilst cultural interaction was particularly intense in the ninth through eleventh centuries, that links between Wales, Ireland and the rest of the Insular world existed for centuries before, and continued long afterwards. In recent years, David Parsons has provided a valuable summary of these historiographical developments and discusses in details the different routes by which the surviving corpus of *llan* toponyms has reached us; some like Llansadwrn or Llangadwaladr, both in Anglesey, clearly have a claim to antiquity on the combined strength of the sculptural and toponymical evidence, although in the absence of tightly dated attestations of these place-name forms it cannot be declared with certainty that these are the original names of these settlements. [45] Moreover, the old conception that the names recorded in such place-names are those of the saints who were once venerated there must also be doubted; these figures may have instead been priests or simply wealthy local patrons whose monuments were sufficiently impressive that the local population

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[42] Karen Jankulak, 'Adjacent Saint's Dedications and Early Celtic History' in *Saints' Cults in the Celtic World*, ed. by Steve Boardman, John Reuben Davies and Eila Williamson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), pp.91-118 (p.97).

[43] Fiona Edmonds, 'Saints' cults and Gaelic-Scandinavian influence around the Cumberland Coast and North of the Solway Firth', in *Celtic-Norse Relationships in the Irish Sea in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Timothy Bolton and Jón Viðar Sigurðsson (Leiden: Brill, 2014), pp.39-64 (pp.57-59).

[44] Pádraig Ó Riain, 'The archaeology of early Christianity in Cardiganshire' in *Cardiganshire County History Volume 1: From the Earliest Times to the Coming of the Normans*, ed. by J.L. Davies and D.P. Kirby (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), pp.378-96 (pp.386-387); John Reuben Davies, 'The Saints of South Wales and the Welsh Church' in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Thacker and Sharpe, pp.361-96 (pp.392-5)

[45] Parsons, 'Warning: May Contain Saints', p.19.

used their names to refer to the entire settlement.[46] In his conclusion Parsons strikes a careful compromise, acknowledging the many examples where *llan* toponyms have supplanted other, earlier elements like *merthyr*, whilst stopping short of casting a general scepticism over all such place-names; rather he argues the evidence for each must be carefully considered in turn, an approach which accords well with the methods and priorities of a regional history like this one.[47]

It appears that whilst place-names are an indication of the age of a church settlement, to date them on that basis alone is highly unadvisable, and it is by aggregating this evidence with surviving stone sculpture, dated archaeological finds and documentary evidence that more reliable dates might be generated. This is especially the case given that the ubiquity of *llan* as a place-name element seems to have erased certain other elements which have therefore become less common in the surviving corpus, although where they survive in later medieval texts their evolution can be reconstructed.[48] This also obscures some more technical or regionally distinctive terms for church settlements which, where they survive, can be informative, as will be seen below; examples include *bod*, meaning 'home, which can be found in north Wales'.[49] The other major category of *llan* name is topographical, usually where the second element is the name of a local river or landmark. These are harder to date than the dedicatory names, but a very slight indication of age can be gleaned where they have preserved Old or Middle Welsh orthography or linguistic features, especially in later medieval or early modern documents. Finally, it is common for *llan* + saints' names referring to universal saints to be suffixed with the name of the local commote or *cantref,* for example Llandrillo-yn-Rhos, which is a possible site of an early mother church.[50]

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[46] Parsons, 'Warning: May Contain Saints', p.24-6.
[47] Parsons, 'Warning: May Contain Saints', p.24-6.
[48] Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names', p.44.
[49] Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names', p.43.
[50] Llandrillo is a 'certain' mother church in R.J. Silvester and J.W. Evans, 'Identifying the Mother Churches of North-East Wales' in *The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches*, ed. by Nancy Edwards (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.19-40 (p.25), but only a 'possible' one in *A Corpus Volume III*, p.16.

Clearly then *llan* was an important and widely used place-name element, and one of the clearest indications of the density of church settlements, at least by the later Middle Ages. However, it is also widely attested in textual sources as a word for church, and whilst this evidence lacks the spatial dimension of the place-name examples, the specific contexts and usages in medieval manuscripts allows us to see in greater detail how the term was used and the different shades of meaning it might convey. The term is frequently found in the Llandaf charters, where it is common to see a *llan* granted with its appurtenant lands noted using different terms, suggesting that *llan* did not have a wider sense of a parish encompassing its dependent territories and properties. For example, the grant of *lannculan* (modern Llangiwa or Llangua, Monmouthshire) is recorded *cum omni agro suo & cum tribus modiis terre* 'with all its estate and three modii (i.e. c.125 acres) of land', although the way in which *lannculan* does not separate *llan* from the second element (perhaps a saint's name) leaves open the possibility that the word is used more in the sense of a modern place-name where it is meant to denote a settlement or even a manor, or has been interpreted in this manner by the twelfth-century editor of this ninth-century text.[51] However, the *Lannculan* charter does preserve some features which support an early origin for at least some of its content, particularly the use of *immoauit* 'sacrificed' as the dispositive verb and the formula *in manu episcopi*, both of which were identified by Wendy Davies as being indicative of an original ninth-century text.[52] Her position on the charters, that there is a substantial amount of identifiably early material still to be found in the charters, has been recently corroborated by the linguistic analysis of Patrick Sims-Williams.[53] Moreover, there is some confusion because there are also examples of *llan* being used as part of a place-name to denote the location of the grant of a piece of land even though the church itself is not being granted, as appears to be the case in a grant made to Llandaff by Meurig ap Hywel of Gwent c.1035, who gave *lanntiuauc agrum trium modiorum / lanntiuauc* 'an estate of three modii'.[54] *Llan* is therefore a term with many uses prior to the twelfth century, but it can reveal much about how people in Wales thought about and named their churches, and in foregrounding the aspect of enclosure, gives us a sense of how a church settlement might have been arranged spatially. When investigating churches in Wales and England, we must therefore consider

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[51] J. Gwenogvryn Evans (ed.), *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv* (Oxford: 1893), p.216.
[52] Davies, *The Llandaff Charters*, p.143.
[53] Sims-Williams, *The Book of Llandaf as a Historical Source*, pp.44-9.
[54] Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*, p.255.

whether we can find any other *llan* toponyms, and whether churches from the pre-Mercian era in Cheshire may have shared some of the characteristics of typical Welsh *llannau*.

A second major term for a church is *eglwys*. At first glance this is a straightforward loan from Latin *ecclesia,* a term which in Gaul referred specifically to the principal church within the capital city of a *civitas* and which served as an episcopal see.[55] In this system lesser churches were referred to by various terms depending on their role, geographical position vis-à-vis the civitas, their purpose and the circumstances of their foundation. Therefore, if Welsh *eglwys* retained something of the sense of Latin *ecclesia*, one would expect such churches to be of higher status, and perhaps the seat of a bishop. Such an arrangement seems feasible when one considers the distinctive group of *Eccles-* place-name located mostly in northwest England, where there seems to be no more than one such place-name per hundred.[56] It has therefore been inferred, though not confirmed, that these often denote early major churches which had large parishes (possibly coterminous with the secular political units of Anglo-Saxon England). Whilst less work has been done on the *eglwysydd* of Wales, it is a less common place-name element than *llan*, and moreover it appears that they are limited to one per commote.[57] Such names might therefore provide some clue into where the greatest churches of early medieval Wales were located in areas where the written evidence is thinnest. However this method has its obstacles, in that it is not certain when the commotes and *cantrefi* of Wales were first created, and to what extent they may have changed over the centuries. Furthermore the greater number of *eglwys* names in the east of Wales suggests that the term was used differently in different regions, and western churches must therefore have had either a different term (or maybe none at all), or more bishops, or that the term was employed in an increasingly general manner before passing out of use.[58] This may be explicable with reference to the greater extent of Romanisation in these parts of Wales which may have left more of a clerical framework in place to work with in the early medieval period.

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[55] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.36-37.
[56] Kenneth Cameron, 'Eccles in English Place-Names', in M.W. Barley and R.P.C. Hanson, *Christianity in Britain, 300-700* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1968), pp.87-92 (pp.89-90).
[57] Tomos Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names', p.42.
[58] Roberts, 'Welsh Ecclesiastical Place-Names, p.42.

Another concept potentially associated with the *eglwys* is the *clas* (plural *clasau*). This term refers to the greater churches, usually those which were the centre of a major saint's cult, wealthier, and more monastic in character.[59] It should be emphasised at the outset that *llan* and *clas* are not entirely exclusive, as many famous and powerful *clasau* are found in places with *llan* place-names, such as Llandeilo Fawr. The term is therefore open to a certain degree of interpretation, and is frequently compared to the English word *minster*, itself a loan-word from Latin *monasterium*.[60] In this respect, it may be that church communities which, whilst not identical shared broad similarities in their mode of organisation, appear more different than they really were because of this difference of terminology. Like minster, *clas* seems to imply a church possessing an ordered religious community living to a rule of some kind (or at least claiming to), but which also had secular and pastoral functions.[61] These communities would therefore have been varied, and home to not only regular monks and abbots but priests and even bishops at different times, and prior to the twelfth century there is likely to have been substantial variation in the lifestyles practiced within Welsh *clasau*. The separateness of a *clas* and its inhabitants is implied in its derivation from the Latin *classis*, which conveys the idea of a distinctive class, rank or caste, and therefore suggests a greater level of withdrawal from secular society. It is also a term which scholars have used in a slightly looser manner than medieval Welsh writers, in that individual churches are designated *clasau*, whereas in contemporary texts *clas* usually refers explicitly to the community that lived within the church.[62] In this sense Welsh *clas* is more like the Latin term *familia*, referring to the community or household attached to the church (sometimes more than one church). This is very clearly seen in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Welsh law tracts, which refer to the rights of the *claswyr*, who held hereditary shares in a church with status similar to canons (precisely the term used in the Latin redactions of the Welsh laws), suggesting a degree of secularisation during the Middle Ages.[63] This is apparent in the 1291 *Taxatio* or tax survey of church properties in England and Wales; many major churches are listed as portionary, which is usually interpreted as evidence for the endurance of *clas* organisation

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[59] J. Wyn Evans, 'The Survival of the *Clas* as an Institution in Medieval Wales: Some Observations on Llanbadarn Fawr' in *The Early Church in Wales*, ed. by Edwards and Lane, pp.33-40 (p.33).
[60] Blair, *The Church In Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.345.
[61] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.603.
[62] Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, p.187.
[63] Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, p.126.

into the thirteenth-century.[64] Clynnog Fawr is again a good example, being divided into six portions which were then in the gift of the bishop of Bangor.[65] It also reflects the lack of clear division in this context between secular and regular clergy, and to a certain extent between the elergy and laity. *Claswyr* / *'canons'* are also translated as *meibion lleyn* in the Cyfnerth redaction of the Welsh laws; 'learned youths' is a fair translation, though Arthur Wade-Evans preferred 'lay proprietors' – the key being whether *lleyn* is related to modern Welsh *'llên'* / 'learning' or *'lleyg'* / 'lay'.[66] Whilst *clas* and *claswyr* are not exactly cognate, it is clear that both are related and refer to those with an interest in a given church, and that they either inhabited it or held certain rights and properties through it. It is also clear that even these partible churches were led by an abbot or *abod*, though he could also be a layman; the case of the lay abbot Ednywain ap Gwaithfoed at Llanbadarn Fawr in 1188 which so incensed Gerald of Wales is widely cited, and Gerald's letters suggest that this situation persisted for several decades, despite the attempts of St Peter's Abbey, Gloucester to assert its ownership over that church (Llanbadarn having been granted to it in 1116 by Gilbert de Clare, then lord of Ceredigion).[67] As late as the 1240s, Llanbadarn continued to be a source of consternation, leading Bishop Anselm of St Davids (1231-1247) to issue an ordinance which created equal shares of the church for both St Davids and St Peters Gloucester from which a vicarage would be funded. However, the text notes that there were still *portiones in eadem ecclesia nondum vacantes* 'portions in the said church not yet vacant', suggesting that some of the local *claswyr* continued to press their rights in the church even after Henry III's recovery of north Ceredigion in 1246, when the church appears to have fallen to the crown by right of conquest.[68] Moreover, in cases where the abbot was a layman it is highly likely that some of his kindred would be *claswyr* of his church, further blurring the line between ecclesiastical and familial property, as such a situation would facilitate the dominance of that kindred over their church, as appears to have been the case at Llanbadarn in the late eleventh- and early twelfth-centuries when the family of Bishop Sulien of St Davids occupied several high offices there.[69] Nevertheless, the lawcodes which attest this mode

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[64] Pryce, *Native Law and the Church,* p.187.
[65] *Taxatio,* BN.BN.AR.01.
[66] Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, p.187
[67] J. Wyn Evans, 'The Survival of the *Clas*', p.34; Gerald of Wales, *Speculum Duorum*, ed. and trans. by Yves Lefèvre and R.B.C. Huygens (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974), p.265; Gerald of Wales, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, ed. and trans. by Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.180.
[68] Evans, 'The Survival of the *Clas*, p.35.
[69] Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, p.186.

of organisation were mostly compiled in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and so whilst the *clas* is well-documented in the twelfth- and thirteenth-centuries, Welsh modes of collegiate or monastic church organisation before this remain unclear. A tenth-century or earlier stratum is possible, and perhaps likely given the frequency with which the lawcodes are associated with Hywel Dda ap Cadell (d.950), but in practice it is extremely difficult to distinguish the early material.[70] Therefore, whilst this seems a reasonable framework through which to consider Welsh Church organisation in the ninth through eleventh centuries, the evidence should not be forced to fit it. In particular, it should not be assumed that the 'secularisation' of the *clas* churches was ongoing throughout the early Middle Ages, as there is little information to guide our chronology of these phenomena and the evidence of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries cannot be automatically read back to the ninth. Finally, whilst far rarer than *llan*-names, *clas* occurs as a place-name element, for example at Glasbury, Radnorshire, which is derived from *Y Clas ar Wy* in Welsh or the '*clas* on the Wye', after the river which runs through the village, and such names may also provide some evidence hierarchies of greater and lesser churches and their spheres of influence.[71]

A key reason why *clasau* have attracted comment is that these churches are the obvious candidates both to have survived from the early medieval period as a result of their greater prestige, power and economic resources, and are therefore where scholars most often look when attempting to reconstruct the spatial organisation of the Welsh Church, based primarily on the development of the *clasau* into mother-churches in the twelfth century and beyond.[72] It is therefore widely assumed that an early and powerful *clas* would have a very large parish, because of the lower number of local churches between the eighth and eleventh centuries compared to later periods, and that the establishment of later chapels and parish churches within that unit would tend to break down this parish.[73] However these churches still tend to retain larger than average parishes and to hold residual dues and jurisdiction over later churches whose parishes were carved out of that *clas*.[74] This process has been identified in operation across western Europe in the early medieval period, or at least the devolution of certain rights (for example to tithes) to new

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[70] Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, pp.32-33.
[71] RCAHMW, *Recorded Name: Glasbury*, 'List of Historic Place Names'
[72] Edwards, 'The Archaeology of the Early Medieval Celtic Churches: An Introduction', p.8.
[73] Silvester and. Evans, 'Identifying the Mother-Churches of North-East Wales', p.31.
[74] Silvester and Evans, 'Identifying the Mother-Churches of North-East Wales', p.22.

local churches whilst retaining others (especially over baptisms).[75] In this they are comparable with the mother-churches of northern England, which remained less developed and densely populated for much of the Middle Ages, and therefore preserved very old features in its ecclesiastical organisation through to modern times; this is an important theme in identifying the oldest and wealthiest churches of all three case studies in this thesis and indicates the value of considering such regions side-by-side as they are here.[76] A complication is that in Wales we lack the baseline provided in England by Domesday Book, excepting large parts of Tegeingl in the northeast and a handful of settlements at various points west of the present Anglo-Welsh border. Other Welsh administrative documents are confined to the pre-Norman charters recorded mostly in the Book of Llandaf, with a few others written into other texts such as the Lichfield Gospels, and the larger corpus of *acta* issued by Welsh rulers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[77] All of these can be read for traces of the residual jurisdiction characteristic of a mother-church. Furthermore, those greatest churches, especially those with a widely venerated patron saint, are much more likely to receive mentions in prose histories and saints' lives, and to have been sites for the production of such material, mostly dating to the twelfth and thirteenth century in our earliest surviving manuscripts; recent progress made by two related projects have refined our understanding of many of these texts, namely The Cults of Saints in Wales and Vitae Sanctorum Cambriae which have produced many new editions of both the Welsh and Latin language lives respectively.[78] Even some very modern documents, such as the first series of definitive tithe maps drawn up mostly in the 1840s can be illuminating although the danger of such a late source is obvious because of the strong likelihood that these boundaries have changed (though not always by very much) over the centuries.

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[75] John Blair, 'Debate: Ecclesiastical organisation and pastoral care in Anglo-Saxon England' *Early Medieval Europe* 4.2 (1995), pp.193-212 (p.210); Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West*, pp. 463-464.

[76] Blair, *The Church In Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.308-309; See also the maps in Thomas Pickles, 'Power Religious Patronage and Pastoral Care: Religious Communities, Mother Parishes and Local Churches in Ryedale, c.650-c.1250', *The 2009 Kirkdale Lecture* (York: Trustees of the Friends of St Gregory's Minster Kirkdale 2009).

[77] Gwenogvryn Evans, *The Text of the Book of Llan Dâv*; Huw Pryce and Charles Insley (eds), *The Acts of Welsh Rulers, 1120-1283* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005).

[78] <www.welshsaints.ac.uk/theedition/> [Accessed 29th December 2023].

2.2 Ireland

The link between *clas* and *familia* provides a useful window into the related world of the Church in Ireland, which has a distinctive terminology of its own, one which has some parallels with Wales, but also several differences, and which has also been the subject of an extremely complex set of debates.[79] *Familia* is of course a Latin term, one which is therefore universal to all the Church across the Latin West. However, whilst the word is commonly found all over Europe, it does not necessarily have the exact same meaning in every context, and this is before one considers how it has been used as a loan word in many vernaculars, and often corrupted. In essence both *clas* and *familia* refer to a religious community or household, and therefore implies something of a monastic character, although *familia* can often refer to the household or retinue of a bishop.[80] The distinctiveness of the Irish usage of *familia* has been recognised for some time, but it becomes more problematic when used to describe the clergy of more than one church, especially when it is used in combination with *paruchia* or *parochia* in Latin. Essentially the uncertainty rests on the nature of episcopal control in the Irish Church and the balance of power between the secular clergy and the powerful abbots and monastic church leaders of the early medieval period.

Parochia in a sixth-century Frankish context refers to a wider region under the jurisdiction of a bishop, and therefore meant something closer to a modern diocese.[81] A Frankish bishop therefore presided over a clearly defined spatial and territorial sphere, and he would expect to exercise oversight and control of most churches within that area, which was usually coterminous with a Roman *civitas* or city-territory based on an urban centre.[82] The Church in Francia therefore preserved significant aspects of the late Roman administration. Wales and Ireland however present different sets of problems when applying this term. In Wales the principal issue is the relatively small number of mentions of bishops in the various written sources. They certainly had a continuous existence in Wales; Gildas refers to British bishops, as does Bede's account of Augustine's visit to the

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[79] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, pp.14-15.
[80] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p.127.
[81] Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West*, pp.66-67.
[82] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.36-37.

border between the Welsh and the kingdom of the Hwicce where the British bishops held two synods to discuss Augustine's attempt to bring their customs into line with the Roman Church.[83] Moreover, in the *Annales Cambriae* St Davids is credited with a fairly consistent set of episcopal obits in the ninth and tenth centuries, and reference is also made to an *Elbodg archiepiscopus guenedote regione* ('archbishop Elfoddw of the region of Gwynedd') upon his death in 809.[84] This raises a question concerning the sense meant by *geunedote regione*; in particular, is Gwynedd conceived here not merely as a political unit or as a geographical entity, but as a jurisdictional concept more like an archiepiscopal province? Elfoddw might be seen either as an archbishop who resided or came from Gwynedd, or the phrase might also indicate the spatial limits of his office. More obviously an archbishop must have other bishops over whom to preside, and that a fairly small region might have one indicates a higher density of bishops than in continental Europe, which is more typical of western British, Scottish and Irish Church organisation.[85] However it is possible that Elfoddw's title was honorific, and marked his high-status as the man credited in the annals with bringing Wales into line with the nineteen year-long Dionysian pascal cycle in 768, rather than any particular office or jurisdiction.[86]

Whilst bishops clearly existed between the ninth and eleventh centuries (and well before), these mentions are generally too passing to make detailed conclusions about the nature of episcopal control and its territorial extent. However, one would expect there to be some residual influence of the Roman administration, especially in south Wales where the *civitas* capitals of Caerwent and *Moridunum* (Carmarthen) would in normal circumstances have had bishops overseeing territorial dioceses in the Gallo-Roman manner.[87] However, the lack of a civilian *civitas* structure in north Wales, which probably remained a military zone up to the fifth century due to the threat of Irish incursion and the greater difficulty of the terrain means that this substratum was not necessarily present, and so it is not certain that the episcopate there evolved in the same way.[88] Moreover, such influence is even more tenuous in Ireland, where what Roman influence there was

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[83] Gildas, *De Excidio* § 67, ed. and trans. Winterbottom, p.53; Bede, *HE,* ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, ii. § 2, pp.134-140.
[84] AC ABC 809, ed. and trans. Dumville, pp.8-9.
[85] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* p.598.
[86] Davies, 'The Myth of the Celtic Church', pp.14-15.
[87] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* pp.586-587.
[88] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons,* pp.586-587.

in ecclesiastical organisation was mediated through the Romano-British Church in the fifth century during the conversion period. Whilst Irish churchmen were clearly aware of this model and took steps to implement it, their mode of organisation was seemingly an adaptation of the continental model to Irish political, cultural and economic circumstances.

The difficulty presented by the terminology has led to two competing models of Irish Church organisation, which have a bearing on Wales because of the potential (but by no means inevitable) similarities between them. The crucial question is whether episcopal authority was exercised within a territorial *paruchia* or diocese which was well-defined and essentially territorially contiguous, or whether this conventional model was subverted by the dominance of powerful monastic churches which constructed federations of dependent churches which were geographically intertwined, destroying the spatial integrity of the *paruchia* (if it had ever existed) and replacing it with intermeshed networks of church sites, also called *paruchia*, the largest of which claimed churches across Ireland.[89] A frequent assumption underpinning this model is that the earliest Patrician Church in Ireland would have been organised into territorial dioceses which must have been destroyed by the rise of the powerful monasteries by the seventh and eighth centuries, and this has been conceived as conflict between Romanising and traditionalist factions because of the concurrent Easter dispute. Therefore the meaning ascribed to *familia* by some historians who advocate the model of the monastic federation is one of widely scattered houses united through their devotion to the same saint and their dependency on a leading church which could be a considerable distance away, but which were all part of the household or family of the leading saint and their successors.[90] It is most often used (both in primary sources and later historiography) of the network of churches led by Iona, but questions have been raised about whether this usage is typical, because of Iona's exceptional prestige and power, the unusual thalassocratic nature of this *familia*, and Bede's famous comment that it was peculiar in having such powerful abbots

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[89] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p.128.
[90] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p.128.

who also ruled over bishops.[91] It is also possible that *familia* and *paruchia* denote different ideas, the former being a more informal sphere of leadership over other churches, the other representing a more orthodox idea of a bishop's sphere of rule in which he was the supreme clerical authority. *Clas* by contrast seems to refer most often a single church, although again one should not apply this terminology too rigidly. The range of titles makes it clear that the Irish Church was highly flexible in its organisation, and the range of possible situations is large. Historians of the Welsh Church must therefore be aware of these potential modes of organisation, given the presumption that most if not all churches (except perhaps the very smallest) had some sort of resident community and the fairly strong evidence for the spreading of saint's cults and the belief that a church dedicated to a saint was their property along with all its appurtenances.[92] Against this however is the clear evidence for the continued existence of bishops, albeit also enmeshed in these dedicatory alliances, who exercised synodal functions, as in the case of Augustine's mission in the sixth century and presumably in Elfoddw's resolution of the Easter controversy in 768.[93] More recent work, led by that of Colmán Etchingham, has stressed the variety of practice in Ireland, particularly regarding the headship of the major monasteries, who could be bishops but were not required to be, and the question of the differing grades of Irish bishops.[94] Etchingham's view, building on that of Richard Sharpe, is that a typical bishop would preside over several (perhaps 3 or 4) *túatha,* meaning the many hundreds of petty kingdoms and lay communities which comprised the basic units of Ireland's early political hierarchy.[95] He also detects the presence of a lower grade of bishop, the *escop túaithe* as noted in the recension of the *Ríagal Phátraic* attached to the *Rule of the Céli Dé* (likely a ninth-century text), who may have presided over a single *túath* beneath the authority of a full *escop túaithe* (a term Etchingham coins from analogy with the *rí túaithe* / 'king of several *túatha*).[96] Such a view may also be confirmed in the Latin texts of the Irish laws, where the lower grade of bishop are referred to as *Corepiscopi, i.e. vicarii Episcoporum vel unius plebus* 'Co-bishops, that is vicars

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[91] Richard Sharpe, 'Some problems concerning the organization of the church in early medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model', *Peritia* 3 (1984), pp.230-70 (pp.244-246); Bede, *HE*, ed and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, iii., § 4, pp.223-224.

[92] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.591.

[93] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp.589, 593.

[94] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p.130.

[95] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland,* p.143; Richard Sharpe, 'Churches and Communities in early medieval Ireland' in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish,* ed. by Blair and Sharpe, pp.81-109 (pp.99-102).

[96] Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p.143

or (bishops) of a single lay community'.[97] The ambiguity at this lower level between a bishop and a mere priest is interesting but of more fundamental importance is the sense that a single *túath* was an acceptable unit of clerical jurisdiction and responsibility, and these local units, often demarked by features in the local landscape, or encompassing a single river valley, would have had their own territorial coherence not unlike an Anglo-Saxon mother-parish. This is not to say that Ireland possessed a systematic administrative geography at this time, because *túath* also has a sense of a community or population group, and therefore is not entirely spatial in its meaning, but these peoples had lands associated with them which by necessity involved the division of space between them. The potential ecclesiastical importance of the *tuáth* is intriguing given that its Welsh cognate *tud* is poorly attested and infrequently used, appearing most often in poetic contexts where its obscurity may have been prized as a sign of the learning of the composer. [98] This might reflect differences in political rather than ecclesiastical organisation; fragmented though its kingdoms often were, political authority was less devolved in Wales than in Ireland, and the tendency to avoid *tud* might result from this. That does not preclude the existence of similar structures in Wales, but the Welsh seem to have had a different term for them, or they were analogous to a different kind of Irish political unit or folk group (if such a concordance existed). Furthermore, the typical grouping of *túatha* into clusters of three or four beneath a more senior bishop accords well with the three commotes which made up the typical Welsh *cantref*.

Beyond the vexed question of *familia* and *paruchia*, we can now focus on the Old Irish vocabulary for churches. As mentioned above this is more complex and varied than in Welsh, and there is no term as ubiquitous as *llan*. However, perhaps the two most common words for a church are themselves Hibernicised loan words from Latin, namely *eclais* (from *ecclesia*) and *cell* (from Latin *cella*).[99] Both of these appear to be quite general terms for a church, particularly *eclais* which can also mean the Church in its widest sense as the entire body of Christian clergy and believers. *Cell* is also prevalent in

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[97]Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p.138; Hermann Wasserschleben, *Die irische Kanonensammlung* (Leipzig: J. Ricker, 1874), p.5.

[98] Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.19; 'tud', GPC.

[99] 'eclais, eclas', eDIL; 'cell' eDIL.

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Scottish place-names.[100] The range of contexts in which these terms apply suggests that, much like *llan*, they might apply to many kinds of churches, both large and small, and more or less monastic in character. A more specialist term is *domnach*, which has a more specific meaning. A *domnach* is often presumed to be a church of considerable age, perhaps dating to the fifth century and the time of St Patrick, though the breakdown of the consensus that the Irish Church was initially episcopal and then evolved into a predominantly monastic institution has created more ambiguity about the origins of this term.[101] There is also considerable difficulty in ascribing it to a particular category of church because of the frequency with which it is used in material relating to the primatial claims of the church of Armagh. For example, in the late seventh-century *Liber Angeli* it is asserted that Armagh's superiority encompassed *omnis ubique locus qui dominicus appellatur* 'any place anywhere called *dominicus* (= *domnach*)', alongside a wide range of other church-terms *aecclesia libera* 'free church' and *cynubitarum… monasteriis* / 'of monasteries of cenobites'.[102] In some cases it seems likely that the age and resultant prestige of some of these churches would leave them well placed to assemble a *familia* of their own and to protect their property against encroachment from both other churches and the laity. However the precise distinction at work here is difficult to identify, and it should not be assumed that a *domnach* is always the sort of mother-church which might serve as the seat of a bishop and the leading church of a *paruchia* or *familia* regardless of whether one conceives of these as spatial territorial units. The parallel with a Welsh *clas*, which does appear to be a greater church in most instances, is therefore far from certain.

In conclusion, the terminology of Church organisation in Wales and neighbouring parts of the Insular World is highly varied, as one would expect in a diverse cultural province encompassing at least four languages. There are clear parallels between certain terms across these languages, such as the common loaning of universal Latin ecclesiastical vocabulary, as seen in the way in which *ecclesia* has been borrowed in every language discussed above. It is also clear however that even these shared terms must be analysed in their own context, as mutation and corruption during the lending process has often lent them different meanings and uses. Here the change from the continental usage of *ecclesia*

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[100] 'eclais, eclas', eDIL; 'cell' eDIL; *Database of Scottish Hagiotoponyms* <www.saintsplaces.gla.ac.uk/index.php> [Accessed 29th December 2023].
[101] Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, pp.22-23.
[102] Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland*, p.84; Ludwig Bieler ed.and trans., *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 2004 edn. (Dublin: School of Advanced Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), § 13, 21, pp.186-189.

(meaning the leading church of a *civitas*) to that found in Irish *eclais* (a much more general term for a church, or indeed the Church in the widest sense) is indicative. Further distinction occurs when one considers which terms became most commonly used, as these are often different and unrelated; the ubiquitous Welsh *llan* ('enclosure') bears little or no relation to Irish *eclais* or *cell,* or English *mynster*, or indeed to most Latin terms which might describe a church of any status. There is of course English *burh*, which can carry the sense of a enclosed, fortified settlement and there are Cheshire examples like Wybunbury (discussed in Chapter 5) which may be early high-status ecclesiastical sites, but the corpus of *burh* names is so large and varied in function that it is difficult to make generalisations about how these sites were related to nearby churches.[103] The group of terms which appears to refer to larger, more monastic churches is similarly varied, though there is perhaps a tendency for such establishments to derive their names from Latin terms; hence, as we have seen, Welsh *clas* and *eglwys,* Irish *domnach*, and English *mynster* all have Latin antecedents (respectively *classis, ecclesia, dominicus and monasterium*). This may indicate that these were perceived as being more Roman in their origins or manner of worship than other lesser churches (though this perception may or may not have been accurate) or might be taken as a sign of the continued prestige and importance attached to *Romanitas* in early medieval Insular cultures. It is also indicative of some sort of hierarchy of churches, regardless of how vague and subjective this may have been. Overall these different regions had similar ways of naming churches and distinguishing the greater from the lesser, but the precise derivation of their chosen terms could be quite varied, reflecting the tension between the universal influence of an ultimately Roman Church and a collection of related but undoubtedly different cultures, something which appears to be as true of 'Celtic' Wales and Ireland as of Anglo-Saxon England. This supports of the validity of a comparative approach incorporating all of the aforementioned areas, and exploring Church organisation at the sub-national, regional level.

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[103] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.140-6; Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.200-19, 232-5.

2.3 England

The study of early medieval churches in the early English kingdoms has arrived at a more settled stage in its development compared to Wales, as it has received a greater degree scholarly attention from a larger number of academics. Consequently, the available frameworks for the development of local churches in England have become more entrenched. This is largely because in recent decades, a broad (though certainly not unanimous) consensus has built up around the so-called 'minster model', an idea most-commonly associated with the work of John Blair. Since the 1980s, Blair has built up a voluminous body of work on the archaeology, organisation and structure of early medieval churches in England and has worked at a series of different scales from county level studies up to syntheses of the entire Old English-speaking region.[104]

The name of the model derives from one of the key questions which as shaped its wider view of the structure of the Church in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, specifically one of terminology. As in Ireland and Wales there are two aspects to this problem, as we must consider terms for different kinds of church both in Latin and in the vernacular. This is where we arrive, not for the first or the last time, at the Latin term *monasterium*, its Old English translation *mynster*, from which Modern English minster, and the difficulty of pinning down what either of these mean. Blair's reading, and one of the defining parts of his conception of Church organisation, is that whilst the word *mynster* is by the far most common Old English translation of *monasterium*, a word which clearly can be applied to a community of religious living according to a strict rule, this is not the case in every instance of either of these terms.[105] Indeed both of them can refer to a church which may not have had a rule, or which may have had only a relatively relaxed one, but which still hosted communal religious observance and which had multiple clergy present.[106] This brings into our definition a range of other church types, notably what would later be formalised as a collegiate church of multiple canons living together, but which in early centuries existed in a less formalised state. Blair's principal innovation was to argue that the overwhelming majority of early churches in England, those traceable at least before

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[104] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*; Blair and Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*; Blair (ed), *Minsters and Parish Churches*.
[105] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.3.
[106] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.3, 74.

the beginning of the Viking Age and earlier, originated as minsters in the sense that they hosted multiple clergy and therefore blended characteristics of a typical high medieval parish church and a small monastery.[107] There is therefore, in his conception, a high degree of overlap between the minsters and the category of mother-churches mentioned above, and the attitude of these priests would have been a major influence on the development of the Church at a local level and its pastoral provision to the laity.[108] It also strongly suggests that if a church can be proven to be collegiate or paramonastic in some way, then that church is more likely to be especially ancient. *Monasterium* and *mynster* are by no means the only terms used of monasteries or paramonastic churches in Old English sources and one can find examples of other terms such as *cenobium* and *ecclesia* in the written sources, but none emerges as frequently.[109]

The minster model emerged into and was shaped by a series of historiographical debates in the area in the 1980s and 1990s, in which scholars attempted to clarify the process of parish fission, building on the generally-held assumption that the very earliest churches in a given region would have had a very large parish, and that over the Middle Ages, new churches and parishes would have been carved out of these older ones in ways that left clues to the original configuration of parochial organisation in the very earliest phases. Much vital work was done on topics such as the interpretation and identification of parish boundaries, the different residual rights a mother-church might retain over its daughters, and the beginnings of a proper archaeological framework for the study of early medieval ecclesiastical sites.[110] Another approach which was frequently pursued at this time was comparative, particularly between Church organisation in English and Irish-speaking areas and argued that the contrasts between them had been overstated. One useful indication of the prevailing methods and thought of the time is 1992's *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, edited by Blair and also by Richard Sharpe. In their introduction, the editors argue that preceding debates over Church structures in both Ireland and the Anglo-

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[107] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.3-4.
[108] See above, p.14
[109] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.74.
[110] Mark Morris, *The Church in British Archaeology*, Council for British Archaeology Research Report 47 (London: Council for British Archaeology, 1983), pp.19-76.

Saxon kingdoms had led to a substantial revision of the scholarly consensus, and a realisation that in several key areas, the two regions were less distinct in their ecclesiastical practices than had been previously assumed.[111] The volume in question focused on the issue of pastoral care, partly as a topic worthy of study in its own right, given that it was after all one of the primary social functions of the Church in early medieval society, but also as a wedge to crack open the issue of Church organisation.[112] This was possible because pastoral care, canonically, was the responsibility of the local bishop and the secular clergy he oversaw, and therefore it cuts straight to the heart of the question around the power, influence and importance of the episcopal office, as opposed to other members of the Church and especially monastic abbots, monks and those who occupied an ambiguous status in between such as priests attached to collegiate or quasi-monastic church communities who lived according to some sort of religious rule but did not observe a full monastic life. If the question of who provided pastoral care and in which churches (or perhaps not always in a church) could be better understood, then the character and mode of organisation of most churches in early medieval Britain could also be illuminated. The chapters which follow explore the themes of pastoral care and parochial organisation across both Old English and Celtic-speaking parts of Britain and Ireland and display a multidisciplinary approach the subject, tackling textual sources, toponomy, archaeology and onomastics; this openness to different corpora of evidence, particularly when employed in reference to a relatively compact local case study or range of case studies, is another common approach in works adopt take the 'topographical' approach which underpins the minster model.

This is not to say that the minster-model was accepted without a thorough critique. In particular, a second strand of research into the early medieval Church in England, especially in the 1990s, approached these questions from a different methodological perspective and leant more heavily on a different body of source material. This was a period where substantial progress was being made on the canons of the various early medieval Anglo-Saxon church councils, which having last been printed between 1869 and 1878, received a new and thorough analysis in 1995 thanks to Catherine Cubitt, who

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[111] John Blair and Richard Sharpe, 'Introduction' in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992), pp.1-10 (pp.2-3).
[112] Blair and Sharpe, 'Introduction', pp.4-6.

had also contributed a chapter on the councils and their pronouncements on pastoral care in Blair and Sharpes' 1992 volume.[113] In essence, the convergence of these two strands in the research created that quintessential problem of early medieval history in which two similarly valid bodies of evidence could point to rather different conclusions. This was because where the more local, topographical approaches which inspired the minster hypothesis tended to focus on local phenomena, and therefore paid less attention to the role of bishops in directing the provision of pastoral care to the laity, the church councils make repeated reference over many decades to the duties of eighth- and ninth-century bishops to regulate the clergy under their jurisdiction, to make visitations around their dioceses and to ensure that the sacraments were made available at suitable intervals.[114] Some of the canons are also explicit in subjecting monasteries to the local episcopal authority, authorising and indeed obliging bishops to monitor the standard of religious life and to chastise any abbots who tolerated laxity in their houses and did not properly enforce their religious rule.[115] The ambition of this sweeping programme of reform, perhaps most clearly laid down at the Council of Clofesho in 747, is immediately apparent, and Cubitt rightly compares it to Charlemagne's similarly extensive *Admonitio Generalis*, which it predates by over forty years.[116] However, much like the *Admonitio*, it must be asked how much this reflected the ambitions of the English-speaking episcopate in the eighth century, and not the actual extent of their power and influence in reality. It is an essentially normative text, laying down the structure and operation of the Church as the members of the council would have liked it to be; it is still of enormous value as an indication of the values and priorities of Church leaders at this time, but to imagine that the whole system could be reformed so quickly stretches credibility. Cubitt is especially explicit about the threat posed by lay power and the exploitation of ecclesiastical property which emerged as a key theme at the Council of Chelsea in 816, suggesting that the bishops did not have a free hand to implement their reforming agenda.[117] Likewise, similar canons were passed at successive church councils in the late eighth and early ninth centuries, and the clear need to restate them, whilst not at all unusual for church council

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[113] Catherine Cubitt, ' *Pastoral care and conciliar canons: the provisions of the 747 Council of Clofesho*' in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. by Blair and Sharpe, pp.193-211; Catherine Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c.650-850* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995).

[114] Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, pp.99-100.

[115] Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, pp.99-100

[116] Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, pp.123-4.

[117] Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, pp.194-5.

canons, does seem to suggest that the issues they were meant to address were long-standing and took decades to resolve.[118]

John Blair's response to these developments is exemplified by his 2005 work *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, in which he acknowledged how some of these debates, particularly concerning church councils, had modified his views.[119] He remained convinced however that most early mother-churches in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms had some kind of communal religious character. It is this text which has largely synthesized much of the scholarship of the 1990s and twenty years on it remains the clearest and most-widely cited statement of the current state of academic thought on the subject. Blair himself tried to set something of a capstone on earlier controversies, opining that 'the debate has, in my view, reached a point beyond which it cannot progress significantly without another generation of local studies, and ultimately a complete catalogue of Anglo-Saxon religious sites supported by a cartographic database'.[120] The second of Blair's suggestions has not yet come to fruition, at least not completely, but as to the first, it is hoped that this thesis might represent a small contribution to that next generation of regional case studies.

Whilst the minster model is perhaps the most prominent historiographical stance we need to explore, it is worth recounting some other aspects of Blair's arguments, especially in later centuries during the Viking Age, the period with which this thesis is primarily concerned. The extent of the disruption created by Scandinavian raids, settlements and territorial conquest in Britain during the ninth and tenth centuries is another question which has been approached by many scholars over the decades. To a degree, one's preferred answer must depend on which aspect of church activity is under consideration; for example the richness of minster-sites and the abundance of metalwork, manuscripts and other luxury items they had previously consumed is mostly lacking from around the middle of the ninth century.[121] This seems to accord with a general pessimism around the

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[118] Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils*, pp.116-20.
[119] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.7.
[120] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.7.
[121] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.320.

intellectual vitality of the Church at this time in texts like King Alfred's well-known preface to the translation of the *Cura Pastoralis*, in which he laments the loss of Latinity and the destruction of books, though of course by emphasising Viking destruction, Alfred could better pose and the saviour and restorer of churches.[122] At the more local level however, churches appear to have been more resilient; grounded in their communities, it was in many ways easier for a community of priests to rely on the support of their kin groups, patrons and parishioners than a bishop who held office largely because of royal or aristocratic support and the ability of church sites to endure through this phase is clearly seen in some of the case studies later in this thesis; the flowering of ecclesiastical sculpture at Sandbach in Cheshire, for example, demonstrates the vitality of some churches even into the ninth century.[123] Once the era of Scadinavian migration and settlement began in earnest from the 860s onwards, the attitude of the newcomers would have been conditioned by their desire to secure their hold on their new lands as part of a culturally mixed elite. A great deal of work now exists on the language, cultural affiliations and tastes of these newcomers and whilst much new material culture arrived in northern England this way, it is clear that the prevailing pattern was one of cultural exchange and hybridity, including the tendency for Scandinavian migrants to convert to Christianity (if indeed they had not already done so) and, in many cases, to act as patrons of local churches.[124] Indeed, as will be clearly seen in the discussion of Wirral to follow, the tenth century may have seen something of a boom in lay patronage at church sites if the proliferation of Scandinavian-influenced stone sculpture can be taken to reflect a wider pattern; clearly the Viking Age was not entirely negative for the Church.[125] Raids could of course be violent, and in the shorter term individual churches may have been disused or their clergy induced to flee, but over the long term the trend was towards accommodation and acculturation to a fully Christianised society. As a final point on this subject, it must also be remembered that when a church does appear to have declined in the eighth, ninth or tenth century, the Viking presence cannot be presumed as the sole cause in every case; Blair has noted a phase in the eighth and ninth century of what he describes as 'secularization', in which lay landholders or even bishops sought to own churches not out of piety or for any spiritual benefits, but in order to control and dispose

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[122] EHD, I, pp.887-90.
[123] See below, pp.261-75.
[124] Lilla Kopar, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology on Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), pp.197-200.
[125] See below, pp.209-20.

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of the great land and wealth that some churches had acquired and which had become more vulnerable after the initial torrent of royal and aristocratic patronage had slowed to a trickle. [126] Here some regional qualification must be included; if a region had fewer wealthy churches in the eighth and ninth centuries, there would have been less available wealth for such proprietors to exploit, and therefore less of an impact on local churches in these areas.

In a section which aims to deal, however briefly, with England at large, this last point reminds us that within these general patterns there is substantial regional variation. The areas discussed in this thesis lie in a zone which was at the periphery of both the Northumbrian, Mercian and Welsh kingdoms and where political authority was weak throughout the Viking Age. Partly as a consequence of this fact, the churches of north east Wales and Cheshire are more poorly evidenced than those to the east and south, where written sources such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* and saints' hagiographies make it easier to find a firm *terminus ante quem* for religious activity at many church sites. The economic basis of society is also likely to have somewhat different in these places and this will have affected the development of the Church; these western regions tend to be wetter and less conducive to arable farming, though the plains of Cheshire are a possible exception, and population densities were lower than elsewhere, even in Wirral which emerges in Domesday as more densely inhabited than either north east Wales or the rest of Cheshire. [127] As we will see, most of these regions remained relatively underdeveloped even in the time of Domesday Book, and a contrast will be drawn with the wealthier and more politically central parts of Northumbria and Mercia where wealthy royal and aristocratic families possessed the resources to endow early monasteries on a lavish scale. The Viking Age also arrived at different places in different ways and at different points in time; it was the eastern coasts of Britain that bore the brunt of the first round of raiding and territorial conquest in the second half of the ninth century, whereas firm evidence for Scandinavian activity Britain's Irish Sea coast in the form of burials, silver hoards and stone sculpture begins in the years around 900, at least one generation later. [128]

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[126] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.328-9.
[127] Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.10-11; VCH Cheshire, I, pp.334-8.
[128] Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland*, pp.83-5.

An additional point here is the role of ecclesiastical toponyms in English place-name studies, which is rather more ambiguous than in Wales with its abundance of *llan* names. Within the corpus of English toponyms, there are several elements which clearly denote ecclesiastical activity and can therefore be used to argue for the existence of an early church at those locations. Perhaps most obvious amongst these is *cirice*, the OE form of the modern word church, whilst one can also point to words like *stōw*, which has the sense of 'a place, a place of assembly, a holy place'; this is not definitive proof that a church was present but it seems highly likely than any site with a more informal religious function would have been a leading candidate to acquire a church at an early date.[129] *Mynster* itself can of course be a place-name element; major examples such as Westminster, Kidderminster and Leominster make this abundantly clear. It is notable however that many of these explicitly ecclesiastical OE elements are much more common in the south and midlands of England, and comparably rare in the north west.[130] Of the main examples discussed in this thesis, only Woodchurch in Wirral contains OE *cirice*, and other elements like *mynster, stōw,* or even *hearg* or Harrow (suggestive or pagan burial activity) are similarly rare. What emerges instead is that many of the major examples in the Cheshire parts of the case study have toponyms that relate to other aspects of their early history which points to a wider significance in the late Roman or early medieval period, but which does not foreground the presence of a church. These receive proper attention in the relevant case studies, but the group of *wich* place-names in Cheshire, all highly likely to be early church sites, instead emphasises the economic functions of these settlements. The other way place-names may obscure the early date of some church-sites is when a very common element is used, one which might apply to many types of place. *Tūn*, often taken as a very general OE term for an ordinary farming settlement, is perhaps the most prevalent of these and may refer to many different kinds of place, giving little clue to the early history of sites such as Acton and Neston in Cheshire, or Prestatyn in Wales. However, despite its ubiquity this element can still mark out a settlement as notable, and the idea that *tūnas* are unremarkable farms or villages has been complicated by recent work which suggests a complex range of compounds using *tūn* was used to mark out significant settlements, and that during the eighth century it was

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[129] EPNS Cheshire, V(I:ii), p.356.
[130] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.216.

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a much rarer element which denoted administratively important places.[131] Interesting as these findings are, the early significance of *tūnas* is difficult to confirm in Cheshire where the scarcity of written sources prior to the Norman Conquest makes it difficult to tell when such toponyms were coined; the challenge is similar to that posed by the Welsh *llan* names and the way they usurped older place-names as the early Middle Ages wore on. *Cirice* presents similar difficulties; some of the examples in the southwest of England have been argued to represent an continuation of British naming practice and the prevalence of hermitages, holy wells and similar in the landscape, but there is a larger body of examples from tenth and eleventh century charters suggesting that this another element which originally had a more specific connotation, which became more generalised in usage with time.[132]

Where explicitly ecclesiastical terms do occur in this region, they are often borrowings, most notably from British; the link between the OE element *eccles* and the OW *egles* is well-known, as is the descent of both words from the Latin *ecclesia*. This etymology is discussed above in the Wales section, but it repays a visit here because of the prevalence of toponyms containing *Eccles* in Cheshire and especially nearby in southern Lancashire. Perhaps the clearest example from just outside the study areas in this thesis is Eccleston, just a few miles south of Chester, whilst we also have Eccleshall in northern Staffordshire and an important cluster of examples from Lancashire, namely Eccles in what is now Greater Manchester, Great Eccleston on the Fylde, Eccleshill in the hills above Darwen and a further two plain Ecclestons (one located a few miles to the west of Chorley, the other to the west of St Helens).[133] The significance of these, much like the Welsh examples, though demonstrated more clearly, is the distinct pattern where each of the early hundreds has a single *Eccles* toponym and no more. The Greater Manchester Eccles would therefore have served the hundred of Salford, whilst Great Eccleston would fulfil this role for Amounderness and the two Ecclestons would have done so for Leyland and West Derby. This clearly holds for four of the six Lancashire hundreds, possibly five if Eccleshill is classed with the others (the identification of the element seems secure enough

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[131] Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.193-9.

[132] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.216-7, 385-7.

[133] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, p.309;.Eilert Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1922), pp.37, 108, 131, 154, 161.

but other evidence for a church is lacking).[134] A similar pattern in Cheshire seems likely, albeit with a lower rate of survival into modern toponyms. Eccleston on the River Dee can be presumed to be the main early church for Dudestan hundred; other examples are elusive but the systematic nature of the pattern in nearby districts strongly suggests that there are lost Eccles place-names in other parts of Cheshire, or that they had a church with a similar status at one point even if it was named differently.[135]

As the place-names clearly indicate, we must be careful that the historiographical framework established here does not become a straitjacket; what holds for churches in Kent or the Thames Valley is not necessarily true of north west England or Wales, just as what holds in Ireland, whilst potentially illuminating, cannot be uncritically applied in other places. This concern to treat each region on its own merits must however be tempered by the simple reality that the available body of evidence is much smaller in some regions than others, and argument through comparison and analogy with other places is one important way for historians to confront this challenge. A balance must therefore be struck; to disallow such arguments entirely would leave us scratching in the dust with precious little material to work with, whilst being too liberal in its use risks inaccurately homogenising the different parts of Britain. Such a challenge is an essential part of the local, regional-scale which has been chosen for this study, and it is hoped this will allow the question of regional variation to be better understood, and that by illuminating the development of less typical and less-studied regions, our overall knowledge of the Church's organisation and development in Viking Age Britain might be enhanced.

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[134] Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire*, pp.75-6.
[135] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.151; Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.176.

3 Tegeingl

3.1 Introduction

Having summarised the important concepts and terminology that underpin the topic area, we can now begin to apply these and test their validity in our selected study areas, beginning in north east Wales. Located between the English city of Chester to the east, and the River Clwyd in the west, the Welsh cantref of Tegeingl was an important frontier zone between areas of Welsh and Mercian, and then English, areas of influence. It is this border dynamic which largely defines our knowledge of the region and the sources which survive from it; when it appears in annalistic sources it is primarily as a site of battles or invasions from at least the seventh century. The historical record suffers because Tegeingl was doubly-peripheral; it was both a contested border region, and located far from the political centres of the polities which vied for control over it. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this case study will cast some light upon the development of local church networks in northeast Wales in the ninth to eleventh centuries. This will allow some of the prevailing models of church foundation and organisation in Viking Age Britain to be evaluated by employing the under-utilized evidence of this region. Some of the questions which must be asked are fundamental, such as identifying the types of churches present

in Tegeingl around this time, their chronology and their relationships with each other. By peeling back the different layers of ecclesiastical and tenurial organisation, the origins and early history of these ecclesiastical sites can be recovered, or at least enough of an impression gleaned to allow for some more general conclusions about how and why churches were located spatially, tenurially and culturally in this region.

Whilst the focus of this chapter is on Tegeingl's Viking Age history, it has often been recognised that the shape of local church networks in Wales is likely to owe a great deal to the first century or two after Roman control of Britain crumbled during the early-fifth century. This period saw a consolidation of Christianity across the island, and was a fertile time for new church foundations in some parts of Wales.[1] As we have seen, this sub-Roman period has been characterised as an 'Age of Saints', and whilst the most extreme versions of this conception have been discredited, it is difficult to deny the weight of tradition and hagiographical material which all points to a surge in the number of saints and their churches in the fifth to seventh centuries. In order to understand fully the situation in Tegeingl around 900, we must therefore consider the local legacy of this obscure but vital period. Quite how Tegeingl was organised politically, never mind ecclesiastically, after the withdrawal of the Roman legions in the early fifth-century is highly obscure, but the area had previously sat in an awkward position, close to the major legionary fortress of Deva Victrix (modern Chester) but occupied by a tribal group called the Deceangli in modern scholarship, who had previously dominated the productive lead mines in what would become Tegeingl.[2] This mining link is largely based on the

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[1] Charles Thomas, *Britain and Ireland in Early Christian Times AD 400-800* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), pp.81-4.
[2] Michael G. Jarrett and J.C. Mann, 'The Tribes of Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 4.2 (1968), pp.161-74 (pp.165-66); see above, pp.27-8.

association of their name with several inscribed pigs of lead from Cheshire and Staffordshire.[3] How this system evolved under the late empire and into the post-Roman period is also unclear, but (as we see later), some archaeological evidence exists in Denbighshire at Tandderwen, which hints at the beginnings of organised religion in the region in the form of east-west aligned cemeteries which exhibit clustering of burials around a small number of focal graves, which pre-empts the later cult of saints and the desire amongst the faithful for *ad sanctos* burial.[4] How thoroughly Christian this was might be disputed however; a secular family or kin-group cemetery is one possible interpretation for the Tandderwen cemetery.[5]

Further instability, but also a degree of cultural vitality and dynamism, was generated by how Tegeingl interacted with the wider Irish Sea province and the rest of Britain, which was greatly stimulated by the arrival of highly mobile populations of Scandinavian origin from the beginning of the ninth century. This is apparent both in an intensification of political conflict between the Welsh and Mercian kingdoms, which had begun some decades earlier during the reign of Offa (757-796), and of conflict between the many Welsh kingdoms, which led gradually to consolidation of these smaller territories into larger units by the tenth-century.[6] However, Tegeingl was often under nominal Mercian control at this time, intermittently during the ninth century and for a longer spell in the tenth. The precise events are discussed below, but one of their principal effects was to

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[3] *VCH* Cheshire¸ I, pp.227-8.
[4] K.S. Brassil, W.G. Owen, W.J. Britnell and others, 'Prehistoric and early medieval cemeteries at Tandderwen, near Denbigh, Clwyd', *Archaeological Journal*, 148 (1991), pp.46-97 ; Anne Sassin Allen, 'Church Orientation in the Landscape: a Perspective from Medieval Wales', *Archaeological Journal*, 173.1 (2016), pp.154-87 (pp.179-80).
[5] Brassil, Owen, Britnell et al, 'Prehistoric and early medieval cemeteries at Tandderwen', pp.46-97.
[6] Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp.425-6, 484.

increase the body of sources available for Tegeingl in the ninth to eleventh century, when the sparse annalistic records grows a little less terse, and the proliferation of new sculptural styles left a larger body of material evidence for study; these pieces are discussed in turn below, along with the history of parishes in which they lie. This does however leave a difficult question, in that whilst the religious situation in Tegingl in say, the fifth-century, can be reconstructed on the basis of the slight evidence and by drawing parallels with other parts of western Britain, and the ninth and tenth centuries have more sources, there is a difficult gap in between, where the record is very sparse, at a crucial time when Christianity was putting down deeper roots in Wales and the less Romanised parts of Britain.

What this chapter attempts to do is collect the evidence for an organised Christian Church in Tegeingl throughout the early medieval period, with a particular focus on the period 800-1100 when a combination of the Domesday Book and the increased survival of other sources allow the region to be studied in greater detail, and before the arrival of the great monastic orders in Wales from the mid-twelfth century. This also allows an approach grounded in studies of Britain and Ireland as a coherent geographical unit, which is especially prevalent among scholars of the Viking Age. Where possible, this evidence is explored through a spatial lens, which aims to identify how the landscape was organised and divided for ecclesiastical purposes, and what this might have meant for the structure of individual churches, any hierarchies between those churches, and more broadly, the provision of pastoral care to the laity. Important church sites or groups of sites are discussed in turn and the relevant evidence described and explained in an attempt to write a brief biography of each site; toward the end of the chapter this evidence is collated and more general trends and patterns are explored. It is hoped that by studying this region, it

will be possible to explore how applicable some of the theoretical frameworks discussed in chapter 1 might be, and also to place Tegeingl in its British and Irish context. In particular, the political volatility which it experienced during the early Middle Ages will allow me to interrogate the issue of how different conceptions of local church development have emerged in England and Wales, and to see how the different phases of Welsh, Mercian and English occupation may have affected this process. It is also hoped that this might shed light on the relationship between the pre-existing British church and the incoming Anglian and Saxon populations which occurred elsewhere in Britain at an earlier date than in Tegeingl. Finally, it should be noted that whilst the focus of this investigation is the area which would come to form the medieval *cantref* of Tegeingl, I have included some evidence from neighbouring regions which lie outside the borders of that unit as they were later defined; in particular many of the entries in Cheshire Domesday in or near Wales' modern borders are of interest, and in order to develop a more vivid and detailed understanding of north-east Wales as an ecclesiastical landscape I have occasionally ranged beyond the formal *cantref* when I felt there was useful evidence which would otherwise be excluded.

In order to address these questions, the key early ecclesiastical sites in the area are explored in turn, with an overview of each church's history as it can be reconstructed and an exploration of its place in the wider landscape of the region. The content moves through the different kinds of sources available for each site, beginning with textual sources where these are available and then moving through other types of evidence (particularly sculptural and archaeological). Where possible, this information is organised and analysed by using a Geographic Information System (GIS), partly for ease of understanding, but also so that the spatial aspects and organisation of each church can be

explored, and the wider landscape explored on a regional level. These sites have been chosen according to several criteria. The strongest are those with explicit textual attestations either in Domesday Book or an earlier source, and those sites which have firmly dated stone sculpture of Viking Age date (several of the best-known sites meet both of these parameters). Examples of these include Dyserth, Whitford and Meliden. There are several sites which meet only one of these criteria; for example Gwaenysgor and Halkyn both had churches in 1086 according to Domesday Book but no sculptural evidence survives at these sites, whilst Hope has several pieces of Viking Age sculpture but no church in the relevant Domesday entries.[7] Early medieval stone sculpture is considered especially relevant and it is for this reason that the locations of the main assemblages of stone crosses in the region (Dyserth and Whitford) are discussed first, followed by those at Meliden and Rhuddlan. It should be noted that given some of the uncertainties of the evidence, the order of the chapter should not be considered an authoritative ranking of the likelihood of an early medieval date. It is acknowledged that such a scheme may not always be entirely consistent where a well-evidenced church might have been once subordinate to another example within the case study; Meliden may be such a case if indeed it can be linked to Dyserth as suggested by the parohical geography, though as we shall see this is identification is not entirely certain.[8] It may also be noted that the examples cluster towards the west of the region; reasons of space have required a focus on the best evidenced examples which tend to lie closer to the River Clwyd, which also benefits from a lower level of modern industrialisation and urbanisation which has preserved a greater amount of archaeological and toponymical evidence. The eastern part of the region would undoubtedly repay closer study in the future and the examples chosen here are not an exhaustive list of candidate sites.

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[7] DB Cheshire., FT2.7, FT2.12, f.269r; *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.356-9.
[8] See below, pp.112-7.
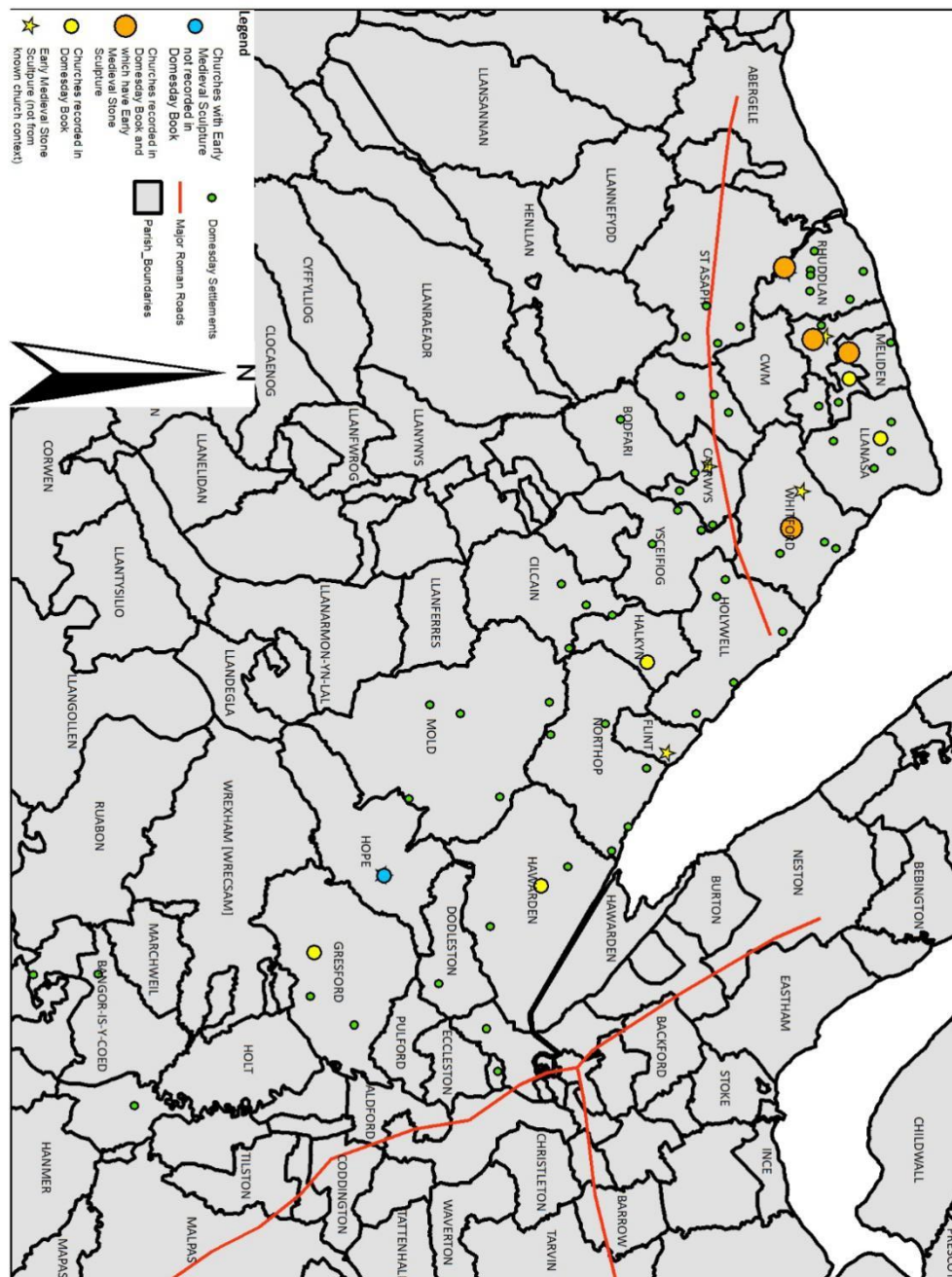
Figure 1 The parishes and churches of northeast Wales

The parish boundaries are as recorded in the 1851 census, after data published by the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure (Campop). The sculptural information is after Edwards, A Corpus, iii (only pieces within the county of Flintshire are included)

3.2 Dyserth

Located less than three miles east of the medieval urban centre of Rhuddlan, the village of Dyserth sits in the shadow of the hill Moel Hiraddug. It is placed at the head of this chapter because it neatly illustrates the difficulties of dating church sites in this part of Wales prior to the tenth century, whilst also demonstrating the variety and richness of the the Viking Age evidence. A church at Dyserth is attested in Domesday Book, where it is recorded as 'Dissaren' or 'dissard', one of the berewicks of the huge manor of Rhuddlan.[9] The greater share was held in 1086 by Robert of Rhuddlan, who held one plough in demesne in his manor there (which also encompassed the berewicks of Bodfari/*Boteuuarul* and the lost *Ruargor*), along with 'a church with a priest'.[10] Additionally, there were two slaves, two villeins, a mill rendering 2s, a league and a half of woodland and a hawk's eyrie.[11] Robert's share was valued at 30s, making it one of the more valuable manors in the hundred.[12] The lesser share was held by Earl Hugh I d'Avranches, where it was combined with Bodeugan/*Bodugan*, Cil Owen/*Chiluen* and Maen Efa/*Maineual*, which together had the same number of ploughlands but was less intensely settled than Robert's share; Hugh had no demesne there, and instead there were was a Frenchman and two villeins with a plough.[13] The shares mentioned are somewhat intermeshed, with Robert's holding at Bodfari being separated from Dyserth by Hugh's lands at Maen Efa, Tremeirchion (part of a separate trio of berewicks) and Bryngwyn. Clearly these groups were designed to make up a single ploughland, but when this occurred is not immediately clear.[14]

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[9] *DB* Cheshire. FT1.2, FT2.2, f.269r.
[10] *DB* Cheshire. FT2.2, f.269r.
[11] *DB* Cheshire. FT2.2, f.269r.
[12] *DB* Cheshire. FT2.2, f.269r.
[13] *DB* Cheshire. FT1.2, f.269r.
[14] Peter Sawyer and Alan Thacker, 'The Cheshire Domesday', in *VCH Cheshire*, I, pp.293-371 (p.335).

Dyserth is later mentioned in a confirmation issued by Earl Ranulph I of Chester (r.1120-1129), which purportedly lists all the gifts made to St Werburgh's Chester by that earl and his vassals. In this document Ranulf confirms the grant of the church of Dyserth by his brother William Meschin; presumably it passed to Earl Hugh upon Robert of Rhuddlan's death in 1093, then to Hugh's son Richard in 1101, and finally to the Meschin brothers when Richard died aboard the White Ship in 1120.[15] Barraclough considered this a spurious charter, likely compiled by the monks of St Werburgh's during the reign of Stephen and advised 'considerable caution'; before him Tait was also suspicious, but was willing to accept that the text as it we have it was a product of the 1120s.[16] Suspicious features include the neologism *inperpetuum* and the shortness of the address, both of which point to a late-twelfth or early thirteenth-century date.[17] The original is lost but was copied by Sir Peter Leycester *ex ipso autographo*, presumably meaning either the original or perhaps Guncelin de Badlesmere's great *inspeximus* of 1280 (now preserved rather inexplicably in the library of St George's Chapel, Windsor as MS. xi. E.5).[18] William Dugdale evidently had access to a copy which he included in his *Monasticon Anglicanum* and although it differs in several readings to Leycester's, it was taken by Barraclough to be the superior text.[19] Despite its difficulties, like the other confirmation charters purportedly issued by the earls of Chester most of the grants it records are likely to be genuine and there is no compelling reason to doubt that Dyserth was granted to St Werburgh's and although the exact date is elusive it could have occurred at any point during Earl Ranulf's tenure. St Werburgh's was certainly in possession of the church

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[15] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 6, p.48;, *ChANEC*, 13, p.23.
[16] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 6, pp.50-51; ChANEC, 13, p.25.
[17] *ChANEC*, 13, p.25.
[18] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, pp.xxix-xxxi.
[19] ChANEC, 13, p.23.

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c.1132-35, when William Meschin's son Ranulf (titled 'de Rhuddlan' in the text of the charter) confirmed his father's grant.[20]

It is also worth noting William Malbank's possible grant of the tithes of *Yraduk*, likely an older form of Hiraddug, as in Moel Hiraddug.[21] This grant occurs in the so-called Eaton charter, the great charter of confirmation issued by Earl Ranulf II (1129-53), which not only confirms all of the grants of Ranulf II and his men, but also recites and confirms the three previous general charters of Earls Hugh, Richard and Ranulf I. In most respects the recitals in the Eaton charter accord well with the three other charters as recorded by Dugdale, Leycester and the Badlesmere *inspeximus*, but they are not identical, and Malbank's grants of the tithes of *Yraduk* (along with those of *Salchale* and *Claituna*) appear only in this Eaton version and not the original S*anctorum prisca* charter, which was purportedly a general confirmation charter issued by Earl Hugh I recording his grants and those of his men to St Werburgh's.[22] If the charter is taken at face value, the grant probably occurred toward the end of Hugh's life in the years leading up to his death in 1101, although it has many of the same weaknesses as the charter of Ranulf I mentioned above (though again the grants incorporated in it appear to be genuine and have the benefit of perfectly feasible witness lists in most cases). Regardless, the identification is strengthened when one considers the position of Moel Hiraddug, which abuts the later parish of Dyserth but actually lies in the neighbouring parish of Cwm. Cwm encompassed two townships, later called Uwchglan and Isglan, and the forms *Hyraduk Ughlan* and *Hyraduk Islgan* were noted in the Chester recognizance rolls in 1414-16 and 1418

[20] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 45, p.93; Edmund King, 'Ranulf (I) [Ranulf le Meschin], third earl of Chester' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).
[21] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 3, p.18.
[22] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 3, pp.13-15.

respectively.[23] Cwm does not seem to appear in these records, and therefore might be a later coinage. The question then arises what tithes were actually being granted to St Werburgh's. Nearby Dyserth was apparently granted to St Werburgh's during Earl Ranulf I's tenure (1120-29) by William Meschin, having previously been held by Robert of Rhuddlan in 1086.[24] Hiraddug was also in Robert's hands at that time. Presumably therefore William acquired some interest in Hiraddug after Robert's death in 1093, providing something of a *terminus post quem* for William's grant. The difficulty is that no church was recorded at Hiraddug in Domeday, and therefore it is not certain whether the tithes in question were those of a separate full parish church (some sort of predecessor to the church of Cwm which went unrecorded in Domesday), or perhaps the tithes of the berewick of Hiraddug (in which case this may have included Pengdeslion, which is now lost but was recorded in the same entry as Hiraddug and was presumably somewhere nearby).[25] The church of Cwm is dedicated to SS Mael and Sulien, two sixth-century saints, although because they are both reasonably well-known throughout Wales and beyond (Sulien can be alternative form of Tyslio), this does not necessarily support an early date for this church, as it may date to a later phase when the cults of these saints were expanding from their earliest cult centres, probably between the seventh and tenth centuries.[26] It does however provide connections to both Gwynedd and Powys, in that Mael was thought to have been a disciple of St Cadfan and followed him to Wales from Brittany.[27] Cadfan is usually associated with Gwynedd, and especially with his *clas*

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[23] Thomas Duffus Hardy, 'Appendix II. No. 1. Welsh Records: Calendar of the Recognisance Rolls of the Palatinate of Chester, from the beginning of the reign of Henry V. to the end of Henry VII.' in *The Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1876), pp.161, 399-401. The relevant rolls in the National Archives are 2 & 3 Henry 5. m. 5 (1) and 5 & 6 Henry 5. m. 8 d. (2).

[24] DB Cheshire. FT2.3, f.269r.

[25] DB Cheshire. FT2.3, f.269r.

[26] Sabine Baring-Gould and John Fisher, *Lives of the British Saints* (London: Charles J. Clark, 1907-13), II, p.1.

[27] Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the British Saints*, III, pp.399-400.

churches at Tywyn and Ynys Enlli / Bardsey Island, which are both mentioned in Llywelyn Fardd's praise-poem *Canu i Gadfan*, composed shortly after 1147.[28] There is also a Powys link here however, in that Cadfan is also associated with the church at Llangadfan, Monts., and this accords well with the cults of other northern Powys saints, such as Beuno (see the section on Whitford below), who were also venerated in Tegeingl.[29] It should also be noted that the same dual-dedication to Mael and Sulien recurs at Corwen, which has been previously identified as a mother-church and a probable *clas*.[30]

The main reason why Hiraddug is relevant to the question of the relationships between different churches is that the grant of its tithes to St Werburgh's separately to those of Dyserth suggest that the former was considered to be some sort of appropriate ecclesiastical unit within which property rights over tithes could be territorialised and alienated. This does not have to have been a full parish (the possibility of some sort of dependent chapel of Dyserth or estate church cannot be ruled out) and it may have been that an essentially secular or tenurial unit (the berewick) was considered suitable. Either way, this evidence, whilst slight, would seem to suggest that Hiraddug was not considered a part of the parish of Dyserth. It is of course possible that William Malbank may have granted the tithes of Hiraddug to St Werburgh's as a small part of Dyserth, only for William Meschin to go further and grant the entire church and its appurtenances to the abbey. Cwm would then be a later addition, incorporating some lands from the mother-parish of Dyserth. However, one would have to explain how the church at Dyserth, which

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[28] Llywelyn Fardd, *Canu i Gadfan*, ed. by Ann Parry Owen (2018) <http://www.welshsaints.ac.uk/edition/texts/verse/CadfanLlF/edited-text.eng.html>.
[29] Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the British Saints*, I, p.38, II, p.4.
[30] Baring-Gould and Fisher, *Lives of the British Saints*, III, p.400.

was under the control of Robert of Rhuddlan in 1086, passed to William Malbank at some point in the 1090s to make his grant, only to pass back to William Meschin in the 1120s whilst his brother Ranulf I was earl. We know that Malbank had a son and heir, named Hugh, who inherited around 1109 and went on to found Combermere Abbey around 1130, and so this cannot be explained by a failure of the Malbank line and the acquisition of their lands by the earl's family through escheat.[31] It is simpler, and indeed more likely, that the two holdings were separate (as suggested by the fact that they were recorded in different entries in Domesday Book), removing the need for any coincidences of inheritance in our explanation, and that the division between the parishes of Dyserth and Cwm dates to this period or just before. This still requires Hiraddug to have passed from Robert of Rhuddlan on his death to William Malbank, which presumably occurred through a grant of Earl Hugh, although this cannot be confirmed. There is however one circumstance which might contradict this, which concerns the changing fortunes of the Normans as they attempted to occupy north Wales. If William made his grant in the narrow window between the death of Robert of Rhuddlan, and the general Welsh revolt of 1094-95, it may be that St Werburgh's lost its rights in Hiraddug, and that William Meschin regranted them in the 1120s. This would still allow Hiraddug to be a subdivision of Dyserth, and for Dyserth's parish to have been larger at some previous time. It also suggests that we should be cautious about arguing from the lack of sculptural evidence at a particular site, because there is no early medieval stone sculpture to be found anywhere in the later parish of Cwm, and yet there is some trace of ecclesiastical activity. A final possibility of course is that the division between Dyserth and Cwm was fairly recent, and may even have been a product of the first few post-Conquest decades. Also of relevance

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[31] A. P. Baggs, and Ann J. Kettle, 'Houses of Cistercian monks: The abbey of Combermere', in *VCH Cheshire*, III, pp.124-87 (pp. 150-156).

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is Bodfari; no church is noted there in Domesday, but one is noted in a spurious charter of Earl Richard of Chester, dated 1119, which confirms the grant of the manor of Bodfari by William de Punterley *cum omnibus appendiciis suis, id est ecclesiam et totum manerium* to St Werburgh's.[32] This is the third in the series of general confirmation charters credited to the Earls of Chester and the issues with it are similar to that of Ranulf II mentioned above. The question may therefore be asked whether there was a church in Bodfari in 1086 or before, or if it was a recent foundation, and what the relationship between it and Dyserth may have been given the decision to group the two settlements together in Domesday Book.

The date of the church at Dyserth is pushed back into the Viking Age by the presence of the standing cross Dyserth 1. A circle-headed cross of type B2b, it has been dated to the eleventh century based on its form and it similarity to the Cornish cross Quethiock 1.[33] Of the two principal groups of circle-head crosses known in Britain, the unpierced quadrants of the cross-head place this example in the Cheshire group, along with most of the other Flintshire crosses, and the western cluster on Anglesey.[34] Dyserth 1 is not entirely typical, as it features a carved plait around the cross-head on one face, a characteristic feature of the Cumbrian group of circle-headed crosses, making Dyserth 1 something of a hybrid, and demonstrating interconnectivity between northeast Wales and the Cumbrian coast in the Viking Age.[35] Furthermore, the trefoil shape of the quadrants is formed with cusps on the cross-arms and ring, a feature more commonly found in later Cornish crosses (and perhaps also on the lost fragment Walton-on-the-Hill 2 from

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[32] ChANEC, 8, p.15.
[33] *A Corpus Volume III* p.354.
[34] CASSS, IX, p.31; *A Corpus Volume III*, p.109
[35] CASSS, IX, p.32

southwest Lancashire), which demonstrates the variety which exists within the Cheshire-North Wales cross group.[36] This feature also reinforces an eleventh-century date, because of the strong parallels with Quethiock 1, which is dated near the end of a sequence of mid and east Cornish sculpture because of its trefoil-holed head.[37] However, Quethiock 1 diverges from Dyserth 1 in having pierced armpits, as well as thinner and taller proportions.[38] The rest of Dyserth 1's decorative scheme fits more closely with the Cheshire group, with the loose three-strand plait on all three surviving faces being closely paralleled by the fragments Bromborough 1a-c and 3, whilst the ring and bar motif is shared by the cross base Dyserth 2 and the likely-hogback West Kirby 4.[39] As a consequence of these artistic similarities, it may be wondered whether these churches and their sculpture reflect a proliferation of smaller estate churches or proprietary churches established by incoming Scandinavian groups, of the kind clearly spreading in tenth-century England; in this case local lay patronage was therefore not merely a way of displaying generosity to the church, but of deploying these commemorative technologies to buttress the socioeconomic of a new elite.

A case for even greater antiquity might be made on the grounds of toponymical evidence, because the name Dyserth may derive from the Old Irish *dísert*, meaning a 'retreat' or 'hermitage', which is itself from the Latin *desertum* and has connotations of Late Antique desert monasticism.[40] A common element in Irish toponyms, it is usually taken to indicate

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[36] CASSS, IX, pp.31-32, 240-241; *A Corpus Volume III* p.354.
[37] CASSS, XI, pp.196-7.
[38] CASSS, XI, pp.196-7.
[39] CASSS, IX, pp.52-53; *A Corpus Volume III*, p.354.
[40] Ronald Latham, 'desertum', *Revised Medieval Latin Word List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p.141; 'dísert', eDIL (2019); Hywel Wyn Owen and Richard Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 2007), p.135.

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an early church, but given the Viking influence at Dyserth, it may have been borrowed no earlier than the tenth century when Scandinavian settlers arrived in north-east Wales, because these groups are often credited with re-exporting Irish cultural influences to other parts of the Irish Sea region. It may be indicative of what sort of place those Scandinavians found upon their arrival, and that there was already a community of a monastic or para-monastic nature at Dyserth, or a hermitage, but in the absence of archaeological evidence this idea is speculative. Furthermore, other examples of *dísert* names occur in Wales, including inland at Disserth, Rads., where there is also a church dedicated to the purportedly sixth-century St Cewydd, but there are no physical remains to support this date.[41] Caution may be necessary with that example, as the earliest attestation is 1291 and the editors of the *Dictionary of Welsh Place-Names* suggest that it may be best interpreted as 'deserted place', in reference to the lack of any village around the church.[42] An alternative etymology for the Flintshire Dyserth has also been suggested, in which the word is formed from the Welsh intensifying prefix *dy* / 'very' and *serth* / 'steep', a reference to Dyserth's location in the shadow of Moel Hiraddug.[43] In their *Dictionary of Welsh Place-Names*, Owen and Morgan note this second possibility while seeming to favour the Old Irish *dísert* derivation, though both are feasible.

However, a further toponymic argument for Viking Age influence can be made on the basis of another Irish comparison. Amongst the Céli Dé churches of ninth and tenth-century Ireland, *dísert* elements are fairly frequent, for example at *Diseart Diarmada* / Castledermot (Co.Kildare), where there is also a hogback stone, placing the church firmly

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[41] Owen and Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales*, p.125.
[42] Owen and Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales*, p.125.
[43] Owen and Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales*, p.135.

in an Irish Sea context and suggesting some exchange of ecclesiastical culture between Britain and Ireland.[44] Castledermot is an especially apt parallel, as there are also tenth-century standing crosses in its churchyard of a type likely to have influenced the development of similar monuments in Britain.[45] There is another possible link here with tenth-century York, where there is some evidence for the dissemination of Céli Dé ideas; specifically the term *colidei* is used to describe them in a twelfth-century account of the foundation of St Leonard's Hospital during the reign of Athelstan.[46] This hardly proves Céli Dé presence in north Wales, but it does indicate the sort of ecclesiastical thought which was circulating around Britain and Ireland in the Viking Age. Welsh churchmen may well have been conversant with these ideas, and therefore Dyserth could have acquired its name in imitation of these Irish examples, just as the Castledermot hogback reflects the importation into Ireland of a sculptural form developed in the Danelaw.[47]

A Viking Age connection with Ireland is also suggested by Dyserth's dedication to Ffraid and Cwyfan, who represent local adaptions of the Irish saints Cóemgen of Glendalough and Brigit of Kildare[48] The date of Bridget's dedication is not exactly known but her cult was popular amongst the Hiberno-Scandinavian population of the Irish Sea; Brigit has churches across Wales and the western seaboard of Britain, on the Isle of Man and in Dublin and therefore a Viking Age context for the dedication at Dyserth is a reasonable

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[44] J.T. Lang, 'The Castledermot Hogback', *The Journal of the Royal Society of the Antiquaries of Ireland*, 101.2 (1971), pp.154-8 (pp.154-155).

[45] Peter Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland: an Iconographical and Photographic Survey*, 3 vols (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1992), I, pp.37-41.

[46] Fiona Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom: The Golden Age and the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019), pp.118-20; Edmonds, 'Saints' cults and Gaelic-Scandinavian influence', p.54.

[47] Fiona Edmonds (pers. comm.).

[48] Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom*, p.143.

hypothesis.[49] Brigit is also the patron of the major church at West Kirby on the Wirral, which has a particularly impressive collection of Viking Age stone sculpture.[50] Cwyfan is less common amongst early Welsh churches, but later records note the celebration of his feast day on the same date as Cóemgen of Glendalough, and so the identification seems reasonably secure.[51] Once again the dating for the Dyserth dedication is late; Wade-Evans' *Parochile Wallicanum* gives no footnote or reference for the dedication and is content to follow the earlier lists of Rees Rice and Browne-Willis's *Parochiale Anglicanum* without qualification; strictly speaking this places the first confirmed attestation of the dedication in 1733 which is concerningly late and does make the exact process of dedication difficult to explain.[52] Based on north-east Wales' links to Chester in the tenth-century as typified by the Cheshire circle-head cross group (especially concentrated at Chester St John's and on the Wirral), it would seem sensible to date the arrival of these saints at Dyserth to the tenth-century, when Hiberno-Scandinavian communities had become firmly established in western Britain and then became increasingly Christianised. Cumulatively, this evidence suggests that the effect of the Viking Age at Dyserth was quite profound, and that the tenth century may have marked a significant change at the site, involving newly-commissioned stone sculpture in a locally popular style, and perhaps a rededication to two new saints to suit Hiberno-Scandinavian tastes.

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[49] Edmonds, 'Saints' cults and Gaelic-Scandinavian influence', pp.56-57.
[50] See below, pp.173-88.
[51] Fiona Edmonds (pers. comm.)
[52] Arthur Wade-Evans, *Parochiale Wallicanum, or, the Names of Churches, Chapels, etc., within the Dioceses of St. Davids, Llandaff , Bangor & St. Asaph, distinguished under their proper Archdeaconries and Deaneries (as these were in a.d., 1733)* (Stow-on-the-Wold: J. H. Alden, 1911), p.76.

What this evidence does not allow us to do however is to investigate how the church at Dyserth functioned. If one can follow the model which has been applied to Cheshire, where the earliest boundaries of secular estates and church parishes appear to have been coterminous, then one would expect to be able to reconstruct an early parish for Dyserth based on its associations with the other berewicks of Rhuddlan with which it was grouped in Domesday and the records of later medieval parish bounds. Such reconstructions have been undertaken in Cheshire, where there is pattern of each hundred being centred on a royal -*tun* for the purpose of secular administration, and on a corresponding ecclesiastical centre (often in the same place); examples include Eastham (reduced to a chapelry of Brombrough by 1066, but still covering a large area and including the tell-tale detached township of Brimstage), Frodsham (which included the Earl's third penny of the hundred of Roelau, and the church had a parish of eight townships) and Acton (a large manor of eight hides and thirty ploughteams in 1086, and later the centre of a parish of twenty townships).[53] The difficulty here is that Dyserth's parish in our surviving bounds is not especially large. One possibility is that it had already been divided before 1086, perhaps to accommodate the church at Rhuddlan (although whether this was a Norman foundation, or related to a Mercian phase of occupation is unclear). Another candidate is Llanelwy, the future St Asaph, although here Domesday rather unhelpfully lists it in a trio of berewicks along with Caerwys – it is therefore uncertain in which of the three places (Cyrchynan/*Chartan* being the third) the church was located, although a case for Caerwys could be made on the basis of Caerwys 1, a late sixth-century Roman-letter inscribed stone.[54] This also leaves open the question of why exactly Llanelwy was chosen as the location of the bishopric of St Asaph in the mid-twelfth century; its later episcopal status

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[53] Thacker, *VCH Cheshire*, I, pp.263-265
[54] DB Cheshire. FT2.5, f.269r; *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.349-351

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has led some to assume that it must be an early mother-church in the region, but it lacks any Viking Age sculptural evidence, unlike the nearby church at Rhuddlan, particularly as that place-name (though not the church specifically) is recorded in the *Annales Cambriae* in the year 798, and probably also in 921.[55] The sculptural evidence cannot be dated tightly enough to conclusively say that Dyserth 1 and 2 pre- or post-date Rhuddlan 1, but the possibility therefore exists that Dyserth was later than Rhuddlan, and that its small parish was carved out of Rhuddlan's and not vice-versa.

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[55] AC AC 798, 921, ed. and trans. Dumville, pp.8-9, 16-17; *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.363-5
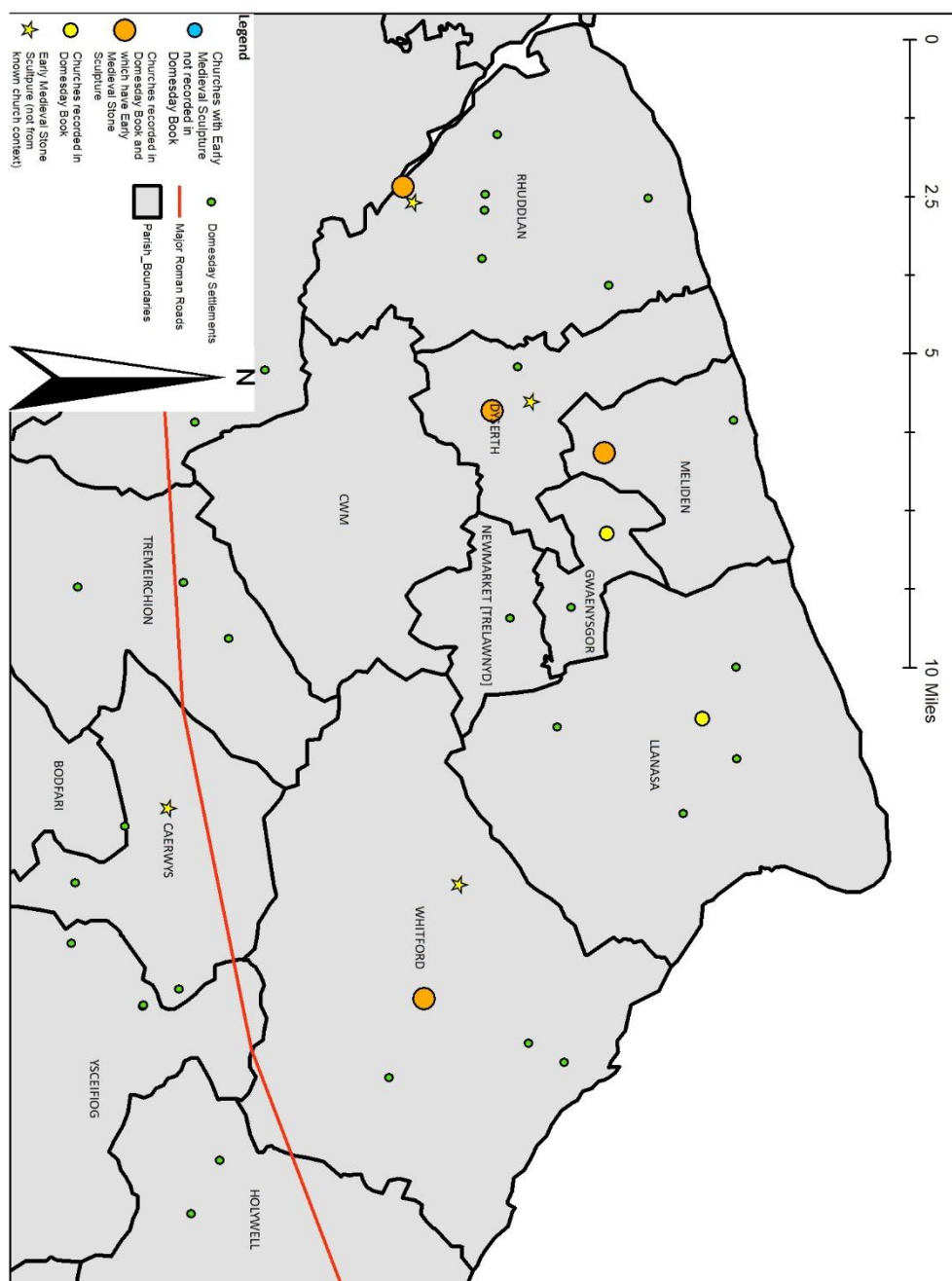
Figure 2 The parishes of western Tegeingl

Note the dense cluster of churches around Dyserth and the unusual L-shape that results from combining the parishes of Dyserth and Trelawnyd

However, there is a clear example of parish division in the 1291 *Taxatio*, which notes that Dyserth had a dependent chapel at Trelawnyd (also known as Newmarket), then known as *Rywlyfuwyd*.[56] Combining the later bounds of Dyserth and Trelawnyd produces a very unusual L-shaped parish, which also seems unlikely to be an original creation. Two parishes lie nestled inside the L, Gwaenysgor and Meliden. As discussed below, both of these places had churches in Domesday Book, and Meliden also has a standing cross of similar date and style to Dyserth's. In the 1291 *Taxatio* both of these were parish churches in their own right (though Meliden had been annexed as a prebend of the cathedral chapter of St Asaph).[57] Meliden's cross (assuming that it came from there originally) would seem to suggest a greater level of wealth than Gwaenysgor, which was an exceedingly small benefice in 1291 at £3. 6s. 8d., which might mean a degree of independence from Dyserth, but the possibility remains that Meliden was carved out of Dyserth's parish, given the clear evidence for its status as a mother-church later in the Middle Ages.[58] Gwaenysgor may also have been split from Dyserth at some point given its small size, and this would have to have occurred before 1086; however it also borders the later parishes of Llanasa and even Whitford which may have presided over this land originally, or Gwaenysgor might be an earlier, but heavily degraded establishment. A more nuanced picture may emerge when one considers the possibility of a proprietary or seigneurial estate church, in which case Gwaenysgor may have originated as a subordinate private oratory within the parish of Dyserth and acquired full parochial status at a later date. This might accord with the Viking Age context of the Dyserth cross, in that the arrival of Scandinavians in the Danelaw is widely associated with the proliferation of Anglo-Scandinavian stone sculpture at lesser sites, which seems to indicate that these incoming populations were

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[56] *Taxatio*, AS.AS.EN.08.
[57] *Taxatio*, AS.00.PB.07, AS.AS.EN.07.
[58] *Taxatio,* AS.AS.EN.06.

enthusiastic about Christianity and patronised (and perhaps founded) churches. [59] Notwithstanding the lack of certain Viking Age evidence at Gwaenysgor, one can imagine that the same sort of settler who either directly commissioned or inspired the Scandinavian ornament on the Dyserth cross might also have founded or adopted a church of their own, initially serving as a private oratory and familial burial chapel, but later growing into a separate parish.

Returning to the link between secular settlement in Domesday and the pre-Norman parish of Dyserth, it is tempting to view the manor of Rhuddlan through the framework of the multiple estate model. The way in which Rhuddlan dominates the unhidated portion of Atiscros by grouping together many minor settlements is reminiscent of the large territories which Glanville Jones and others attempted to reconstruct in order to reveal the early medieval agrarian and administrative organisation of Britain. In that conception of early medieval lordship, a local centre such as Rhuddlan would have been the collection point for renders of foodstuffs from a territory consisting diverse landscapes and an interdependent network of economically specialised settlements, which was eventually acknowledged as a formal administrative unit called a *maenor*.[60] In Wales this pattern may lie behind the formation of *cantrefi* and commotes. The difficulty here is twofold. Firstly, the chronology of the system of administrative units is unclear, and whilst the *cantrefi* are frequently mentioned in the annalistic sources (particularly those which originated as separate kingdoms) it is not until the eleventh-century that the system seems

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[59] Dawn M. Hadley, 'Conquest, Colonisation and the Church: Ecclesiastical Organisation in the Danelaw', *Historical Research*, 69 (1996), pp.109-128 (p.125).

[60] Glanville R.J. Jones, 'Multiple estates perceived', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 11.4 (1985), pp.352-63 (p.354).

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to have coalesced into an actual administrative framework.[61] Furthermore, these later developments are only attested explicitly in the thirteenth-century in the Welsh lawcodes, which are inherently normative texts and are likely to present the role and organisation of the *cantref* as the legal scholars of the day would have liked them to be.[62] Secondly, the specific case of Rhuddlan adds further complications because it is far from clear whether we should be expecting the settlement pattern and its overlying administrative hierarchy to reflect Welsh or English practice, given the political instability alluded to above. However, the differences between early English and Welsh tenurial organisation were not always that great. A useful parallel can be drawn between Rhuddlan and the great soke manors of the Danelaw, which similarly consist of a manor with several berewicks and sokelands which (when held by a church) all pertained to a major political or ecclesiastical centre.[63] However, as Dawn Hadley has suggested, these northern English manors are unlikely to have remained static over the centuries leading up to Domesday (which may have 'frozen' some of them after 1086), and furthermore in England they existed primarily to incorporate the somewhat anomalous group of sokemen into convenient units which might be economically exploited by their lord.[64] In the Atiscros Domesday record we do not see any mention of sake or soke, nor any group of tenants who might be analogous to the sokemen, and so the comparison rests primarily on a superficial similarity in their structure, and perhaps also in purpose given that both Atiscros and the northern Danelaw represent regions far from the centre of English royal power. Another major difference is in the value of the estates; the northern Danelaw sokes tended both to be extremely large but also very populous and valuable, whilst the manor of Rhuddlan,

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[61] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp.568-569; Andrew Seaman, 'The Multiple Estate Model Reconsidered: Power and Territory in Early Medieval Wales', *Welsh History Review*, 26.2 (2012), pp.163-85 (pp.168-9).
[62] Seaman, 'The Multiple Estate Model Reconsidered', pp.168-9.
[63] Dawn Hadley, 'Multiple Estates and the origins of the manorial structure of the Danelaw', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 22.1 (1996), pp.3-15 (p.4).
[64] Hadley, 'Multiple Estates', pp.7, 9-10.

despite covering an extensive area, was sparsely populated and of comparably little value.[65]

To summarise the evidence, Dyserth stand out amongst the churches of Tegeingl thanks to its impressive Viking Age stone cross and separate cross-socket, its rare and interesting toponym (if one accepts the origin from the Irish *dísert*) and its dedication to SS Brigit and Cóemgen. All of these suggest that it enjoyed a period of relative prosperity and religious reinvention during the Viking Age, during which the community there was exposed to Scandinavian and Irish influence as part of a wider Irish Sea cultural zone. The church survived, though perhaps in a rather diminished state, after the Normans arrived in north Wales and took control of the region, and it passed through the hands of the earls of Chester and their leading barons until being granted to the abbey of St Werburgh's Chester, although the extent to which they retained control of it during the mid twelfth-century when the princes of Gwynedd enjoyed a period of military success against the English is beyond the purview of this chapter.[66] What remains obscure is the mode of organisation followed at Dyserth; we do not see the tell-tale portionary status in the 1291 *taxatio* which might indicate that it was once a collegiate *clas* church, nor do we have concrete proof of the conventional monastic life.[67] Trying to push the date of the church much earlier than the tenth century is also very difficult; neither the dedication nor the place-name can be linked to the first few centuries of Christianity in western Britain, nor is there any directly related archaeological or sculptural evidence from Dyserth for

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[65] Hadley, 'Multiple Estates and the origins of the manorial structure', p.7.

[66] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 6, p.48; ChANEC, 13, p.23; On the campaigns of Gruffudd ap Cynan and Owain Gwynedd in this area, see R.R. Davies, *Conquest, Coexistence and Change: Wales 1063-1415* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp.33-45, 48-55.

[67] Huw Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, p.187.

this period. This may lead one to suspect that Dyserth's local prominence was a recent development in the Viking Age, encouraged by Scandinavian patronage linked to the mercantile communities based to the east in Chester and the Wirral.[68] It may be that an already ancient church was reinvigorated by this influx of wealth in the tenth-century, or that the church was founded anew, perhaps using the Céli Dé churches of Ireland as an inspiration. In this case we might be looking not at an ancient mother-church, but a lavishly decorated proprietary church, built either for a newly arrived noble family of Scandinavian or Hiberno-Scandinavian heritage, or a local aristocrat interested in the changing artistic fashions of the region. This same ambiguity applies with regards to Dyserth's parochial jurisdiction and its place in the landscape. The parish boundaries as we have them do not give Dyserth a particularly large parish, but the dependent chapel at Trelawnyd in the 1291 *taxatio* shows that it was once larger.[69] If the parish of Cwm (or Hiraddug if that is how it was known in the twelfth-century) could be conclusively added then we would be looking at an impressive parish indeed but whilst this is perfectly possible there is no compelling evidence which requires us to believe this. In summary, we clearly have a church which once enjoyed ecclesiastical jurisdiction over part of western Tegeingl in the eleventh century, and in all likelihood the tenth, but beyond this the picture is uncertain. Even in the eleventh century, the exact relationship with the neighbouring churches of Rhuddlan and Meliden is unclear, and given that none of these churches is that far from the other (both are within three miles of Dyserth), we have the additional difficulty of trying to discern the relationships within this exceptionally dense cluster of churches. Meliden, which is discussed below, sits within the 'L' formed by combining the bounds of Dyserth and Trelawnyd is therefore slightly more likely to have intruded on Dyserth's parish. There is no evidence to suggest that Dyserth enjoyed any

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[68] Everson and Stocker, 'Transactions on the Dee', pp.160-3.
[69] *Taxatio* AS.AS.EN.08.

special rights over those churches which were clearly contemporary with it (the aforementioned Rhuddlan and Meliden, and also Whitford), except perhaps for the location of the standing cross *Maen Achwyfan* which is dealt with below and is not compelling in and of itself; therefore there are no grounds to argue that it was the head of some sort of grouping or federation of churches like those occasionally found in early medieval Ireland.

3.3 Whitford

Located approximately three miles northeast of Holywell, Whitford is the location of two large stone monuments, most notably the impressive standing cross known as *Maen Achwyfan*. This name, first attested as a field-name in 1388 (*kaeye Mayen ychufan*), means 'the field of Cwyfan's stone'. The coincidence that a cross associated with Cwyfan stands just five miles to the east of the church at Dyserth is striking, given that the latter was also at some point dedicated to him, though there is no other firm evidence to link the history of the two places together.[70] In Domesday, the vill of Whitford is divided between two estates, with one third part of it being held alongside nearby Mertyn and Calcoed by a certain Odin from Earl Hugh.[71] Such an obviously Scandinavian personal name may be significant given the other signs of Scandinavian cultural influence as we will see. As usual for Atiscros, this trio of settlements adds up to a single ploughland, which was apparently worked by a plough belonging to a priest with six villeins.[72] A church is also explicitly mentioned.[73] This is not, at first glance at least, a promising Domesday entry for a major church which one would expect to be more valuable, more

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[70] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.366-71.
[71] DB Cheshire. FT1.8, f.269r.
[72] DB Cheshire. FT1.8, f.269r.
[73] DB Cheshire. FT1.8, f.269r.

densely-populated or to have multiple clergy present, even in Atiscros where expectations of economic development in 1086 are low, although a priest who held a plough in demesne may well have been a figure of local wealth and importance. In theory the church could have been located in any of the three settlements, but there is no evidence for an early ecclesiastical site at Mertyn or Calcoed, and given the continued existence of the church of St Mary and St Beuno in Whitford and the presence there of the cross-carved stone Whitford 1 (dug up from the cemetery of the church in the late nineteenth century), Whitford is by far the strongest candidate.[74] The other two thirds of Whitford were held alongside Bychton by Robert of Rhuddlan (again making up one ploughland), and was worked by two villeins and at least twelve slaves.[75] When mapped, we can see that Whitford is therefore on the crossover between Robert's demesne manor, which was probably centred on Whitford but which also encompassed Bychton to the northeast, whilst Hugh's holdings ran from Whitford in a southerly direction to Calcoed.

The first piece of Whitford sculpture is the aforementioned Whitford 1, a cross-carved stone dated c.925-1000.[76] Carved from an imposing sandstone block measuring 191cm high, it features a Latin cross with square-armpits, square arms and a spiked stem, of a type more commonly found in eastern Anglesey (comparable examples can be found at Llangaffo, Llangeinwen and Llanfihangel Ysceifiog).[77] In all likelihood a grave marker, the stone could have stood either upright in the ground or functioned as a recumbent grave-slab. The very earliest examples of this type of monument are seventh-century, but the editors of the relevant catalogues place it at the end of the sequence based on the form

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[74] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.365-6.
[75] DB Cheshire. FT2.8, f.269r; The slaves are described as male and female – it is unclear if the dozen were mixed gender, or if there were twelve males and an unspecified number of additional females.
[76] *A Corpus Volume III* , pp.365-6.
[77] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.177-80, 188-94; 202-3, 204-6, 365-6.

of the stone and the type of cross which is used, dating it loosely to either the eleventh or twelfth centuries; previous to this Nash-Williams gave a wider range of the seventh-century through to the eleventh. [78]

Much more secure in date is the standing cross Whitford 2, or *Maen Achwyfan*. Standing around 3.4m tall, this is one of the most ambitious works of early medieval sculpture to be found anywhere in Wales.[79] As with the cross at Dyserth, it features an unpierced circle head of Type B1d, whilst all four faces of the shaft feature a range of Viking Age interlace and fret patterns.[80] Notable aspects of this decorative scheme include triquetra knots within the cross-arms, rolls in the armpits and triple concentric mouldings around the cross-head, all features shared with West Kirby 2 and 3 in the Wirral, placing this example firmly in the Cheshire-North Wales group.[81] Furthermore, the cross includes a rare piece of figural ornament, featuring a naked figure grasping a staff in one hand and a battle-axe in the other, whilst at his feet is a serpent; the whole scene is surrounded by a series of circular patterns suggestive of waves.[82] The precise source of this image is unknown but there is little Christian content involved, and it probably derived from Scandinavian mythology.[83] The carving cannot be identified with any particular story, but the device of the serpent is reminiscent of Fafnir, the dragon slain by Sigurd; however the usual details of Sigurd cooking Fafnir's heart and sucking his thumb are absent.[84] Other characteristic Viking Age elements to the decoration include the T-frets on both of the narrow faces,

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[78] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.365-6.
[79] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.367.
[80] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.367-70.
[81] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.367-70; CASSS IX, pp.134-5.
[82] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.367-70.
[83] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.371.
[84] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.371.

using the same K-type patterns found on Meliden 1 in Flintshire, Penmon 1, 2 and 4 from

Anglesey, Chester St John 1-2, Disley Lyme Hall 1-2 and Hilbre Island 1 (all Cheshire),

Ilam 2, Leek and Stoke-on-Trent 1 (Staffs.), Eccles 1 (Lancs.) and Lowther 7 (Westm.).[85]

Examples can also be found on several Manx cross-slabs, including Face A of Gaut's

Cross from Andreas (Kermode's number 73), Face A of the smaller monument from

Ballaugh (77) and Face C of a larger slab from Jurby (78).[86] The latter is an especially

close parallel, because like *Maen Achwyfan*, it uses this motif on a very narrow face, and

the, broad, shallow proportions of *Maen Achwyfan* may owe something to Manx

influence. These signs of Scandinavian influence are especially interesting when one

considers the Domesday entries for Whitford, because Earl Hugh's share of the settlement

(which crucially is the one which appears to have included the church) was subinfudated

in 1086 to man named Odin; he held this manor from Hugh which also included Calcoed

and Mertyn.[87] He may also be the 'Odin' who held part of the large manor of Bistre, also

from Hugh.[88] His Norse name is not necessarily evidence that Scandinavian culture was

still alive in 1086, but together with the stylistic inclinations of *Maen Achwyfan*, it does

suggest that its influence was more than superficial.

On the basis of these numerous Viking Age parallels, the monument has been dated

between 925 and 1000, again placing the period of Viking influence and possible

settlement in the early or mid-tenth century and later.[89] The dedication might be used to

argue for an earlier date, as the presence of a cult of Beuno in Whitford provides a link

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[85] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.221-9, 232-4, 360-62, 371; CASSS II, p.132; CASSS IX, pp.62-4, 74-6, 81, 173-4; CASSS XIII, pp.290-1, 308.
[86] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.371; P.M.C. Kermode, *Manx Crosses*, 1994 reprint (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1907), pp.146-9, 154-9.
[87] DB Cheshire. FT1.8, f.269r.
[88] DB Cheshire. FT3.1 f.269r.
[89] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.371.

back to the earliest centuries of Christianity in western Britain. Beuno's principal church was at Clynnog Fawr (Caerns.), and is thought to be an early monastery of the sixth-century which gradually developed in to a typical *clas* church through the Middle Ages; it remained a portionary church as late as the reign of Edward IV of England, who issued an *inspeximus* confirming Clynnog's purported foundation charter.[90] That Beuno should be venerated in a church in Tegeingl speaks to his status as one of the most popular saints of north Wales, but begs a series of questions in terms of date. Dedications to an early saint can potentially be taken as evidence that the church in question is also early, but this is much more trustworthy when the dedicatee is an obscure local figure (especially if that is the only site where they are recorded). The presence of a major figure like Beuno is more challenging. In the case of the three major saints of the diocese of Llandaf, namely Dyfrig, Teilo and Euddogwy, John Reuben Davies has demonstrated that the expansion of the patrimony of their central churches (for example Llandeilo Fawr) was a gradual process, and that the resultant evidence of place-names and dedications is likely to reflect the expansion of these cults in the centuries after the death of the relevant saints.[91] Therefore, in the case of Whitford, the Beuno dedication does not necessitate that a church was founded here in the seventh century whilst Beuno was alive, and a date as late as the ninth or tenth century is perfectly acceptable. Furthermore, we must also remember that the territorial extent of at least some Welsh bishoprics was coterminous with the kingdoms within which they lay, and that therefore the diocesan geography of Wales is likely to have been profoundly changed by the political developments of the ninth and tenth centuries.[92] In particular one might point to the territorial expansion of Gwynedd

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[90] Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Edward IV's Confirmation Charter for Clynnog Fawr', in *Recognitions: Essays presented to Edmund Fryde*, ed. by Colin Richmond and Isobel Harvey (Aberystwyth: National Library of Wales, 1996), pp.229-42 (p.230-1).

[91] John Reuben Davies, 'The Saints of South Wales and the Welsh Church, p.367.

[92] Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'The seven-bishop houses of Dyfed', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 24.3 (1971), pp.247-62 (pp.247-8).

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under Rhodri Mawr and his successors and the consolidation of political units into larger ones such as the new kingdom of Deheubarth as a time of significant political and, therefore, ecclesiastical change.[93] The expansion of certain bishops' authority at the expense of others' would have been reflected in the choice of cults, dedications and place-names which were promoted by these bishops.

Beuno's cult in north Wales is likely to have benefited from Gwynedd's annexation of smaller units such as Rhos and Rhufoniog, but given the uncertainty about which Welsh kingdom was more in control of Tegeingl it seems unlikely that the arrival of Beuno's cult at Whitford can be dated on this basis (especially because the dates at which the lines of Rhos and Rhufoniog were extinguished are themselves obscure). A further possibility exists based on the link between Beuno and the dynasty of Powys, from which he reputedly descended if the Welsh genealogies can be believed; the ancestry ascribed to him in the fourteenth-century *Buchedd Beuno* makes him a son of Bugi (and therefore brother to St Cadog), and by extension the great-great-grandson of king Cadell Ddyrnllwg of Powys.[94] Furthermore, the relevant hagiographical material locates his birthplace and early religious activity in modern Montgomeryshire, which would make a Beuno more of a local saint. If this explains the origin of his cult at Whitford, then an early medieval date for that church becomes more likely. This material also links him closely to St Winefride/Gwenfrewy, whom he supposedly revived after she was killed by Caradog ap Alawg for rejecting his advances.[95] This makes the Tegeingl connection explicit, given the important pilgrimage site of St Winefride at Holywell. Yet as we will see there are

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[93] Charles-Edwards, 'The seven-bishop houses', p.260-2.
[94] P.C. Bartrum, *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), p.30.
[95] Robert of Shrewsbury, *Vita Sancta Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury Laud Misc. 114 version)*, ed. and trans. by David Callander, § 3, p.64 <www.saints.wales/theedition>.

problems around dating the ecclesiastical presence at Holywell itself, which was certainly

thought to be the site of Beuno's miracle by the twelfth century. His *vita* is not preserved

in its original form; instead we have some allusions in the two mid-twelfth-century lives

of Winefride, and a related mid-fourteenth-century Welsh text known as *Buchedd

Beuno*.[96]

There are signs of other cultural influences at play. For example, Whitford is an entirely

English place-name, from OE *hwit, and OE ford*, meaning 'white ford', which is attested

as *Widford* in Domesday and then appears in Cymricized forms beginning *chw-* in the

thirteenth-century.[97] Whether this is the original name is difficult to tell, as it may have

replaced an earlier Welsh toponym, although what this was is completely unknowable.

An early ecclesiastical place-name is possible, which could incorporate any of the

elements previously mentioned, or Whitford might represent a translation into English of

something like Modern Welsh *rhyd gwyn*. This would seem a tempting possibility given

that the survival rates for Welsh toponyms in England are much higher for topographical

features such as rivers and hills.

Overall, the sculpture at Whitford is indicates some sort of change or renewal there around

the mid-tenth century. This might be explained by the arrival of a new patron in the area

who commissioned sculpture in the latest style, demonstrating influences from across the

Irish Sea, and the functioning of the church may not have changed very much. However,

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[96] Patrick Sims-Williams, *Buchedd Beuno: The Middle Welsh Life of St. Beuno* (Dublin: Dublin Institute
for Advanced Studies, 2018).
[97] Owen and Morgan, *Dictionary of the Place-Names of Wales*, pp.493-4; DB Cheshire FT1.8, FT2.8,
f.268v-269r.

if it was a marker claiming the field in which it stands for the church of St Cwyfan (presumably that at Dyserth), then this would mean that the community of Dyserth itself had chosen to commission *Maen Achwyfan* as a hybrid Irish Sea monument incorporating English, Irish and Welsh forms and motifs. Therefore, it must have regarded these as acceptable in a Christian context. It also displays an openness to external influence, although how deep this ran is unclear; it may be a means of asserting power or prestige by adopting a new and innovative sculptural form, although the novelty may have worn off as the style spread to other Tegeingl churches and to Anglesey. Similar explanations have been proposed for the unusual quasi-hogbacks West Kirby 4, and Bidston 1.[98] However, the sculpture clearly demonstrates an outward-looking aspect to external influences, sharing much with the Dyserth pieces and displaying a familiarity with the cultural milieu of the Irish Sea, especially Chester. Why they may have chosen to mark this particular site so emphatically is another question. Such a marker would have a near universal audience, in that it declared Cwyfan's ownership of the field in question to all, but it may have been conceived with other local landowners in mind, and perhaps also the church of Whitford.

Another tempting explanation is that the cross was erected to mark the donation of the appurtenant piece of land to the church at Dyserth by a secular patron, in which case the cultural allegiances of *Maen Achwyfan* would be determined by an outside figure and not the community of the church itself (assuming that Dyserth was important enough to have one). This would detach the dating of the church at Dyserth from that of *Maen Achwyfan*,

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[98] Howard Williams, 'Clumsy and Illogical: Reconsidering the West Kirby Hogback', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 96 (2016), pp.69-100 (p.97); Richard N. Bailey and others, 'A Miniature Viking Age Hogback from the Wirral', *The Antiquaries Journal*, 86 (2006), pp.345-56 (pp.350-2); CASSS IX pp.49-51, 135-6.

as the grant could have been made to a church which was already quite old. There is more to say about the regional practice of marking lands, territories and boundaries with crosses, which is common throughout Britain in the Viking Age. This is particularly interesting in the context of the field in which *Maen Achwyfan* sits; even today the road which runs past it turns through a long smooth bend.[99] Following preliminary fieldwork in 2003, David Griffiths suggested that this may form part of a curvilinear enclosure surrounding the monument, based on the shape of the field boundary and a corresponding anomaly in the rest of the field revealed by geophysical surveying; the same survey also showed a double linear anomaly interpreted as a possible trackway approaching the cross from the southwest.[100] This evidence is not decisive since it is based on unexcavated magnetic anomalies, and we lack any dating evidence to determine the relationship between *Maen Achwyfan* and other features at the site, although the fact that no trackway appears on eighteenth-century maps of the area is encouraging.[101] The alignment of the cross itself is also intriguing, because the two broad faces point east and west, giving a clear view of the latter when approaching from the possible trackway, suggesting some sort of relationship.[102] If the existence of such features around the cross can be proved, this would provide a more nuanced understanding of *Maen Achwyfan*, because it would then represent a Viking Age monument with all the diverse cultural influences we have already noted, but in the context of a curvilinear enclosure which is more stereotypically 'Celtic'.

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[99] Griffiths, 'Maen Achwyfan, p.150.
[100] Griffiths, 'Maen Achwyfan', pp.150-1.
[101] Griffiths, 'Maen Achwyfan', p.151.
[102] Griffiths, 'Maen Achwyfan', p.143, 151.

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Crucially, this fusion would have occurred in a way which suggests co-operation on the part of the Welsh (whether through the church of Dyserth or not). There may be alternative explanations for the magnetic features, but together this evidence could potentially suggest a productive and diverse cultural milieu in which indigenous and foreign cultural influences were being combined in innovative ways, and this may suggest peaceful relations between the local population and any recent Scandinavian arrivals in the tenth-century. In terms of the church at Dyserth, if the Cwyfan link is pertinent, this suggests that this cultural accommodation encompassed local religious institutions. Therefore whatever change is evidenced by the tenth-century sculpture there, Dyserth is likely to have retained some distinctly Welsh characteristics, even as it acquired an Irish Sea influenced appearance. As is often the case when dealing with such flimsy evidence however, it is possible to marshal an argument to the contrary. In particular, the place-name evidence of Domesday could be read as a suggestion that Whitford was more English than Dyserth, given the clear and consistent form of the toponym given at two points ('Widford'); one could therefore argue that placing such a significant monument to Cwyfan in the parish of Whitford laid down a marker to the more English community, and was an act of defiance in the face of expanding English power.[103] The two views need not be contradictory; as we see in *Armes Prydein Fawr*, there were clearly some Welsh-speakers in the tenth century who welcomed the Scandinavian presence as a potential check to English expansion, and the mix of possible cultural identities and political affinities was especially wide in the tenth century.[104]

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[103] DB Cheshire. FT1.8, FT2.8, f.269r

[104] *Armes Prydein Fawr*, in *Armes Prydein: The Prophecy of Britain from the Book of Taliesin*, ed. and trans. by Ifor Williams and Rachel Bromwich (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1972), pp.xii-xx.

A more practical question is what kind of church existed at Whitford. A look at the tithe maps of the area reveals a respectable but not especially large parish, although the benefice of Whitford was worth a substantial £17. 6s. 8d. in the 1291 T*axatio*.[105] There is also no sign of any division of the church's income into portions, which would indicate a *clas* church. It is unclear what relationship may once have existed between Whitford and its neighbouring parishes; suspicion naturally falls on Holywell as having been largely promoted by the monks of Shrewsbury after they co-opted the relics of St Winefride from her shrine at Gwytherin, Denbs., which would place its growth predominantly in the 1130s.[106] Its lack of any early medieval stone sculpture would also suggest a later foundation than Whitford. There is also the question of how genuine the link between Winefride and Holywell really is; according to the details of her *vita*, the site of her beheading and miraculous revival was at the church which St Beuno had founded, which according to the same source was *Locus uero ubi sanguis illius effusus est, primitus Siccauallis dicebatur /* 'the place where her blood was spilled was called Dry Valley', with *Siccauallis* rendering Welsh 'Sechnant' as used in the Anonymous Life of St Winefride.[107] It is not difficult to link this with the Sychnant Pass linking Conwy and Penmaenmawr, which would place the site of Winefride's decapitation and the consequent appearance of a spring around 25 miles further east of Holywell, to the west of the river Conwy. However, the name is not uncommon throughout Wales, and one could point out the Aber Sychnant, a tributary in the headwaters of the River Clywedog in modern Denbighshire, which would provide a more local Sychnant for Beuno's church. Neither is precisely right for Holywell however. Our first written mention of Holywell

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[105] Taxatio, AS.AS.EN.04.

[106] Robert of Shrewsbury, *Vita Sancta Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury Laud Misc. 114 version)*, ed. and trans. by David Callander, § 37, pp.105-7.

[107] Robert of Shrewsbury, *Vita Sancta Wenefrede (Robert of Shrewsbury Laud Misc. 114 version)*, ed. and trans. by David Callander, § 5, pp.17, 67.

comes in the general charter of confirmation issued by Earl Richard of Chester in 1119 already mentioned above, which records that a certain *Burel* gave the church of *Haliwella* to St Werburgh's Abbey.[108] Given that the grant was included in this charter, and not the so-called 'Sanctorum prisca' charter issued by Richard confirming grants of his father and his barons, we can assume that it must have occurred after Hugh's death in 1101. This is rather suspicious given the complete absence of any mention of Holywell in Domesday Book in 1086, and the aforementioned activity of the monks of Shrewsbury in translating and then cultivating Winefride's cult. Indeed, east of Whitford, the evidence of stone sculpture dries up completely until one reaches Hope and the English examples in Chester, with the exception of the lost Ati's cross near Flint.[109] This was not due to an absence of churches, because one is recorded in Domesday Book at Halkyn.[110] Against the argument that Whitford parish may have been divided at some point is the regularity of its borders, which form neat rectangle with one side abutting the Irish Sea with the church almost perfectly in the middle; the usual rules of thumb in these matters might leave one to expect a division to produce a more complicated and interlocking set of boundaries. The range of ecclesiastical interests at play in Holywell in the twelfth-century is further complicated by a grant from Ranulf II's tenure, when Robert de Pierrepoint gave Holywell with its church to the recently-founded Basingwerk Abbey; Tait speculates that Ranulf II's substantial grants of Eastham and Brombrough were intended to repair relations with St Werburgh's shortly before his impending death, and so they may have been intended as compensation for allowing Holywell to be appropriated by one of his men (along with other unknown infractions given the value of the compensation).[111] The

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[108] ChANEC, 8,p.15.
[109] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.470.
[110] DB Cheshire. FT2.7, f.269r.
[111] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 5, p.45.

church was later regranted to St Werburgh's by Ranulf II's son Hugh II.[112] Overall, the picture presented at Whitford broadly aligns with that at Dyserth, in that we have a clear intermixing of different cultures from around the Irish Sea expressed in stone sculpture, and in the linguistic mix of the place-names. What is perhaps different is the spatial configuration of the sculpture; *Maen Achwyfan* stands along in a field today, though it may once have been elaborated with other features. It therefore is not so strongly associated with the church at Whitford and this may suggest that the site was configured differently, and that whatever communal or memorial function is fulfilled occurred away from the church, perhaps indicated another focus of religious life or the site of a family memorial or an undeveloped burial ground.

3.4 Meliden

Close sculptural links are also apparent between Whitford and Meliden, around six miles west of Whitford and one and half north of Dyserth. There is only one piece of early medieval stone sculpture recorded here, a now-fragmentary cross recorded in two ways; one part is still extant in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, whilst our other record is a sketch by Edward Lhuyd or his assistants c.1696 and subsequently copied into BL Stowe MS 1023, f.152.[113] This shows a larger fragment of a cross-shaft, including the round outline of a circular cross-head. Most literature has focused on the similarities between this piece and *Maen Achwyfan* just five miles away to the east, because of the many features which they share. These include a large double-beaded plait on Meliden 1's face A ii (with 8 strands as the surviving fragment survives today, though it may once have had 10 strands, comparable to 12 on *Maen Achwfyan's* face A iv, and 14 on face C ii), an

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[112] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 5, p.45.
[113] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.359.

identical plaitwork motif forming an X-shape within a square panel (Meliden 1 face C i and *Maen Achwyfan* face C iii, with the latter tentatively identified as type Y8 fretwork), interlocking K5-type T-style fretwork on the narrow sides of the crosses (Meliden 1 face D i and *Maen Achwyfan* face D i) and a similarly mysterious carved figure of a naked man apparently standing on or being surrounded by a collection of curved lines (Meliden 1 C iii and *Maen Achwyfan* C iv).[114] The two pieces also share carvings of quadruped animals on a narrow face (Meliden 1 B ii and *Maen Achwyfan* B vii) at the same height as the carved figure and these may also be a part of the same mythological or religious scene. [115] As stated in the above, the inspiration for this carving appears to be Scandinavian, although identifying these figure surrounded by what may be snakes or waves with a particular legend is very difficult and it may also be compatible with a Christian explanation, as often seen on Viking Age crosses in northern England.[116] The antiquarian sketch also features an inscription, but it makes no coherent sense and the original appears to be completely blundered.[117] Meliden is therefore another example of the Cheshire and North Wales group of circle-headed crosses which characterise the region, suggesting links with Whitford, Dyserth and Chester.

In terms of place-name evidence, Meliden is first recorded in Domesday in as *Ruestoch;* this identification was made at least as early as 1916 by James Tait in his edition of the Domesday returns for Cheshire (with the Welsh sections reprinted in 1925) and has been followed by all subsequent editions, but in the absence of a thorough survey of

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[114] *A Corpus Volume III* pp.362, 367-70.
[115] Edwards, *A Corpus*, iii, pp.362, 367-70.
[116] Richard N. Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London: Collins, 1980), p.49 ; Kopar, *Gods and Settlers*, pp.42-3.
[117] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.362.

Denbighshire place-names it etymology cannot be known with any confidence.[118] By 1241 it has become *Estradmelened*, with other thirteenth-century sources recording it as *Altimeliden* or *Aldmelyden*, and the modern Welsh form is still Gallt Melyd.[119] This appears to be derived from the Welsh *allt* / 'hill(side)' or 'slope' and the personal name Melyd, presumably the same person as the saint of that name to whom the parish church is dedicated.[120] Recorded in Domesday Book as a holding of Robert of Rhuddlan in the same entry as nearby Prestatyn (derived from OE '*prēosta*' / 'priests' and '*tūn*' / 'settlement', this unilocal dedication supports an early beginning for Meliden as an ecclesiastical site, given that there would be little reason to invent as obscure a saint as Melyd in later centuries, and more widely this may reflect the apparent abundance of local saints in Wales.[121] As per usual there are no dateable early medieval remains of this church, but it is possible that the current building incorporates a thirteenth-century core which is encouraging.[122] The twinning with Prestatyn in Domesday is intriguing; it is perfectly sensible on the grounds of geographical proximity, the two being less than 2 miles apart, but the names may imply more about the relationship between them. Names beginning with *prēosta* are often considered to be secondary and in this case the generic quality of the toponym versus the specifically saintly one at Meliden may imply that the latter is earlier and that Prestatyn was only named after the community of St Melyd was established.[123] In particular, *prēosta-tūn* toponyms have been argued to represent residual part of a church's property left for the clergy after its other lands had been appropriated,

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[118] DB Cheshire, FT2.15, f.269v; James Tait, 'Flintshire in Domesday Book', *Flintshire Historical Society Publications*, 22 (1925), pp.1-37 (p.30).

[119] Owen and Morgan, *A Dictionary*, p.316.

[120] Owen and Morgan, *A Dictionary*, p.316.

[121] Owen and Morgan, *A Dictionary*, p.399; DB Cheshire, FT2.15, f.269v.

[122] Edward Hubbard, *The Buildings of Wales: Clwyd (Denbighshire and Flintshire)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), pp.388-9.

[123] Thomas Pickles, 'Biscopes-tūn, muneca-tūn and prēosta-tūn: dating, significance and distribution' in *The Church in English Place-Names*, ed. by E. Quinton (Nottingham: English Place-Name Survey, 2009), pp.39-108.

probably at some point from the eighth century to the tenth.[124] Against this however, it is Prestatyn which appears first in the relevant entry, which may imply that it took primacy. Yet Prestatyn lacks sculpture (either extant or in antiquarian sources), whereas Meliden had its substantial cross. Indeed, it may be that Prestatyn was dependent upon Meliden and formed part of its endowment; it was perhaps the settlement of the priests in the sense that they owned it or held rights to rents and food renders from it. The alternative is that Prestatyn was originally independent of Meliden and that the two only became associated during the tenurial reorganisation of the Rhuddlan area in connection with some phase of the *burh*/*llys*/borough there, in which case the link would date to around 921 at the earliest and may have occurred as late as the 1070s when Earl Hugh d'Avranches and Robert of Rhuddlan came into their lands. The final option is that the grouping of the berewicks into groups was arbitrary and resulted from the whim of the officers who performed and then compiled the Domesday survey, but if this were so, one would expect the settlements to be more widely scattered across the region.

On this subject, there are other examples of Domesday ordering pairs or trios of Rhuddlan's berewicks where one has a church based on other kinds of evidence but is not written first and this may be worthy of investigation. However, these tend to look like more minor churches given the fact that we usually lack any pre-Norman physical remains for them. They include *Inglecroft et Brunfor et Alchene* (Inglecroft, Brynford and Halkyn) and *Cancarnacan [et] Wenescol* (Carn-ylchan and Gwaenysgor).[125] Of these, Halkyn was later the site of a parish church whilst Brynford was in the parish of Holywell.

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[124] Pickles, 'Biscopes-tūn, muneca-tūn and prēosta-tūn', pp.39-108; Thomas Pickles, 'The Christian Landscape of Early Medieval Chester and Wirral' in *Looking at the Landscape: Glimpses into the History of Cheshire and Beyond*, ed. by Graeme J. White and Sharon M. Varey (Chester: University of Chester Press, 2022), pp.9-30 (p.15).
[125] DB Cheshire. FT2.7, FT2.12, f.269r-269v.

Gwaenysgor went on to be the seat of a small parish containing the preceding Carn-ylchan and was therefore more likely to be the site of the *ecclesia wasta* / 'derelict church' noted in 1086, especially as there is still a small late medieval church standing there, whilst Carn-ylchan is little more than a hamlet in the modern day.[126] There is also the case of Whitford, which is recorded twice because the manor was divided between Earl Hugh and Robert of Rhuddlan; when Whitford comes last in the entry describing the former's share, it may be because Earl Hugh held only a third part.[127] In the second entry for Robert of Rhuddlan it occurs first, as does Dyserth in both its entries.[128] Our sample is extremely small, but the fact that the compilers were not struck by the importance of these ecclesiastical sites over their neighbours may suggest that even the first-named place was not especially large or important, at least not according to the terms of Domesday. This primarily sought to determine the taxable value of land and the financial and military resources which might be exacted from it by the crown; it may therefore be a consequence of a lack of interest in the churches of north-east Wales because they were not hidated, unlike those further east which were recorded individually in a more typical format. It also ties in with the impression that this area was underdeveloped economically and underpopulated, and that those churches as it possessed, although actually fairly high in number, were only small and of little financial value.[129] Of course, it may be simple ignorance on the part of both the surveyors and compilers of Domesday, compounded by a lack of interest in such poor and peripheral holdings. The difficulty with a case like Meliden, never mind a Whitford or Dyserth, is how does one reconcile this with the impressive stone sculpture from these sites? Continuing with the church itself, by the

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[126] DB Cheshire. FT2.12, f.269v.
[127] DB Cheshire. FT1.8, FT2.8, f.269r.
[128] DB Cheshire. FT1.1, FT2.2, FT2.8, f.269r.
[129] Sawyer and Thacker, The Cheshire Domesday', in VCH Cheshire, I, p.338.

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1291 *Taxatio* its benefice had been annexed as a prebend of St Asaph cathedral, was held by a priest named *Kefnerth* or *Kesuerth* and valued at a fairly low £7. 6s. 8d. (i.e. 11 marks) compared to the other parish churches in the region, although this may reflect the small parish it possessed when its boundaries first came to be mapped.[130] Meliden is therefore a difficult to site to interpret; its smaller parish, modest valuation in the 1291 *Taxatio* and the slightly later date of its sculpture so point to however to a somewhat less wealthy or important church, or at least one which took longer to benefit from the influx of lay patronage in tenth- and eleventh-century Tegeingl; this is a useful reminder that each of these sites has its own biography and it should not be assumed that all this stone sculpture appeared at the same time. The main argument for an early date would be the dedication to Melyd, and also the toponym Prestatyn, which may have been an estate held by the local clergy though once more, precise dates are elusive.

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[130] Taxatio, AS.00.PB. 07, AS.AS.EN.07, AS.00,PB.07.
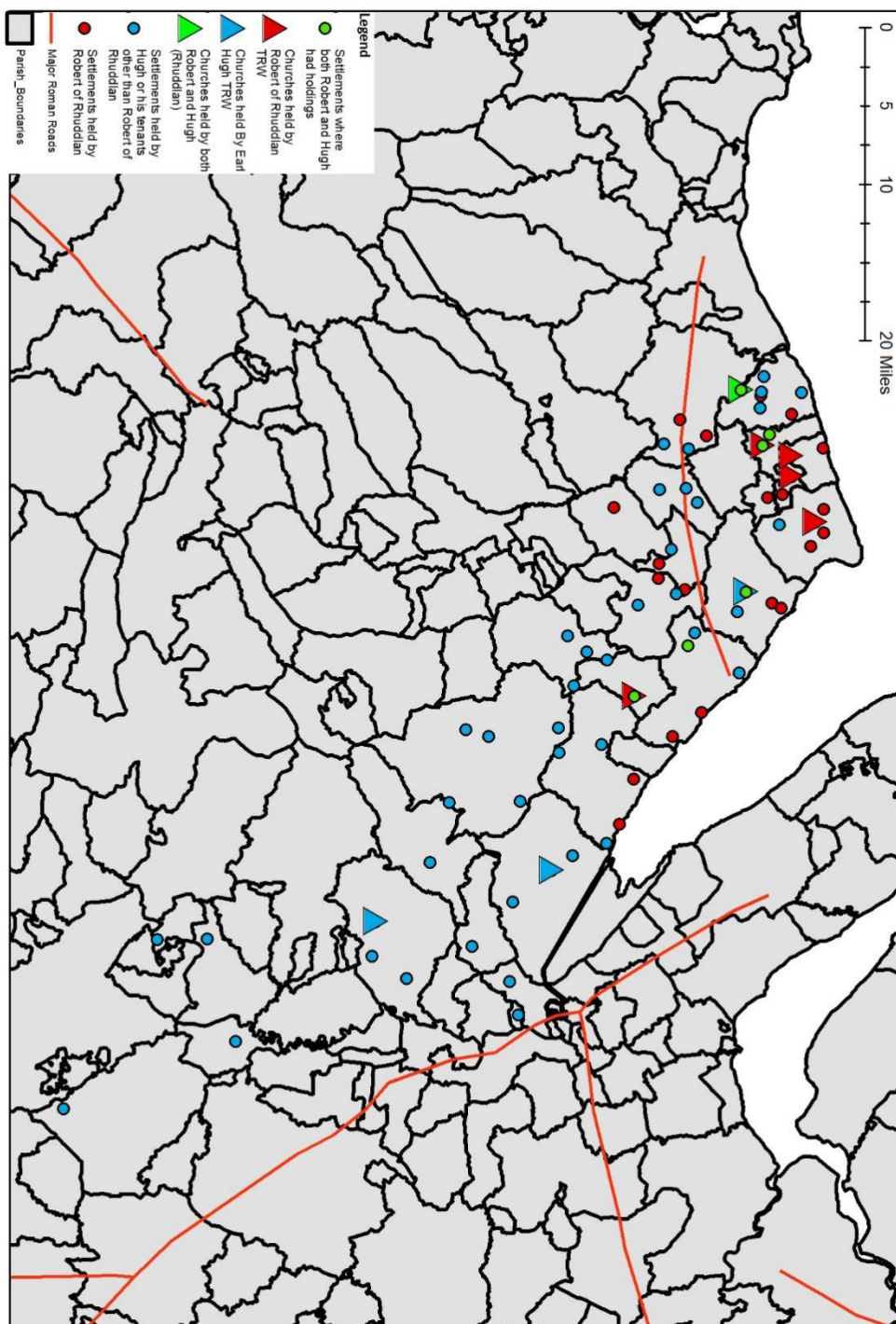
Figure 3 The distribution of churches and settlements in Tegeingl in Domesday.

Note that a green dot above a triangle notes that both Earl Hugh and Robert of Rhuddlan held land in that place, but that only one of them held the church

Turning to some more general comments about the parishes of this region, if one works from the assumption (and given the scarcity of evidence that may be all that it is) that the earliest churches of north-east Wales would have had very large parishes, as the minster-model often applied in England would suggest, and that these were subsequently divided as the local church network was filled in during the early medieval period, then we must start by identifying which churches are likely to be the oldest. The difficulty here is that we have only a single piece of evidence which certainly predates the ninth-century, namely the Roman inscribed stone Caerwys 1.[131] Dated by Nancy Edwards to the second half of the sixth century, this is a Roman-letter inscribed stone and grave marker which reads HIC IACIT MVLI/ER BONA NOBILI, translated 'here lies Bona wife of Nobilis (or Nobilus) or 'here lies the good wife of Nobilis', or 'here lies the good wife Nobilis'.[132] The *hic iacit* formula originates in a Late Roman context during the fourth century but its introduction into Britain is difficult to date precisely, but it became widespread throughout western Europe.[133] The inscription is notable given it commemorates a woman, and not a man as is the case with most similar examples, and the *hic iacit* formula is a strong indication that Christian burial activity was occurring the Caerwys area in the sixth century. However, linking this to the early medieval configuration of churches in Tegeingl is challenging, because although it now lies in the parish church at Whitford, it was first recorded after being recycled as a gatepost around a mile north of Caerwys, and so we have lost its initial context which might help us identify an early ecclesiastical site.[134] However, subsequent detective work has reconstructed a likely site in a field called Cae'r Orsedd (the field of the mound or tumulus) which still contains an eponymous

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[131] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.351.
[132] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.349.
[133] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.122-3.
[134] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.349.

barrow.[135] Whilst tentative, this is an attractive possibility for the stone's original location given the frequency with which early medieval grave-sites and funerary monuments reused and referenced prehistoric features, which Tegeingl still has in abundance, and the hoard of Roman coins reputedly unearthed nearby.[136] We must also recall that the archaeological evidence should make us wary of assuming that an early cemetery must have evolved at some point into an ecclesiastical site, and the excavations from Tandderwen are a case in point, showing a sophisticated east-west aligned cemetery clustered around a handful of focal graves, but not next to a known parish church.[137] Indeed, one theory would posit a gradual evolution of burial practice across the earliest Christian centuries in western Britain from a continuation of using existing ancestral (and therefore originally pagan) burial grounds toward burial in a churchyard, especially where that site could boast the relics of an early saint.[138] The dating for this change is highly obscure, but a long transition period lasting into the eighth and ninth-centuries may be feasible.[139] This may be one way of explaining the gap in our evidence between the Caerwys stone, which was of a Roman style which had died out in Britain by 700, and the flourishing of the Viking Age styles epitomised by the standing crosses at Dyserth, Meliden and Whitford in the tenth and eleventh centuries; Caerwys 1 could originate from an earlier Christian burial ground which became redundant as churchyard burials became more prevalent. It may also explain the remoteness of the stone from any church; it could date to a period before the church at Caerwys (or indeed any other church) had established a monopoly over the burials of the local population. Furthermore, Caerwys 1 is still valuable as an indicator that Christianity had arrived in this part of Wales by the later

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[135] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.349-350.

[136] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.350.

[137] Heather James, 'Early Medieval Cemeteries in Wales', in *The Early Church in Wales*, ed. by Edwards and Lane, pp.90-103 (pp.92-93).

[138] Nancy Edwards, 'The archaeology of the early church in Wales', p.10.

[139] James, 'Early Medieval Cemeteries', pp.92-3.

sixth century, and its use of the ubiquitous *hic iacit* formula indicates contact with the rest of Christian Europe.[140]

Important though that evidence is, it leaves us little farther forward in identifying the most ancient parishes of Tegeingl. Domesday is immensely valuable here because it confirms the presence of churches at several sites by 1086. However, before we deal with these, there is also the difficulty posed by several churches which are noted in early twelfth-century charters, and which might predate the Norman Conquest. Examples mentioned above include Holywell (particularly important because of its large parish) and Bodfari. Most of these churches are recorded in problematic circumstances however, usually in long general confirmation charters issued by the first four earls of Chester reaffirming a variety of grants made by them and their men.[141] The three main examples all have a problematic textual history, in that they survive mostly as late medieval or early modern antiquarian copies made from the muniments of St Werburgh's Abbey, Chester, which was refounded by Earl Hugh d'Avranches around 1093.[142] The original cartulary of the abbey is now lost barring two fragments still at Chester cathedral, but a summary of its contents was made in the early fourteenth-century (prior to 1310 in James Tait's opinion).[143] This copy, which is more properly regarded as a register, is now designated BL Harley MS 1965 and forms the basis of our record of the abbey's holdings; some of the later material can be corroborated by later medieval or early modern copies, or occasionally extant originals. The three earliest charters (one each for earls Hugh, Richard and Ranulf I) easily arouse suspicion because of the very large number of properties

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[140] Mark A. Handley, 'The origins of Christian commemoration in late antique Britain', *Early Medieval Europe*, 10.2 (2001), pp.177-99 (p.186).
[141] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, , 3, 5-6, 8, pp.13-37, 39-67; ChANEC, 3, 8, 13, 28, pp.2-11, 14-16, 22-26, 39-47.
[142] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, p.xxxv-xliv.
[143] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, p.xxxiii.

which they grant, and therefore a cynical scholar might regard them as figleaf for an enormous land-grab by the abbey at some point in the twelfth or late thirteenth-century. On textual grounds they are also of a rather unconventional form which has lead previous editors to think that they must be fabrications cooked up in the abbey, though some of the unusual features of these *pancarte* may reflect a genuinely early date.[144] Clearly these documents are not above suspicion, and there are some examples of impossible or highly unlikely combinations of dates and witnesses as revealed by comparison with surviving originals or sound copies of the grants in question. However, there are fairly few of these when considered as a proportion of the overall number of properties noted, and in most of the Welsh examples we have the advantage that many of the churches and properties granted to the abbey were lost fairly quickly in the course of fighting in the twelfth century as the border shifted back and forth between England and the Welsh principalities. This inspires some confidence that these grants are grounded in some sort of reality, because if a twelfth-century forger were hoping to claim new properties for his abbey, one would expect them to choose properties which were more secure, less vulnerable to loss or destruction through warfare and which could be acquired more easily and quickly; pursuing these Welsh churches would have been more difficult and less attractive, and their presence in the confirmation charters despite this can be taken as a sign that St Werburgh's genuinely had held these churches at one point. One might counter this point by noting that the resultant disruption to landholding patterns may have created opportunity for a cunning monk to expand his abbey's endowment in north-east Wales, but if the grants were fabricated in the later twelfth-century, after the campaigns of Gruffudd ap Cynan and Owain Gwynedd in Tegeingl, then the forgery was clearly executed well or with access to authentic witness lists from other documents, as the

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[144] *ChANEC*, pp.7-9.

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subscriptions to these charters are mostly free from chronological paradoxes or other provable factual errors. As it is, I can find no convincing reason not to accept Tait's line of argument that these charters mostly record genuine grants, because of the integrity of their witness lists, even if their current form as a general charter of confirmation might be the product of St Werburgh's scriptorium. This view, with some qualifications, was also accepted by Barraclough in his collection of the charters of the Norman earls of Chester up to 1237.[145]

All of this being the case, it seems we have a small group of churches whose earliest mention is from the earliest decades of Norman rule in England. It may therefore be asked whether these churches were new foundations at this time, or if their dates might be pushed back before the Conquest by some other means.

3.5 Rhuddlan

If the evidence for Meliden is somewhat equivocal, we are much on firmer ground with Rhuddlan, which was of obvious importance as a proto-urban centre by the 1090s and which played a crucial role in Anglo-Welsh border conflict over the preceding centuries and where a church was undoubtedly present by 1086 at the latest. The complicated structure of the manor of Rhuddlan as recorded in Domesday has already received attention above, but there is more that can be said about this settlement. Rhuddlan was first attested in the *Annales Cambriae* in 796, when it was apparently the site of a battle, although between who we do not know.[146] Given its proximity to what would become

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[145] *ChANEC*, p.10.
[146] AC AC 796 ed. and trans. Dumville, pp.8-9.

Cheshire one might suspect Mercian involvement given the large number of other campaigns against the Welsh known from this time; Offa campaigned in Wales in 778, 784, 795 and 796, whilst his successor Coenwulf did likewise in 798, 816 and 818.[147] That the battle occurred in the same year as Offa's death is intriguing but we do not know whether this occurred before or after his passing in July of that year. The two possibilities are therefore that the campaign was in progress or possibly over when Offa died, or that it was a response to his death by the Welsh who saw an opportunity to resist further Mercian encroachments. However, the annal which tells us all of this is extremely terse and contains no other information about Rhuddlan and what sort of place it was. It is also worth noting that the suggestion that the battle occurred on Morfa Rhuddlan, the tidal marshes to the north around the mouth of the Clwyd, or even that the battlefield is now underwater due to an increase in sea levels over the past 1200 years.[148] The annal is further complicated by the death of king Maredudd ap Tewdwr in the same year. The A version of the text in BL MS Harley 3859 reads as follows:

> *an[nus]. Offa rex mercioru[m]. [et] morgetiud. Rex demetoru[m]. morte*
>
> *moriunt[ur] [et] bellum rudglann.*

> Year. Offa King of the Mercians and King Maredudd of the people of Dyfed
>
> died by annhiliation, and the battle of Rhuddlan.[149]

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[147] Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, pp.67-9.

[148] This view can be traced all the way back to David Powel, *the Historie of Cambria (London:* Rafe Newberie and Henrie Denham, 1584). See also mention of it in J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from Ancient Times to the Edwardian Conquest* (London: Longman Green, 1911), i, p.201, and Henrietta Quinell, Marian R. Blockley and Peter Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan, Clwyd 1969-73: Mesolithic to Medieval*, CBA Research Report 95 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1994), p.7.

[149] AC A 796, ed. and trans. by Dumville, p.8.

A second possible mention occurs in 921, when there are two sources which may mention a settlement at Rhuddlan.[150] The first is the Mercian Register, inserted into versions B, C and D of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which notes the foundation of a *burh* at Cledemutha.[151] Whist other possibilities certainly exist, this has usually been taken to been the mouth of the Clywd following the work of F.T. Wainwright in the 1950s, a possibility which is granted extra credence by an interesting mention in the *Annales Cambriae* of the same year.[152] This annal laconically records a *Gueith Dina 's' Neguid* or battle of the new fortress or city, suggesting a military confrontation at a newly founded defended site; a perfectly feasible choice of word in Welsh for a new English *burh*.[153] This would certainly seem to ground the foundation of 'Cledemutha' in a Welsh context, and specifically a north Welsh context given that it forms part of a chain of *burhs* built across the northern frontier of Mercia after the year 900.[154] The identification is therefore probable. We may also consider the archaeological evidence for a fortified settlement at Rhuddlan, where several phases of defensive earthworks have been excavated, although none has been conclusively proven as tenth-century.[155] Sunken-floored rectilinear buildings were also discovered, which withstand comparison with similar remains in Chester, York and Dublin and seem to be a standard type in urban or quasi-urban environments of the tenth-century.[156] Reassuring as the firm dates and physical evidence are for the *burh*, there are still problems with our knowledge, not least that we do not know who fought in the battle of 921, if it was at Rhuddlan. A likely context is the expansion of Edward the Elder's hegemony over his neighbours, in particular the fact that

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[150] ASC BCD 921

[151] ASC BCD 921

[152] F.T. Wainwright, 'Cledemutha', *The English Historical Review*, 65 (1950), pp.203-212 (p.212); AC ABC 921 ed. and trans. by Dumville, pp.16-17.

[153] AC ABC 921, ed. and trans. by Dumville, pp.16-17.

[154] David Griffiths, 'The North-West Frontier' in *Edward the Elder, 899-924*, ed. by N.J. Higham and D.H. Hill (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.167-187 (p.168).

[155] Quinnell, Blockley and Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan*, p.213.

[156] Quinnell, Blockley and Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan*, p.211.

king Idwal ap Anarawd of Gwynedd apparently made some form of submission to Edward at Tamworth in 918, alongside his cousins Hywel Dda and Clydog ap Cadell who were then ruling in Seisyllwg.[157] Wainwright suggested that in this case the building of a *burh* in Rhuddlan was a mutually beneficial endeavour, as it would hinder the movement of Viking forces which had harassed the kings of Gwynedd for several decades (note especially their defeat of Rhodri Mawr in 877, if we are correct in assuming that this was his reason for fleeing to Ireland according to the Chronicle of Ireland).[158] The story of Ingimund as told in the Fragmentary Annals of Ireland adds to the case, as his presence in Anglesey in 902 is likely to have been highly disruptive, and so it may be that Idwal quite willingly entered into a subordinate relationship with Edward to facilitate defence against these Vikings.[159] There is however the difficulty posed by the dating of the *Fragmentary Annals* and their poor state of survival. We have only a seventeenth-century copy of a late medieval vellum manuscript, although the core of the text is an eleventh-century from Osraige.[160]

This still leaves open the question of who fought at Rhuddlan. If it was an Anglo-Welsh affair, then we can only assume a change of heart of Idwal's part, who may have come to resent English dominance in Tegeingl. The second option is that this was in fact a battle against Viking forces, and that this information has simply been omitted because of the extremely terse style of the annalist in the Harley manuscript. Further context is provided by the rather obscure events of Edward's final few years, where he seems to have faced

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[157] ASC A 918, ed. ad trans. Whitelock, p.216.
[158] Wainwright, 'Cledemutha', pp.208-9, CoI, ed. and trans. Charles-Edwards, p.327.
[159] FAI § 429, ed. and trans. by Radner, p.167-73.
[160] See below, pp.161-2.

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significant separatist sentiment in his recently (918/19) annexed kingdom of Mercia.[161] William of Malmesbury notes that he died in 924 in Farndon, on the River Dee and the modern Anglo-Welsh border, whilst dealing with a rebellion of the Mercians.[162] That relations between the different parts of the English realm were fraught is also suggested by the delay in Athelstan's coronation, which eventually occurred on 4 September 925; having reached maturity while serving on Mercia's northern frontier, it is possible that he experienced resistance from the political community of Wessex, who had concerns about accepting a ruler they considered to be Mercian, and who they were not especially familiar with, especially while Athelstan's younger half-brother Ælfweard still lived to claim his share of the kingship.[163] It may therefore be the case that Idwal made common cause with these Mercian rebels and took his opportunity to throw off English lordship, although it must be noted that the gap of three years or so in our sources is somewhat problematic. However, this is exactly what the late account of William of Malmesbury suggests, when he explicitly records the participation of the 'Britonum' in the uprising of 924.[164] There is therefore a rather knotty question here; taken at face value we may have two major Anglo-Welsh conflicts occurring with three years of each other, which rather undermines the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 920 and the supposed submission of the Welsh kings at Bakewell. There is also the Viking dimension to consider; Ragnall of Northumbria also submitted in 920, which weakens Wainwright's idea of an anti-Viking alliance rather fatally. All in all, it is not possible to certainly identify the participants at the *bellum dinas newydd*, but the link with the new English settlement is very hard to discount; whether they fought with the Welsh against an unknown Viking force or against them is unclear.

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[161] Wainwright, 'Cledemutha', p.209.

[162] William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, ed. and trans. by R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), ii. § 133.1, pp.210-11.

[163] Sarah Foot, *Athelstan: The First King of England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), pp.17-18

[164] William of Malmesbury, *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, pp.210-11.

It is also worth remembering that the kingdom of Powys had been suppressed by Gwynedd in the mid-ninth century, leaving Gwynedd as the only likely Welsh power in the area of Rhuddlan, although the nature and strength of that control is highly obscure.[165]

Beyond this, we do not hear of Rhuddlan in the written record again until the events of 1063-64 and the fall of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. Quite what was going on at Rhuddlan through the tenth and most of the eleventh-century is very difficult to see, but the *burh* at Cledemutha is usually thought to have been short-lived because of the total absence of coins anywhere in Britain produced by the mint which one would expect to find there.[166] That Rhuddlan was not completely abandoned however is demonstrated by a two fragments of cross-shafts, discovered in the vicarage in 1935-36, both having been reused in masonry walls (Rhuddlan 1 was built into the front wall of the vicarage, whilst Rhuddlan 2 was built into an adjacent boundary wall).[167] Neither fragment is in good condition, with Rhuddlan 1 being heavily weathered and Rhuddlan 2 having been lost altogether, but both feature typically Viking Age plaitwork and closed-circuit patterns.[168] In Nancy Edwards' opinion, the second fragment is too small to belong to the same cross-shaft as the first, suggesting at least two crosses once stood nearby, and they are both loosely dated to the second half of the tenth century or the first half of the eleventh.[169] That they were found in the vicarage of the parish church of St Mary is indicative and Edwards notes the possibility that they originally stood there, which accords with local knowledge of their history.[170] However care should be taken with this because there are

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[165] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.509.
[166] Quinnell, Blockley and Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan*, p.164.
[167] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.363-5.
[168] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.363-5.
[169] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.364-5.
[170] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.363.

two ecclesiastical sites inside Rhuddlan, those being the current parish church, and another further south, just north of Twthill, a motte on the banks of the Clwyd which is thought to lie within the centre of the tenth-century *burh* (although until it is excavated, any interpretation of this feature must remain speculative).[171] That a church once stood there is clear from the archaeological record, because it was excavated in the 1970s. Digging revealed a substantially-built stone church and cemetery, whilst one of the earliest graves contained a coin of William II Rufus dated 1092-95 placing the construction of the stone church in the immediate aftermath of the Conquest.[172] This is intriguing because it raises the question of where the church near which the two or more standing crosses stood was, and whether the church which Earl Hugh of Chester and Robert of Rhuddlan held in 1086 according to Domesday Book was the now demolished stone church, or an earlier one (probably in wood) of which no remains survive. On the balance of probability one would expect the church nearer Twthill to be older as this accords better with the boundaries of the Mercian *burh*, which might mean that the two Rhuddlan fragments originated there and not at St Mary's. By contrast the current St Mary's church was built during the same program of works as the castle during the reign of Edward I, and was completed around 1300; it is possible that this marked a return to an older per-Norman church site but the shape of the *burh* defences as currently reconstructed does not support this (this assumes that the earliest earthworks, designated Ditch I, followed the outline of the earlier Mercian defences).[173] All this suggests that either the church was built concurrently with the Mercian *burh* in or around 921, in which case it was likely built according to Mercian practices, or the church was pre-existing and the site was consciously chosen in the knowledge that the church would be enclosed

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[171] Quinnell, Blockley and Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan*, pp.8, 78.
[172] Quinnell, Blockley and Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan*, p.79.
[173] Quinnell, Blockley and Berridge, *Excavations at Rhuddlan*, pp.210, 223.

within the *burh*; this may have left more of a Welsh influence to its form and mode organisation, but only further archaeological evidence will be able to confirm the sequence of construction.

3.6 Regional Church organisation in Tegeingl

To offer some concluding remarks on churches of Tegeingl, the early medieval ecclesiastical history of the region remains obscure, but there are certain patterns which can be observed and compared to the prevailing models of Church organisation. The first, and this perhaps stands in contrast to much of the rest of Wales, is that we have relatively little evidence of larger ancient churches in this part of Wales, or of any which might have been organised as monasteries or collegiate churches on the *clas* model. Some examples of these can be found in regions close to Tegeingl, particularly Bangor-is-y-Coed and Llanynys to the south and Abergele to the west, but as is often the case with Tegeingl, it is unclear if any of these enjoyed any level of influence in this region. The claim that is sometimes made that Llanelwy / St Asaph might have been an early Welsh ecclesiastical centre is very difficult to evidence; in particular it has very little support in terms of pre-Norman stone sculpture or chronicle evidence compared to nearby Rhuddlan, and given the way in which the diocese's early history was manipulated in the twelfth century (I think here particularly of the link to St Kentigern and Maelgwn Gwynedd in the supposed foundation charter from the *Llyfr Coch Asaph*, and Kentigern's slightly more credible appearance at Llanelwy in Joscelin of Furness's Life of the saint) there are major dating problems to be addressed here.[174] The lack of any mention of a church in the Domesday

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[174] On Kentigern's *Vitae* see John Reuben Davies, 'Bishop Kentigern among the Britons' in *Saints' Cults in the Celtic World*, ed. by Steve Boardman, John Reuben Davies and Ella Williamson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), pp.66-90.

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returns raises a major objection to the presence of a major ecclesiastical establishment there in the late eleventh century.[175] That a church may have existed at Llanelwy is perfectly possible and one can see how the advancing English would have been keen to appropriate a known ecclesiastical site for their new bishopric, but the only evidence to suggest that Llanelwy enjoyed any special status in the early medieval period is late. The one factor which might be indicative of an early mother-church is the enormous size of the *nawdd* which St Asaph claimed in the twelfth-century.[176] Whilst this is also late, it is grounded in aspects of Welsh law which seem to very old based on similar claims for churches in the Book of Llandaf (although no claim is ever made over such a wide area in that text).[177] The sheer scale of the claim is suspicious, and there is little evidence that it represents any jurisdictional reality at any point in Llanelwy's ecclesiastical history, but this might just be a distant echo of a wider sphere of influence or privilege which has been otherwise totality wiped from the historical record. This all contrasts with nearby Rhuddlan, which has tenth-century stone sculpture, possible archaeological remains of similar date (and if not of the tenth then certainly the eleventh) and chronicle references from 796 and 921.[178] Rhuddlan of course is a rather different site because of its role in the Merican and then English advance into Wales, and may not be typical therefore, but the point still stands.

Returning to those churches which we can be confident about, the three churches which stand out are Dyserth, Meliden and Whitford. This is not necessarily a surprise, as their fine standing crosses are already well-known to scholarship, but there is more that can be

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[175] DB Cheshire. FT2.5, f.269r.

[176] Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, p.171.

[177] Pryce, *Native Law and the Church*, p.170-2.

[178] AC AC 796, ABC 921 ed. and trans. by Dumville, pp.8-9, 16-17.

said about how they sit in their regional and landscape contexts. This relative abundance of high-quality stone sculpture at sites which have only circumstantial evidence for their prominence (or even existence) prior to the Viking Age is striking, and the links emphasised here to the Cumbrian and especially the Cheshire groups of circle-headed crosses are well-established. However, in this context the Tegeingl examples are sometimes treated as outliers in scholarly works which have taken the mercantile Scandinavian communities of Chester and the Wirral as their focus.[179] When viewed as part of the ecclesiastical history of Wales, they are important as a check to any reliance upon the now-discarded model of an ancient Celtic church in Wales, characterised by a proliferation of small churches and hyper-local saints cults. This idea was largely discredited several decades ago across the Celtic regions, but aspects of it live on partly because it can still be a useful framework in some regions of Wales, and also because it remains a tempting position to retreat to for scholars faced with such a scarcity of evidence. These three Tegeingl churches complicate this idea in several ways. The first is that they show the importance of external cultural influence on Wales. This is very apparent in these cases because the visual ornament of these three crosses owe such a huge debt to the Scandiavian-influenced art which had appeared throughout Ireland and Britain in the ninth-century, and demonstrate an openness to foreign ideas which is in some ways contradictory with the idea of a conservative Welsh Church which was resistant to change and intrinsically old-fashioned. Here the examples of Dyserth, Whitford and Meliden are all very useful, because they seem to show quite clearly a phase of renewal or change around the late tenth century in the form of a newly reinvigorated artistic tradition which may be indicative of wider cultural and religious developments. The precise circumstances of the foundation or organisation of these churches remains

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[179] *CASSS* IX, pp.39-40.

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obscure, but the possibility that these churches were taken under the wing of arriving Scandinavian populations, patronised and enriched seems highly feasible and seems to follow other examples (the Scandinavian phase at St Patrick's, Heysham would seem a good parallel for an early-medieval church and the changes that might occur at well-established sites under Scandinavian influence).[180]

This has two important consequences. The first is that whilst these Tegeingl churches were obviously more intensely exposed to this Irish Sea milieu, there is evidence for this occurring more widely throughout Wales; the related Penmon crosses on Anglesey and the presence of habitative Norse place-name in the south-west are testimony to this as well, and together they reinforce the idea that the picture of the Welsh Church as it emerges into a brighter light in the eleventh and twelfth-centuries represents the culmination of several centuries of developments, and should not be assumed to be particularly ancient.[181] Once more, others have already begun to break down these assumptions (for example, in John Reuben Davies deconstruction of *llan* as a toponymic element and his suggestion that many of these names were coined as late as the ninth and tenth centuries).[182] The second, related consequence is that we should be careful not to view the later part of Wales' early medieval history solely as the lead-up to the arrival of the English, and to use terms such as pre-Norman with care; there is a danger here of teleological thinking. In particular, the three examples I have highlighted from Tegeingl show how these periodical divisions, whilst necessary for ease of understanding, are perhaps unsuitable in areas where the body of evidence is not amenable to precise dating.

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[180] W. Potter and R. D. Andrews, 'Excavation and Survey at St Patrick's Chapel and St Peter's Church, Heysham, Lancashire, 1977-8', *Antiquaries' Journal*, 74 (1978), pp.55-134.
[181] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.225-6; Loyn, *The Vikings in Wales* pp.10-11.
[182] John Reuben Davies, 'The Saints of South Wales and the Welsh', pp.392-5.

That we should still try and refine these is of course clear – chronology remains the historian's bread and butter – but the use of such stark partitions can only be undertaken with due care for the difficulty posed by our evidence.

Returning to more tangible affairs, it remains the case that the organisation of the churches of Tegeingl appears unusually flat; it is very difficult to trace continuity across the early Middle Ages for any church in Tegeingl and therefore to establish any order of precedence, never mind anything as complex as an episcopal hierarchy. The main exception to this is Dyserth, the parish of which came to include a dependent chapel at Trelawnyd by 1291 which then became a full parish church in its own right. One might also be able to add the parish of Cwm if the theory which I outline above has any merit. This would have given it quite a broad territorial range, which is presumably reflective of its status at some point early in its existence. Against this one could argue that this may not have made it a very wealthy or influential church if the land which it presided over was sparsely populated or underdeveloped. It may also be the case that other churches in the region also enjoyed a similar sphere of influence at some point but that the details have not been preserved. Continuing, that there was such little distinction between the greatest and smallest churches in Tegeingl in historical reality is highly unlikely; the parallels with Ireland and the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms would lead to us to expect that churches were founded at different times and could move up or down in terms of their formal rank, prestige and reputation, and that they would compete to defend and expand their rights and territorial jurisdiction as part of a flexible and dynamic system of Church organisation.[183]

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[183] Sharpe, 'Churches and Communities', pp.106-8.

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Two factors present themselves which might explain this impression. The first is that the toll of warfare between the Welsh and their Mercian, English and then Anglo-Norman neighbours may have been so disruptive that only a very basic church system could be sustained, consisting perhaps of a few scattered minor churches for the provision of pastoral care to laity on a very occasional basis, or (perhaps less likely) that if the full range of church-types once existed here, it was so thoroughly destroyed that it left virtually no record. The second is that because this region was never at the heart of any political unit, it was for most of the Middle Ages deprived of royal or noble patronage of the kind which was often necessary to found churches; simply there was no local authority who was sufficiently wealthy and interested to devote land and other resources to ecclesiastical projects on a large enough scale. This could be contrasted with the experience of late seventh- and early eighth-century Northumbria, where royal patronage was the key driving force between the expansion of the church network, and where early minsters were often constructed on *villae regiae* granted by the king specifically for the purpose.[184] Closer to home, it is also apparent that the various kings of southeast Wales assumed a similar role, as they dominate the early grants in the Llandaf charters in the sixth and seventh-centuries.[185] The patronage of lesser nobles did develop slightly later in both of these examples, but generally in imitation of the example set by the king.[186] Tegeingl, having no known royal dynasty of its own had no ruler to endow great churches for it, and such local leaders or nobles as there were appear to have lacked the necessary resources. In this respect we must remember however that their churches are likely to have been smaller and poorer than the royal foundations known from elsewhere in Britain

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[184] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* p.55-6.
[185] Sims-Williams, *The Book of Llandaf*, pp.104-5.
[186] Sims-Williams, *The Book of Llandaf*, pp.104-5.

and Ireland, and therefore may have become archaeologically invisible; usually constructed in wood prior to the twelfth century, Welsh churches are mostly unknown in archaeological excavations, with the only clear example being that at Capel Maelog (Rads.).[187] In practice there are likely to be far more, but mostly underneath existing churches which prevents their excavation. Poorer churches, chapels, or estate churches were unlikely to have had the kind of resources or the number of clerics to undertake much writing, and therefore they are also the least likely kind of church to leave any imprint in the early medieval record. This may help to explain why even those churches in this region which seem to be prospering in the tenth and eleventh centuries have no concrete evidence taking them further back in time; that at least some of them lie atop much older church sites seems likely but cannot be proven. Here there are illustrative examples from the Wirral, Cumbria and large parts of Northumbria which have much more secure phases from before the ninth century, which then see a phase of renewed patronage in terms of stone sculpture (some of it even more elaborate than what we find in Tegeingl) in the tenth century following the arrival of their Scandinavian populations.[188] That Dyserth, Meliden or Whitford might have followed a similar path seems highly plausible.

The one piece of evidence in all three of these cases which might take the history of these churches back further is their dedications. Here Dyserth is the outlier, having two Irish saints as its patrons (if we are correct in identifying Cwyfan and Ffraid with Cóemgen and Brigit). Meliden by contrast has a unique dedication to St Melyd, and Whitford has a

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[187] W.J. Britnell, 'Capel Maelog, Llandrindod Wells, Powys: Excavations 1984-87', *Medieval Archaeology*, 34 (1990), pp.27-96 , (pp.43-5).
[188] Potter and Andrews, 'Excavation and Survey at St Patrick's Chapel', pp.55-134.

dual-dedication to Beuno and Mary. Melyd's obscurity is almost total, with no later hagiography, and some would consider this a factor in favour of an early date.[189] Beuno's cult by contrast generated a great deal of hagiography and genealogical material, and this makes one suspicious that its presence at Whitford derives not from any role he might have had in its foundation (which would give a date in the sixth or seventh century) but from the growth of his reputation (and just maybe of the material and temporal interests of his major churches) in later centuries. Such possibilities could be argued almost endlessly, but it should be noted that where identifiable saints can be found as patrons of known early medieval saints in Tegeingl, there is a tendency towards north Welsh saints (Beuno is an obvious example, as is Cadfan who is honoured at Cwm, although the dating of the latter is uncertain as explained above). There may also be a more specific link to northern Powys, which was Beuno's supposed birthplace and where we find the eponymous Llangadfan.

The crucial factor in the early ecclesiastical history of Tegeingl seems to be that lack of local political authority which defines so much of its history. In particular, the apparent failure of the territory of the Decenagli to develop into one of the petty kingdoms of sub-Roman Britain appears to have created the situation for a relative vacuum both politically and religiously; there was no equivalent of the *civitas* of the Cornovii centred at Wroxeter, or of the Silures at Caerwent, ancestor of the kingdom of Gwent. That there was Christianity in Tegeingl is clear; we have the Caerwys stone from the sixth-century and a ring of known early Christian sites surrounding the region, which means there must have been some sort of ecclesiastical activity, even if this was at a very low level.[190] We must

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[189] Nancy Edwards, 'Celtic Saints and Early Medieval Archaeology', p.225.
[190] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.349-51

therefore think of a very sparse and basic church network, geared almost exclusively to the infrequent provision of the most basic pastoral services; at the very most baptisms, weddings and funerals, and even then perhaps not in all cases, and not always performed in a dedicated church. There may have been the occasional round of preaching and hearing confession on an itinerant basis. Such a picture seems similar to the local holy figures who seem to have begun many of the small local churches of Wales and especially Cornwall, but we cannot ascribe any churches to the ninth century or earlier with as much confidence as we can in those regions.[191] Even the large parish of Dyserth may not reflect an island of ecclesiastical wealth, and might be more reflective of how tenuous the Church's presence was in the area up to the Viking Age. It may therefore be the case that we must look at Tegeingl (especially its western parts) as a periphery, one engaged in some of the same religious developments as the rest of Wales but following behind because of its distance from major political centres which is likely to have hindered its development in all manner of ways. The apparent revival of its churches in the tenth century may therefore be viewed as a badly-needed injection of interest and resources on the part of an insecure and Christianising Scandinavian or Gaelic-Scandinavian population which possessed the necessary mercantile wealth and a desire to express their new and growing religiosity.

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[191] O.J. Padel, 'Local Saints and Place-Names, p.307.

4 Wirral

4.1 Introduction

The Wirral Peninsula is situated in the north west of Cheshire, bounded by the Dee estuary to its west and the Mersey estuary to its east, lying in view of the historic counties of Flintshire and Lancashire and sharing a similar early medieval history of trade, Viking incursion and settlement. It therefore formed part of a frontier zone between areas of Welsh and Mercian cultural influence and this factor shaped the development of its earliest Church organisation between the seventh and eleventh centuries, along with Tegeingl or Atiscros which lay on the opposite side of the Dee estuary. It is also a valuable case study in its own right, as the available evidence offers an insight into patterns of church foundation and parish fission in north west England. As our understanding of the chronology and typology of Wirral's ecclesiastical sites is less developed than the English south and midlands, it cannot be assumed that the growth of churches followed the same broad patterns as other parts of the emerging English kingdom; this must be proved by a thorough examination of the local evidence. It is also important for the large major phase of Scandinavian migration which arrived in Wirral in the tenth century, which brought new cultural influences which are especially apparent in the toponomy and the stone

sculpture of the district, allowing us to examine how Viking settlement in north west England interacted with and changed the organisation of the Church in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The following chapter presents a balanced view, one which acknowledges the distinctive local history of the district, whilst also showing how broad principles and methods developed for other parts of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms can be applied productively to Wirral.

Wirral's history as a distinct district or region is first attested in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in the 890s and it is therefore a clearly delineable unit to a historian pursuing a topographical approach to ecclesiastical history, but which also had meaning to the local population in the early Middle Ages. The choice of an Anglo-Saxon hundred is also deliberate, because this unit has a Welsh equivalent (the *cantref*), which facilitates cross-border comparisons with Wales. It also enables discussion of an idea noted in the literature, that hundreds or their predecessors may be linked to the organisation of the Church at an early date, especially in the north west where a connection between these units and *eccles* place-names has long been suggested.[1]

That is not to say that its early borders are known with precision. Whilst three sides of Wirral are marked by major watercourses, its southern edge is less clearly defined. Taking administrative boundaries as a guide, the Domesday hundred of *Willaveston* stretched further south than the later hundred of Wirral, as the former included additional townships to the southeast which extended its borders to the River Gowy.[2] These changes occurred

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[1] Cameron, 'Eccles in English Place-Names', pp.89-90; Andrew Breeze, 'Cheshire's Celtic Place-Names', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Cheshire and Lancashire*, 169 (2020), pp.155-67 (p.156, 160).
[2] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.291-2.

gradually, with the two names being used interchangeably between 1259 and 1360, whilst

the boundary itself moved prior to 1200.[3] To the south of Wirral lies Chester, a hundred

in itself in Domesday. From there, the Domesday boundary of *Wilaveston* ran eastwards

into the wetlands which flanked the Gowy. West of Chester, the topography of the

peninsula has been altered by extensive canalisation of the Dee in the eighteenth century

and subsequent silting of the estuary, but the shape of the previous coastline can be traced

inland of the current river channel in modern satellite photography. The river was once

wider and ran up the western shore of Wirral as far as Parkgate, from where the estuary

opened out towards the Irish Sea between Hilbre Island on the Wirral side and Point of

Ayr on the Welsh side.[4] These geographical factors form a context in which the growth

of Wirral's early churches must be understood, because they influenced the ability of the

local population to generate an economic surplus, to access trading networks through

which this surplus might be exchanged and foreign goods imported, and their openness

to external cultural influences. This was true before the Viking Age, as amply evidenced

by the artefact assemblage from the trading site at Meols in Wirral, but these connections

grew in magnitude with the arrival of Scandinavian groups in the Irish Sea and the

subsequent expansion of trade and migration in the region.

The modern geography of Wirral cannot be simplistically read back into the Viking Age.

During extensive engineering works between 1732 and 1736, a new artificial channel

called the New Cut was created which diverted the river into a straight course below

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[3] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.166-7.

[4] Simon Ward, 'The course of the River Dee at Chester' in *'Where Deva Spread Her Wizard Stream': Trade and the Port of Chester*, ed. by Peter Carrington (Chester: Chester Archaeology, 1996), pp.4-11, (p.8).

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Chester.[5] However, these works reduced the velocity of the water in the estuary, encouraging the deposition of sediment and the formation of the substantial salt marshes which now exist along the previous Wirral shoreline.[6] This process has been accentuated by land reclamation in the upper parts of the estuary in stages between 1754 and 1916 around Saltney, Sealand and Shotton.[7] The flow of water in the estuary was further reduced in the late eighteenth century, when water was diverted to supply the new canal network.[8] Later the channel was diverted again to its present course along the Welsh shore of the estuary. In the early medieval period, the terrain downstream of Chester was therefore much wetter and the Dee far wider, and travellers from Wirral to north Wales would have either to travelled via the city, or more likely have gone by boat.

A second geographical factor to consider is long-term fluctuations in sea level in the Irish Sea. Research suggests that sea levels peaked between the first and the late-fourth century, fell back from then to the seventh century and then gradually rose again up to the thirteenth century, a pattern which mirrors the economic prosperity of Chester as a port.[9] Currently the region around Chester is experiencing historically low sea levels and the limit of navigation on the Dee would have been higher between the ninth and eleventh centuries. This finding also applies to the Welsh shore of the estuary and the coasts of south Lancashire. The impact of sea level change on other coastal centres in the wider region such as Rhuddlan and Meols must also be considered, as this will have caused the

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[5] Geoffrey Place, 'Parkgate and Ireland', in *'Where Deva Spread Her Wizard Stream'*, ed. by Peter Carrington, pp.72-74, (p.73).
[6] Ward, 'The course of the River Dee at Chester', p.6.
[7] Place, 'Parkgate and Ireland, p.73.
[8] John Herson, 'Canals, Railways and the Demise of the Port of Chester' in *'Where Deva Spread Her Wizard Stream'*, ed. by Carrington, pp.75-89, (p.81).
[9] Ward, 'The course of the River Dee at Chester, p.8; M. J. Tooley, 'Theories of coastal change in north-west England' in *Archaeology and Coastal Change*, ed. by Frederick Hugh Thompson (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1980), pp.74-86 (pp.82-4).

accessibility of these sites, and therefore the intensity of cultural and economic contact at these places, to fluctuate. In terms of the economic and cultural connections of the region, higher sea levels are likely to have hindered communication by land through inundation, whereas waterborne transport may have become easier and we should expect this to alter patterns of travel and communication. We must also consider competing routes across the Irish Sea; evidence for Roman-era ports is much stronger in Cumbria, particularly at the fort complex at Maryport and at Ravenglass, and perhaps also at Carlisle and Lancaster.[10] Such natural harbours likely remained in use in the early Middle Ages and sculptural and textual evidence for Northumbrian intervention in these places is stronger than Wirral; it is likely that seventh-century Northumbrian expeditions to Anglesey, Man and the Irish midlands as noted by Bede were launched from these ports and other neighbouring river estuaries.[11] By the eighth century, Northumbrian control at Whithorn and the wide variety of church-sites in the Lune Valley seem assured when one examines the archaeological and sculptural evidence from these places, recurrence of certain decorative motifs and the religious and exegetical complexity of much of the surviving sculpture; this in itself highlights the usefulness of considering economic and ecclesiastical contacts together.[12] Wirral cannot boast the same density of seventh-century sculpture as either of these places, though the high-status runic-inscribed stone Overchurch 1 is from this era and some involvement of Wirral in these networks seems likely.[13]

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[10] Fiona Edmonds, 'Barrier or Unifying Feature? Defining the Nature of Early Medieval Water Transport in the North-West' in *Waterways and Canal-Building in Medieval England*, ed. by John Blair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.21-36 (pp.24-6).

[11] Edmonds, 'Barrier or Unifying Feature?', p.29; *HE*, II.5; II.9; IV.26 (ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors), pp.148-9, 162-3, 426-7); CoI 685.2, ed. and trans. Charles-Edwards, p.165..

[12] Peter Hill, *Whithorn and Saint Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town, 1984-91* (Stroud: Whithorn Trust, 1997), pp.16-9.; Felicity H. Clark, 'Wilfred's Lands? The Lune Valley in its Anglian Context' in *Lancashire's Sacred Landscape*, ed. by Linda Sever (Stroud: History Press, 2010), pp.130-46 (pp.135-7).

[13] See below, pp.206-9.

The exact nature of economic activity outside military expeditions in this period is unclear and the evidence is ambiguous; Meols has not revealed any of the class E ware ceramics associated with Gaulish exports of wine in the sixth and seventh centuries, nor any of the earlier class B amphorae that reflect direct trade between Britain, Ireland and the Mediterranean around the fifth and early sixth centuries.[14] The way in which the Meols collections were assembled by combing through finds exposed by coastal erosion may have disfavoured the collection of ceramic finds versus metal ones as the latter were more easily spotted and arguably more exciting; however, the antiquarians who first began to collect the material did notice the lack of ceramics in their collections and it may therefore genuinely reflect the original disposition of finds in the archaeological deposits.[15]

However, the hinterland of Meols has thrown up three low-value Byzantine coins of sixth-century date, namely a decanummium of Justinian I (r.527-65) found at Moreton and a pair of folles from Leasowe near the River Birket, one each from the reigns of Justin I (r.518-27) and Maurice (r.582-602).[16] Further east, another follis of Justinian I was discovered at Seacombe on Wirral's Mersey shore in 2007, dated 547-8.[17] Some caution is required as these coins do not come from properly excavated contexts and the Maurice example has scratches suggesting it has been previously cleaned of soil with a hard point prior to its loss, suggesting it might be a modern loss which would also cast doubt on the Justin I piece.[18] However, we can take some comfort from the discovery in 2022 of a

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[14] Charles Thomas, 'Gallici Nautae de Galliarum Provinciis' A Sixth/Seventh Century Trade with Gaul, Reconsidered', *Medieval Archaeology*, 34 (1990), pp.1-26 (pp.14-6).
[15] Griffiths, Philpott and Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral*, pp.52-3, 60.
[16] Robert Philpott, 'Three Byzantine coins found near the north Wirral coast in Merseyside', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 148 (1999), pp.197-202 (pp.197-8).
[17] PAS, 'LVPL-874C64' <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/179124> [Accessed 27th July 2023].
[18] Philpott, 'Three Byzantine coins', pp.200-1.

Sasanian drachm of Khosrau II (r.590-628), dated 615-18, which came to light through metal detecting, again suggesting some connection to long-distance European exchange networks.[19] Such finds are extremely rare; only seven examples from Britain are known, including another drachm of Khosrau II dated c.628 which was discovered near Gwalchmai in central Anglesey, corroborating the idea that Persian coinage circulated in the Irish Sea in the seventh century.[20] This particular coin was found rolled and folded in half in the manner of hack-silver, and it may well have circulated for some time after it was minted.[21]

Furthermore, there is one notable piece of early medieval ceramic evidence from Meols to discuss. This is the ampulla of St Menas, dug up from the sands by a local fisherman in 1955.[22] These ceramic vessels are most commonly found in Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean but they occur across Europe and another example is known from Mersey estuary near Halton.[23] Like the Wirral example, a Byzantine coin, specifically a copper alloy follis of Justinian I dated c.527-37, was found close by at Preston on the Hill in 2000, and together this cluster reinforces the argument that the ampullae were genuine sixth-century imports.[24] A slight tendency to occur near monastic sites has been noted, and this may suggest they were often brought to Britain as souvenirs by returning pilgrims who had visited the shrine of St Menas at Abu Minas, close to Alexandria.[25] The Meols ampulla may therefore evidence Christian activity in Wirral in the sixth or seventh

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[19] PAS, 'LVPL-BED8F3 <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/1081346> [Accessed 27th July 2023].

[20] PAS, 'LVPL2174' <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/40409> [Accessed 27th July 2023].

[21] PAS, 'LVPL2174' <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/40409> [Accessed 27th July 2023].

[22] Griffiths, Philpott and Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast*, p.59.

[23] Griffiths, Philpott and Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast*, p.59.

[24] PAS, 'LVPL1440' <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/5970> [Accessed 27th July 2023].

[25] Griffiths, Philpott and Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast*, p.59.

century. Beyond this the archaeologist has little ceramic evidence to interpret; except for Chester, Cheshire and Lancashire were nearly aceramic during the early Middle Ages, and even after local pottery production took off again in the twelfth and thirteenth century, our understanding of these wares is limited.[26] Taking the question of waterborne trade more widely, explicit evidence for shipping is sparse, but the basin of the Mersey has revealed a notable concentration of early medieval logboats.[27] These small craft may appear modest but their shallow draft would have made them well-suited to exploiting the upper reaches of navigable rivers and they have been found both in the Mersey estuary itself and on a major tributary, the Irwell. Such vessels were well suited to local transport needs and suggest that short journeys up and down navigable rivers were important to travel and economic activity in the region.

Another crucial piece of context here is the Medieval Warm Period, which facilitated an expansion of settlement zones into marginal land as the Viking Age wore on. Reconstructions of historic climate are complex, and over time climate and ecological historians have developed a more nuanced understanding of this idea which stresses regional variation; the globe did not become uniformly warmer and drier in the early Middle Ages, nor did these changes occur in a strictly linear fashion.[28] Nevertheless, a general, gradual warming of England's climate is perceivable from at least the ninth century through to the twelfth or early thirteenth, in common with much of western and

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[26] Nick Higham, *A Frontier Landscape: The North West in the Middle Ages* (Bollington: Windgather Press, 2004), p.13.

[27] Sean McGrail and R. Switsur, 'Medieval Logboats of the River Mersey: A Classification Study' in *The Archaeology of Medieval Ships and Harbours in Northern Europe*, BAR International Series 66, ed. by Sean McGrail (Oxford: British Archaeology Reports, 1979), pp.93-116.

[28] Raphael Neukom and others., 'No evidence for globally coherent warm and cold periods over the preindustrial Common Era', *Nature*, 571 (2019), pp.550-554 (p.554).

central Europe (though still with significant variation in date and extent).[29] This process may also have shaped the development of Wirral's local churches as the pastoral needs of a growing population changed with their economic and geographic circumstances, and as new settlements emerged to be served. This pattern of healthy economic growth and expansion on Wirral, but from a low base, has been used by Nick Higham and others to explain the relatively slow growth of nucleated villages in medieval Wirral, arguing that it took several centuries for the population to grow to a point where combining enough households into a viable economic unit became workable.[30] In a period where local and especially proprietary churches were expanding in western Europe, the influence of the economic superstructure on church organisation and distribution may have been a decisive factor.

Concerning its relevance to ecclesiastical developments in western Britain, Wirral presents several advantages both as a comparison to material from Wales and as an important case study in itself. One obvious point is that it neighbours the Welsh *cantref* of Tegeingl across the Dee estuary. A comparison between Wirral and Tegeingl therefore allows us to test how significant was the Anglo-Saxon influence on the early development of Tegeingl's churches; if churches there developed on largely the same lines as Wirral's, it would argue against a specifically Welsh mode of Church organisation, whereas a sharp contrast would suggest that the frontier was a significant factor in the development of Welsh churches and would support ideas of Welsh exceptionalism or idiosyncrasy. Wirral therefore acts as a control, at least prior to the eighth century, because while it lies firmly

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[29] Neville Brown, *History and Climate Change: A Eurocentric Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2001), p.99.

[30] Philpott and Adams, *Irby, Wirral:* Exacavations, pp.221-2.

on the Mercian side of the frontier, it is similar in its geographical location and coastal character. The comparison may also cast a sidelight on the incorporation of Wirral by Mercia, the dating of which is usually linked to the battle of Chester around 616 as noted by Bede and the Chronicle of Ireland, probably compiled at Iona before 740.[31] From one such source, this information was later entered into the Welsh Latin chronicle tradition maintained at St David's from the late eighth century and known to scholars as the *Annales Cambriae*.[32] However, this event may not have ended British control of Wirral immediately and it was the Northumbrian ruler Æthelfrith (r.593-616) who instigated this campaign against Powys, even though Wirral was later in Mercian hands (and Mercians may have fought on the British side at Chester).[33] Furthermore, early medieval warfare on the Welsh border usually aimed at exacting tribute or establishing a looser dominion over lesser polities, rather than outright territorial conquest.[34] Consequently, there may be a gap of several decades between the subjugation of Wirral and its full annexation. Our best date for the end of British rule in Wirral is therefore some point in the seventh century and we have little evidence with which to refine it.

Recent archaeological investigation has broadened our understanding of Wirral between the Roman withdrawal and the arrival of the Vikings, and excavations at Mark Rake in Bromborough, Eastham and Wallasey have provided useful evidence of continued settlement activity in the fifth and sixth centuries. At Hilary Breck, near St Hilary's Church in Wallasey, an oven or grain-drying kiln carbon-dated within the range 390 to

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[31] CoI 613.3, ed. and trans. Charles-Edwards, p.128;; HE ii. 2 (ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors), pp.140-3.
[32] AC ABC 613, ed. and trans. Remfrey, p.45.
[33] Nick Higham, 'King Cearl, the battle of Chester and the origins of the Mercian "overlordship"', *Midland History*, 17 (1992), pp.1-15 (pp.13-4).
[34] Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp.73-5.

580 AD was discovered in 2011.[35] The general picture is of a sparse but not insignificant population amongst whom certain aspects of Romano-British culture and settlement practices endured. These small sites have helped to illuminate a major program of excavation near Irby, undertaken between 1987 and 1996, which uncovered a long-lived sequence of curvilinear buildings which dated between the fifth and eighth centuries, with the authors preferring to place them earlier within that range.[36] These discoveries must be considered alongside other evidence such as palaeobotanical analysis, which does point to a modest decline in cereal production and the regeneration of woodland from around 300 onwards, at least when considering north west England more broadly.[37] What these sites have not revealed however, is much information on the religious affiliations or practices of the local population.

By comparing patterns of church foundation and patronage between Wirral and Tegeingl during this phase of conquest, it might be possible to deduce how the Mercians took control in Wirral. Tegeingl also spent long periods under Mercian or English control from the eighth to the eleventh centuries and this is another reason why the two districts form an intuitive unit for research purposes.[38] This should caution us against drawing too sharp a distinction between Wales and England, particularly during the Viking Age, as the border between them was fluid even after the construction of the great linear dykes in the late-eighth and ninth centuries and Tegeingl certainly experienced some Mercian cultural

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[35] Mark Adams, 'Mark Rake, Bromborough: Final Report, NGR SJ 349 823', *Journal of the Merseyside Archaeological Society*, 16 (2021), pp.1-40; Mark Adams, 'An archaeological Watching Brief on Land at Hilary Breck, Wallasey, Wirral, Merseyside: Final Report' (Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool Field Archaeology Unit, 2012), pp.4-5, 10.

[36]. Philpott and Adams, *Irby Wirral: Excavations,* pp.53-61.

[37] Nick Higham, *A Frontier Landscape*, p.24.

[38] Wendy Davies, *Patterns of Power in Early Wales*, pp.69-71.

influence. We should instead frame these as questions of degree, remembering that an intermixture of different patterns of church development was possible and the balance between them will have shifted over time in response to the political and cultural context. The Viking Age presents a further complication through the introduction of Scandinavian cultural influence and intensified contacts with Ireland, which affected Wirral and Tegeingl in different ways and for which the evidence is unevenly distributed. Furthermore, while some place-names or sculptural styles may appear more Welsh, Scandinavian or English, the clergy of both Wirral and Tegeingl were exposed to a common Christian package of religious and ideological concepts which were broadly consistent across cultural and ethnic boundaries, and these societies were similar in their economic basis and the kinds of hierarchies they supported.

There are also specific connections between the two regions in the source material. These are most evident in the corpora of stone sculpture, which display close cultural links and share decorative schemes and motifs, particularly on the ring-headed crosses found in both districts. This includes a degree of Scandinavian influence from the tenth century onwards, which occurs throughout the Irish Sea coasts of Britain. It is especially notable in Wirral where it is attested both sculpturally and textually; it is therefore possible to say more about developments in Tegeingl prior to the eleventh century in light of events in Wirral. Many of these arguments, particularly the sculptural and artistic links, are also applicable to Chester, and while this thesis is not primarily concerned with the development of its churches and parishes, the influence of the city on its hinterland is undeniable.

That the histories of Wirral and Chester are closely intertwined is neatly illustrated by the first attestation of the place-name Wirral in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 893, during a phase of renewed conflict between Viking forces and Wessex. Having been besieged and defeated at Buttington, Montgomeryshire, the next year *þara Deniscra… foron on anstreces dæges 7 nihtes þæt hie gedydon on anre westre ceastre on Wirhealum, seo is Legceaster gehaten*.[39] The English army then laid siege to the city. The annal for 894 notes that they fled from Wirral into North Wales, then led the English on a chase through Northumbria (perhaps crossing back through Mercia) and East Anglia.[40] Chester is consistently placed *on Wirhealum* 'in Wirral'; this suggests the district was larger, even before one considers the southern portion transferred to Broxton hundred in the twelfth century as mentioned.[41]

The name Wirral is composed of the Old English elements *wír* and *halh* (*halum* in the dative plural), meaning 'at the nook(s) where the bog-myrtle grows'.[42] That *wír* means myrtle is clear, as the word glosses Latin '*myrtus*' in the Épinal-Erfurt Old English glossary from the late-seventh and century respectively; this likely refers to bog myrtle (*Myrica gale*), which is native to Britain and thrives in acidic peat bog conditions, rather than common myrtle (*Myrtus communis*) which prefers the hotter, drier conditions of the Mediterranean.[43] Such wet conditions prevailed in parts of Wirral, particularly around the

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[39] ASC A 893, BCD 894; The Danes… went continuously by day and night until they reached a deserted city in Wirral, which is called Chester', ed. and trans. Whitelock, p.204

[40] ASC A 894, BCD 895; B: *Ond þa sona æfter þam on þysum geare for se here of Wirhealan innan Norðwealas forðam hie þær sittan ne mihton – þæt wæs forðon þe hie wæron benumen ægþer ge þæs ceapes ge þæs cornes þe hie geherhod hæfdan*', 'And then in this year, immediately after that, the Danish army went into Wales from Wirral, because they could not stay there. That was because they were deprived both of the cattle and corn which had been ravaged', ed. and trans. by Whitelock, p.204.

[41] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.131.

[42] EPNS Cheshire, I, p.8.

[43] J.D. Pheifer (ed.), *Old English Glosses in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p.34.

two estuaries and the low-lying, marshy region in the north of the peninsula. However, Margaret Gelling has questioned this derivation, noting that most of Wirral is formed of two dry ridges of low hills, though she does not propose an alternative and it is for now, the most likely sense of the word.[44]

The second element, *halh*, appears across England. Dodgson's interpretation of 'nook or corner of land' is the standard one and derives from an eleventh-century Old English glossary where *halh* renders Latin '*angulus*' / 'angle, corner'.[45] It is related to OE *holh*, 'hollow', and in inland locations gives the sense of a shallow valley or 'recess' in the topography.[46] It may also describe places bound by rivers and streams, or areas characterised by springs and streams.[47] This latter meaning is well-attested in Cheshire and Gelling identifies several examples in the south east of the county at Coppenhall ('*Coppa-halh*' / 'Coppa's nook'), Blakenhall ('*blacan-halh*' / 'at the black nook') and Wettenhall ('*wētan-halh*' / 'wet nook').[48] In low-lying regions, the term applies to dry areas of land within a marsh with a particular concentration in East Anglia and Lincolnshire. Wirral has two such settlements called Saughall (*salh-halh* / 'willow nook'), one of which (Saughall Massie) stands on the marshy zone in the north of the peninsula.[49] Finally, *halh* can have an administrative sense, meaning an area projecting out from the rest of an administrative unit such as a parish, or somehow separated from it.[50] This administrative sense may explain Wirral, as the peninsula projects from the rest

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[44] Margaret Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1984), p.106.

[45] A.H. Smith, *English Place-Name Elements,* 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), I, p.223; Thomas Wright and Richard Paul Wülkner, *Anglo-Saxon and Old English Vocabularies* (London: Trübner & Co., 1884), p.326.

[46] Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, p.100.

[47] Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, p.100.

[48] Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, p.106; EPNS Cheshire, III, pp.22-3, 51-2, 167.

[49] Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, pp.100, 102-3; EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.202-5, 321-2.

[50] Gelling, *Place-Names in the Landscape*, p.100;

of Cheshire, although given that the shiring of Mercia is conventionally dated to the mid-tenth century, and specifically to the reign of Edgar in recent scholarship (r.957/9-75), this seems unlikely to be the original sense of the toponym (Cheshire itself is first attested in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as '*Legeceasterscir*' in 980).[51] Some doubt is also created by the inconsistent early forms. Wirral usually occurs in the singular dative form '*hale*' as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle A-text for 894 (*Wirheale*), but there are early attestations of the dative plural *halum* in the same text for 893 (*Wirhealum*) and in the will of the Mercian magnate Wulfric Spott dated 1002 to 1004 ([*Wir*]*halum*).[52] In the singular, the whole peninsula is a projecting piece of land surrounded by water, while in the plural, it might characterise the district by the short streams and shallow valleys in the hill-ridges on the peninsula.[53] Overall, the *halh* in Wirral is best understood as an area surrounded by water, referring either to its position as a peninsula or as an island of drier lands in wetland landscapes around the rivers Mersey, Dee and Gowy. The link between Wirral and wetlands is emphasised by the compound with '*wir*' / 'bog-myrtle', giving a sense of its liminality, but also its potential value as an island of habitable ground in a marshland landscape.

Another consideration is the Welsh name for Wirral, first attested as *Cilgwri* in the late-twelfth century, which combines the Welsh elements *cil* and the personal name *Gwri* to give 'Gwri's nook', which may commemorate an ancient Welsh ruler called Gwri, or

[51] George Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.157-64; ASC AC 980; C: '*Þy ilcan geare wæs Legeceasterscir gehergod fram Norðscipherige*', p.84.

[52] Whitelock, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), pp.46-7 ('Wir-' is supplied by Whitelock, but seems entirely logical as it preceded by Wulfric's bequest of '*þæra landa betwux Ribbel. Τ Mærse*' / 'the lands between the Ribble and the Mersey')); Charles Insley, 'The Family of Wulfric Spott: An Anglo-Saxon Marcher Dynasty?' in *The English and Their Legacy: Essays in Honour of Ann Williams*, ed. by David Roffe (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012), pp.115-28 (pp.124-6).

[53] EPNS Cheshire, I, p.8.

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could echo the medieval Welsh tradition of naming kingdoms and territories after a supposed ancestor.[54] The clearest examples are the sons of the fifth-century king Cunedda of Gwynedd, such as the Ceredig named in Ceredigion or the Dogfael commemorated by the commote of Dogfeiling.[55] However, the sources for these links are often late, and the earliest royal Welsh genealogies are the Harleian genealogies appended to British Library Harley MS 3859; the Deheubarth pedigrees in the collection end with Owain ap Hywel and were compiled in their current form during his reign (c.950-988) and more probably around 954, the last completed annal in the accompanying A text of *Annales Cambriae*.[56] Recent work by Ben Guy has illuminated the antecedent texts of these and other pedigrees in the collection, and pushed their compilation back into the ninth century, but they remain a late and problematic source for the sixth and seventh centuries, prone to refashioning and alteration by succeeding generations to support their political and dynastic claims.[57] *Cilgwri* may therefore denote some sort of British political unit in Cheshire before the seventh century, but with little other information this should be considered speculative. Other objections can be raised; for instance, while many regions of Gwynedd were named for the sons of Cunedda, it is unclear whether the practice was adopted in Powys, the kingdom most likely to have ruled Cheshire at the beginning of the seventh century. Furthermore, it is difficult to find contemporary attestations of these regional names prior to the ninth century; Ceredigion, the most frequently mentioned in the *Annales Cambriae,* first appears in 807 in the A version of the text, and the others are seldom mentioned until they were adopted as the names of *cantrefi and* commotes.[58] The

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[54] EPNS Cheshire., I, p.8.

[55] Thomas M. Charles-Edwards, 'Dynastic Succession in Early Medieval Wales' in *Wales and the Welsh in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to J. Beverley Smith'*, ed. by R.A. Griffiths and P.R. Schofield (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2011), pp.70-88 (pp.71-2).

[56] Ben Guy, 'The Textual History of the Harleian Genealogies'*, Welsh History Review*, 28.1 (2016), pp.1-25 (pp.3-4); Dumville, *Annales Cambriae, A.D. 682-954*, p.vii.

[57] Ben Guy, 'The Textual History of the Harleian Genealogies', pp.23-5.

[58] AC A 807, ed. an trans. Dumville, p.8-9; Melville Richards, 'Early Welsh Territorial Suffixes', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 95 (1965), pp.205-12, (pp.205-6).

dating of this system of territorial organisation is uncertain, but Thomas Charles-Edwards places its origin in the reign of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, during his dominion over Wales between 1056 and 1064.[59] It should be noted that other interpretations of *Cilgwri* have been proposed, and when the name appears in the *Mabinogion*, it may refer to a minor place-name close to Corwen in Denbighshire.[60] The idea that the name *Cilgwri* preserves an early British kingdom of the sixth century is therefore reliant on a series of parallels with other Welsh kingdoms and the evidence of much later sources. It would be unwise to base an argument on a single place-name, but with the dearth of evidence about Cheshire's early political organisation, it is a possibility worth considering.

The matter cannot be disregarded entirely as it affects how we should view the development of local churches in Wirral. If the district was under Mercian control from the early seventh century, then for most of the early medieval period, the churches of Wirral would presumably have developed on lines similar to other parts of Mercia, with a predominance of large minster churches founded at early dates, whose *parochiae* then fragmented over time as new churches were founded to serve local populations. This would have made the influence of any surviving British churches very diffuse. An interesting parallel occurs in the West Midlands, where Patrick Sims-Williams has suggested that the conversion of the kingdoms of the Hwicce and Magonsætan occurred 'in an unobtrusive and ultimately unmemorable way by the Britons living among them' and that the process was mostly the result of informal cultural contact amongst a mixed population.[61] This organic process contrasts with the top-down, royally directed pattern

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[59] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, pp.568-9.
[60] Andrew Breeze, 'Cheshire's Celtic Place-Names', p.159.
[61] Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp.78-9.

of conversion and church foundation in Northumbria, and may have left more of a British flavour to early church sites in Wirral.

A related question concerns the date of the Mercian settlement of Wirral. Whilst the Northumbrian victory at Chester provides a *terminus post quem* around 613-16, it did not necessarily occur immediately after the battle, and this expansion fits better in the context of the Mercian hegemony of the mid to late seventh century; the Northumbrian campaign may have been punitive rather than a territorial conquest, or might have led to fleeting only control over Wirral. The lack of other firm chronological markers in the chronicle records suggests that that Wirral was incorporated into Mercia only gradually. The relative lack of furnished graves of seventh-century or earlier date in Cheshire is relevant here, as this has traditionally been taken as evidence for the earliest phases of Anglo-Saxon migration in Britain.[62] This indicates that the incoming Mercians had adopted a less archaeologically visible form of burial, specifically unfurnished inhumation, suggesting they had become thoroughly Christianised and that their settlement in Wirral occurred after the conversion of the kingdom in the 650s and 660s. A similar pattern emerges when the distribution of known Anglo-Saxon settlements is considered; the evidence for Cheshire is thin, and what little exists is late (Viking Age or later in date).[63] In his analysis of this evidence, John Blair's argues that it reflects how the local British population was often acculturated into the growing Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and that these new Mercians retained aspects of their Romano-British culture, especially regarding their approach to their built environment.[64] In this case, he focuses on broader patterns of

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[62] Barry Cunliffe, *Britain Begins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp.413-22.
[63] John Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, p.34.
[64] Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.35-40.

building and settlement growth, but this would surely have included church building and would encourage some degree of continuity at church-sites across the migration period.

The lack of furnished burials is explicable, for we know from Bede writing about St Wilfrid's exile in Sussex in the 680s that the royal dynasty of the Hwicce had been Christian since the time of Eanfrith and Eanhere, 'both of whom were Christians, as were their people'.[65] These were the father and uncle respectively of Queen Eaba of the South Saxons and flourished around the 670s, placing the conversion of their kingdom in the mid-seventh century.[66] Sims-Williams also argues that as the incoming Anglian elites pushed further west, their expansion became less a migration and more a conquest of a predominantly British population by a relatively small aristocracy; this derives ultimately from the well-attested phenomenon that furnished and cremation burials, indicative of Anglian and pagan practice, occur first in south-east England and Kent before spreading west and north.[67] By the time this new elite reached Wirral, around the same time that Mercia drew the Hwicce into its orbit, the new Mercian component to local society may have been small and less likely to destroy aspects of the existing cultural superstructure, including any British churches. One might also note here St Wilfrid's words at his dedication of Ripon in the mid-670s, where he celebrated his new control over the 'holy places in several regions which the British clergy had abandoned as they fled the sharpness of the hostile sword in our people's hand'; this is a Northumbrian example, most likely referring to the British churches in recently conquered districts in the Pennines, but it offers an example of how one Anglian kingdom dealt with the existing

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[65] *HE*, IV.13, ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp.372-3.
[66] *HE*, IV.13 ed. and trans. by Colgrave and Mynors, pp.372-3; Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.57-9.
[67] Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon Britain*, pp.20-21.

Church establishment.[68] Commenting on this passage, John Blair notes a discrepancy between the treatment of the *ecles* church-sites between the Tweed and the Forth, conquered by Northumbria in the 630s, and those sites in the Pennine and western territories seized in the 670s (where Wilfrid's new 'holy places' were located). Drawing on Stancliffe, he suggests that the more gradual manner in which the Northumbrians expanded northward gave the existing churches of the region a greater chance to survive and for the *ecles* sites to endure as powerful mother-churches with large parishes in later centuries. Eccles in Berwickshire, five miles northwest of Kelso, is one example, which even after losing Berwick-upon-Tweed in the mid-twelfth century retained a large parish with three dependent chapels.[69] By contrast, the attitudes of Wilfrid's generation appear more domineering, and there are several examples of *ecles* sites which survived only as modest local parish churches.[70] Based on these parallels, we might suspect that the Mercian acquisition of Wirral was less dramatic, and more like their annexation of the Hwicce and Magonsætan, or the Northumbrian expansion into the lands between the Tweed and Forth; the chronicle record is silent on the matter after the battle of Chester, and neither Bede, Stephen or their contemporaries noted a 'conquest' of Wirral or Cheshire, or its conversion to Christianity. This would also accord with the position of Wirral at the boundaries of three kingdoms, namely Northumbria, Mercia and Powys; it was geographically peripheral to all and may therefore have been settled and converted piecemeal, rather than through a decisive military campaign.

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[68] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.30-1; Clare Stancliffe, 'Oswald, 'Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians'', in *Oswald: Northumbrian King to European Saint*, ed. by Clare Stancliffe and Eric Cambridge (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1995), pp.33-83 (p.78); *Vita Wilfredi*, § 17, ed. and trans. by Bertram Colgrave, 2007 online edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), pp.36-7.

[69] Richard Oram, 'Parishes and Churches' in *Northern England and Southern Scotland in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. by Keith J. Stringer and Angus J.L. Winchester (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017), pp.197-218 (pp.203-4).

[70] Stancliffe, 'Oswald, 'Most Holy and Most Victorious King of the Northumbrians'', p.78.

Like much of Cheshire, the history of Wirral before the tenth century is poorly attested, and there is little on which to base a local history of Church organisation in a border context. The sole pre-Viking piece of Anglo-Saxon sculpture is the Old English runic inscription from Overchurch, an extremely impressive monument dating to the early ninth century.[71] We also have the important assemblage of archaeological material from Meols, where coastal erosion has gradually revealed a sequence of finds spanning most of the early medieval period.[72] Rich in coins and precious metals, these have been interpreted as indicating a long-lived beachfront trading site with commercial contacts with the Irish Sea and mainland Europe as early as the sixth century; the site was renewed and given fresh impetus from the early tenth century.[73]

The paucity of written material changes from the 890s, spurred by the reassertion of Mercian power in Cheshire as Æthelred and Æthelflæd advanced northwards from the midland core of the kingdom against predominantly 'Viking' opposition. Their conquest pushed the frontier of the kingdom northwards over Æthelflæd's lifetime, eventually reaching and then exceeding Mercia's traditional northern boundary at the Mersey. As mentioned, Chester was refortified in 907, becoming a bulwark for the Mercian and English rulers of the region and an important trade entrepôt.[74] But this was only one of

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[71] CASSS IX, pp.91-4.; see below, pp.206-9..

[72] David Griffiths, '2.4. Early Medieval Material: AD400-450 to 1050-1100' in *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast: Discoveries and observations in the 19th and 20th centuries, with a catalogue of collections,* ed. by David Griffiths, Robert A. Philpott and Geoff Egan (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2007), p.58.

[73] David Griffiths, 'The coastal trading ports of the Irish Sea' in *Viking Treasure From the North West*, ed. by James Graham-Campbell (Liverpool: National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, 1992), pp.63-72 (pp.66-9).

[74] ASC BC 907; B: '*Her wæs Ligceaster geedneowad*', p.73.

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several *burhs* established in the north west at this time; others in Cheshire include Eddisbury (914), Runcorn (915) and Thelwall (919), while further afield there were new *burhs* at Manchester (919), *Cledemutha* or Rhuddlan in Tegeingl (921) and perhaps Penwortham on the River Ribble.[75] The intensity of Mercian activity in the area after 900 demonstrates its importance as a keystone in the borders of the kingdom, a junction between its northern and Welsh frontiers which also gave access to the Irish Sea. It therefore provides insight into how the political and cultural dynamics of a frontier zone influenced Church development. As Mercian control become more entrenched, we see more mentions of Cheshire in texts such as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, reflecting the political and military activities of Æthelred and Æthelflæd. These are largely found in the 'Mercian Register', a separate set of annals inserted *en bloc* into versions B and C of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and spliced into the sequence of annals of version D which gives additional detail about events in Mercia and offsets the Wessex-centric narratives of the other versions.[76]

In Wirral, we also have a more unusual source for the tenth century. It has long been apparent to historians and toponymists that Wirral experienced a significant degree of Scandinavian cultural and political influence during the Viking Age, which left its mark in the place-names and sculptural remains of the district.[77] This is most clearly illustrated by the story of Ingimund, leader of a group of Vikings who left Ireland to pursue new

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[75] ASC BC 914; ASC A 919; ASC CD 921.

[76] Dorothy Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, I, 2nd edn (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), pp.110-3; F.T. Wainwright, 'The chronology of the Mercian register', *English Historical Review*, 238 (1945), pp.385-92 (p.385).

[77] David Griffiths and Stephen E. Harding, 'Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Scandinavian Heritage of North-West England' in *In Search of Vikings: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Scandinavian Heritage of North-West England*, ed. by Stephen E. Harding, David Griffiths and Elizabeth Royles (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2015), p.10.

opportunities in Britain as recorded in the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*. This is a complex text which survives only in a transcription of seventeenth-century copy of a lost fourteenth-century manuscript compiled by the Irish bard and historian Giolla na Naemh Mac Aedhagáin.[78] This was itself written up from earlier material originating in the eleventh century in the Irish kingdom of Osraige and particularly interested in its ninth-century ruler Cerball mac Dúnlainge.[79] The account of Ingimund's arrival in Britain comes towards the end of the text in an annal dated by the text's modern editors to 907 following the work of F.T. Wainwright, largely because this coincides with the restoration of Chester.[80] However, more recent discussion has pointed out that this places the entries within the *Fragmentary Annals* out of order, and that a date around 910 is more likely.[81] This accords well with two other pieces of information. Firstly, Æthelred of the Mercians is described not merely as unwell but 'on the verge of death'; given that he died in 911, a date closer to that year is more convincing.[82] Secondly, 910 saw a new wave of fighting between Scandinavian groups and Mercia, culminating at the battle of Tettenhall, and it has been suggested that the Scandinavian forces there included recent settlers from north west England.[83] This does not necessarily mean that Ingimund's band was present, as the Mercian Register records that there were Scandinavians raiding throughout Mercia that year; Ingimund may have exploited this instability to undertake some raiding of his own.[84]

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[78] Clare Downham, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Portrayals of Vikings in the 'Fragmentary Annals of Ireland'', *The Medieval Chronicle*, 3 (2005), pp.27-39 (pp.29, 37).

[79] Downham, 'The Good the Bad and the Ugly', pp.27-9.

[80] F.T. Wainwright, 'Ingimund's Invasion', *English Historical Review*, 63.247 (1948), pp.145-69 (p.152); ASC BC 907

[81] Matthew Firth, 'On the Dating of the Norse Siege of Chester', *Notes and Queries*, 69.1 (2022), pp.1-4 (p.2).

[82] FA 429, ed. and trans. by Radner, p.173; Firth, 'On the Dating of the Norse Siege of Chester', p.4.

[83] John Quanrud, 'Taking Sides: North-West England Vikings at the Battle of Tettenhall, AD 910' in *In Search of Vikings: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Scandinavian Heritage of North-West England*, ed. by Stephen E. Harding, David Griffiths and Elizabeth Royles (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2015), pp.71-94 (pp.75-6).

[84] ASC BCD 910

The veracity of the Ingimund story is supported by a contemporary notice in the A text of the *Annales Cambriae sub anno* 903 that *Igmunt ininsula món uenit . et tenuit maes osmeliavn*.[85] The conventional reconstruction of these events therefore begins in 902, when the Scandinavian leaders of Dublin were expelled by the kings of Leinster and Brega as recorded in the Chronicle of Ireland; Ingimund presumably left around this time and arrived first at *maes osmeliavn*'[86] On toponymical grounds, this has been identified with Llanfaes, a trading settlement in eastern Anglesey (the *insula món* of *Annales Cambriae*).[87] That Scandinavians were present in eastern Anglesey around this time is attested by the archaeological evidence available six or seven miles west of Llanfaes at Llanbedrgoch, where excavations in the 1990s uncovered an early medieval settlement first established around 600 CE. Originally a farmstead or local manorial centre, the site exhibits a shift in use during the ninth or tenth centuries, when the boundary ditch around the settlement was reinforced with a stone wall, whilst the remains of five hastily-buried individuals may be the result of a raid during in the Viking Age.[88] The material culture at the site was also transformed, as shown by the appearance of Scandinavian-influenced metalworking, silver bullion and weights, suggesting that Llanbedrgoch became a trading site as connections between western Britain and the Irish Sea zone intensified in the tenth century.[89]

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[85] AC A 902, 'Ingimund went to the island of Anglesey / and held Maes Osfeilion', ed. and trans. by Dumville, pp.14-5.
[86] CoI 902.2, ed. and trans. Charles-Edwards, p.344.
[87] Thomas. M. Charles-Edwards, 'Dynastic Succession in Early Medieval Wales', p.85.
[88] Mark Redknap, 'Viking Age Settlement in Wales and the Evidence from Llanbedrgoch' in *Land, Sea and Home: Settlement in the Viking Period*, ed. by John Hines, Alan Lane and Mark Redknap (Abingdon: Maney Publishing, 2004), pp.139-76 (pp.150, 154-5).
[89] Mark Redknap, 'Viking Age Settlement in Wales and the Evidence from Llanbedrgoch', p.156.

There is also the Red Wharf Bay hoard, a collection of five silver arm-rings discovered close to Llanbedrgoch in the 1890s which strongly suggests a Hiberno-Scandinavian presence at the site.[90] These are a distinctive type of arm-ring, usually with stamped decoration, found around the Irish Sea but especially in Ireland, where the region around Dublin has produced a particular concentration of finds which may reflect a manufacturing site.[91] Their considerable weight (between 77g and 107g) and fineness (averaging 93.46% to 96.81% silver content) suggests their purpose was not purely ornamental and that they formed a useful way of transporting larger quantities of bullion, which would reinforce the idea that their distribution is the result of trading activity across the Irish Sea.[92] This would also have made them particularly suitable for hoarding and their completeness is in sharp contrast with the Cuerdale Hoard, in which most of the arm-rings were fragmentary, having been cut into hack-silver; the implication is that the Cuerdale metal was already being prepared for smelting at the time of its deposition, whereas the Red Wharf Bay hoard was either intended to be recovered whole or buried in such a hurry that there was no time to cut down the rings had that been intended.[93] This particular type of arm-ring is usually dated to the early tenth century and it has been suggested that the deposition of this hoard can also be linked to the Ingimund story, and that it may have been deposited by a Hiberno-Scandinavian traveller in the early tenth century.[94] A similar cache of arm-rings was discovered in recent years at Huxley, approximately seven miles south west of Chester, which firmly places Cheshire within

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[90] George C. Boon, *Welsh Coin Hoards 1979-1981: The Coinage of Cnut in Wales; The Coinage of the Empress Maud; The Earliest Portrait Esterlings; With an Appendix of Other Hoards from Viking Times to the Dissolution of the Monasteries* (Cardiff: National Museum of Wales, 1986), p.99.

[91] John Sheehan, 'The Huxley Hoard and Hiberno-Scandinavian Arm-Rings; in *The Huxley Viking Hoard: Scandinavian Settlement in the North West*, ed. by James Graham-Campbell and Robert Philpott (Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 2009), pp.58-70 (pp.60-1).

[92] Boon, *Welsh Coin Hoards*, pp.99-100.

[93] Boon, *Welsh Coin Hoards*, p.100.

[94] Boon, *Welsh Coin Hoards*, p.102.

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the Irish Sea zone in which Ingimund operated.[95] A final hoard which may relate to the same events as Ingimund's travels is the Bangor hoard, thought to be discovered in 1894 on the eastern side of High Street, though it was not properly published at the time and therefore both the findspot and date remain uncertain.[96] Fifteen items are known from the hoard; two of these are pieces of bullion, one of which is a cut section of a silver ingot while the other fragment of a stamped silver arm-ring much like the Red Wharf Bay examples.[97] The other thirteen pieces are a intriguing mixture of Anglo-Saxon, York and Kufic coins, including three pennies of Edward the Elder (r.899-924), four coins Scandinavian York loosely dated 910-919 plus a rare penny of Sigtryggr Caech (r.921-26) and five Samanid dirhams dated 900 to 911.[98] A date early in the 920s is therefore most likely and this firmly places North Wales in the same network of trade and travel which enabled and encouraged increased economic activity and migration between Ireland and western Britain in the first decades of the tenth century. The Welsh stop on Ingimund's travels is therefore well-evidenced.

Turning to the *Fragmentary Annals,* we hear that Ingimund's band were driven out of Anglesey by 'the son of the king of Britons' (presumably the future king Idwal Foel) and travelled onwards to Wirral.[99] Initially welcomed by the Mercians, they were allowed to occupy lands near Chester; it may be that Æthelflæd hoped her new allies would protect the Dee and Mersey estuaries from other raiders, an arrangement known elsewhere in

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[95] Barry Ager, James Graham-Campbell and Dan Garner, 'Discovery and Contents' in *The Huxley Viking Hoard: Scandinavian Settlement in the North West* (Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 2009), pp.45-50 (p.45).
[96] Boon, *Welsh Coin Hoards*, p.92.
[97] Boon, *Welsh Coin Hoards*, p.92.
[98] Boon, *Welsh Coin Hoards*, p.96-7.
[99] FAI § 429, ed. and trans. Radner, p.169.

Europe, especially in ninth-century Francia.[100] Whatever the agreement, Ingimund and his men were evidently unsatisfied, rebelled, and laid siege to Chester.[101] The resolution of the conflict is ambiguous; the *Fragmentary Annals* suggest that after the initial Scandinavian attack, the Mercians sought an alliance 'with the Irish who were among the pagans (for the pagans had many Irish fosterlings)'.[102] The Irish were persuaded to betray and slaughter the Danes before a final battle in which the text fancifully describes how boiling water and ale and beehives were thrown upon the 'Norwegians' from the walls of Chester.[103] The passage finally tails off inconclusively with Ingimund's forces withdrawing, whilst noting that the fighting soon resumed; no further details are provided.[104] The use of terms like 'Norwegians' (*Lochlannaig* in the Irish) may reflect the composition of the text in the eleventh century, when the Danish and Norwegian kingdoms had been consolidated and contemporary chronicles distinguish between them quite clearly; neither was true in the early tenth century and the *Fragmentary Annals* are projecting an anachronistic set of ethnic categories into the past.[105] Nevertheless, the *Fragmentary Annals* are clearly important as the only written account of the arrival of a Hiberno-Scandinavian group in western Britain following the 'expulsion' from Dublin in 902, recording a specific example of a process which is widely suspected across north-west Britain but which is rarely attested in textual accounts.

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[100] Simon Coupland, 'From poachers to gamekeepers: Scandinavian warlords and Carolingian kings', *Early Medieval Europe*, 7.1 (1998), pp.85-114 (pp.89-90).
[101] FA 429, ed. and trans. Radner, p.172.
[102] FA 429, ed. and trans. Radner, pp.172-3.
[103] FA 429, ed. and trans. Radner p.173.
[104] FA 429, ed. and trans. Radner, p.173.
[105] Downham, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, pp.33-34.

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That the Ingimund tale has historical substance, marking a pivotal moment in longer-running connections across the Irish Sea, is strongly suggested by the appearance of stone sculpture in Scandinavian-influenced styles across western Britain, with a notable concentration in Wirral, which also boasts a cluster of Norse place-names.[106] These pieces demonstrate the interconnectedness of Wirral and its adjacent regions, because artistic connections can be identified with pieces from Chester, north Wales, Lancashire and Cumbria, and also with Ireland.[107] Cultural exchange was greatly facilitated by the arrival of new Scandinavian networks, which substantially increased the volume and value of trade throughout the Irish Sea region which particularly benefitted Chester, and also Meols, on the northern coast of Wirral.[108] Other clear indications of economic expansion include the wide distribution of coins minted in Chester throughout the Irish Sea region and beyond (it was one of England's most productive mints in the tenth century) and so-called 'Chesterware' pottery, which was popular in tenth-century Dublin.[109] More broadly, the north west of England saw intensified economic contacts with Ireland at this time due to interconnection of the kingdoms of York and Dublin, which shared a ruling dynasty for much of the early tenth century; Chester and Meols were well positioned as intermediate stops on such a journey, whilst the evidence of the Cuerdale Hoard (deposited 903-5) has been to used to highlight the importance of the Ribble-Aire route across the Pennines.[110]

Another key text for understanding the local processes of church foundation and development in Cheshire during the early Middle Ages is Nick Higham's *The Origins of*

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[106] CASSS, IX, pp.30-1.
[107] CASSS, IX, pp.39-40.
[108] Griffiths, 'The coastal trading ports of the Irish Sea', pp.66-9.
[109] VCH Cheshire, I, pp.261-2.
[110] Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom*, p.220.

Cheshire, published in 1993 as part of the *Origins of the Shire* series. A slim volume with little more than 200 pages, it is nevertheless an outstanding example of regional history writing and still the most detailed summary of Cheshire's pre-Norman history over thirty years since its first publication. Its chronological sweep is broad, beginning with the prehistory and geomorphology of the county, and progressing through the Roman and Mercian periods before finishing with an analysis of the Cheshire Domesday returns. The heart of the book however, taking up the bulk of its pages, concerns the period under discussion here, from the obscure and difficult transition from Roman rule to Anglian settlement, Viking incursion and the formation of the county as an identifiable administrative unit. One of Higham's principal themes is the formation and reformation of territorial units, and he pays a great deal of attention to the creation of counties, hundreds, parishes and major estates as part of the wider organisation of the landscape and the local population.[111] Of the greatest use is his hundred by hundred itinerary of Cheshire, in which each unit is discussed in detail with a summary of its early medieval history, patterns of land use and toponyms and, most importantly, a summary of the major early ecclesiastical sites.[112] Whilst not explicitly a book on the early medieval Church, local churches feature prominently and the broadly topographical approach employed by Higham has a great deal in common with the methods pursued by scholars like John Blair around the same time.[113] Much of Higham's findings about the territorial, tenurial and economic organisation of the county derive from Blair's criteria for identifying high status, pre-Viking churches and minsters such as large surviving parishes or a large assessed value or multiple priests recorded in Domesday; he also relies upon the assumption that the original parochial boundaries of these churches matched the

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[111] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.176-81.
[112] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.128-81.
[113] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.127-8.

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boundaries of the local major estates of their lay founders and patrons.[114] These ideas are rightly balanced with a strong grasp of the difficult nature of much of the evidence for Higham's model of early medieval Cheshire, which often dates after the Norman Conquest, and he carefully notes the 'tentative nature of this reconstruction' and the different assumptions on which his findings rest.[115] Of particular salience is his observation that in some parts of Cheshire, each hundred seems to contain a maximum of two major early *parochiae*, with some evidence that this reflected an early grant of land to the Church, with the other of these *parochiae* remaining under royal or lay domination.[116] He also observes the tendency of the former to become more fragmented by the time of Domesday, and this would seem to accord well with Blair's description of a phase of secularisation and exploitation of churches by lay aristocrats and even bishops and ecclesiastics in the eighth and ninth centuries.[117] Higham also made a great deal of progress in using toponomy to reconstruct early medieval economic units, exploiting elements like *lēah* which denote wooded areas to trace the boundaries of blocks of lands which were economically diversified and extensive.[118] That being said Higham did not reach this conclusion without qualifications and in particular, he expresses the view that the organisaton of Wirral, having experienced the dislocation of Viking settlement in the early tenth century, was more obscure and more difficult to account for.[119] It should also be noted that in much of this work he built upon and acknowledged earlier foundations, especially Alan Thacker's contributions to the first volume of the *Victoria County History* of Cheshire which was published in 1987. Thacker's work, being longer, is able to consider much more evidence than Higham's, particularly on Domesday Book which was

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[114] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.128.
[115] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.127.
[116] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.176.
[117] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.178; Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.323-9.
[118] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.177.
[119] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.131.

edited and reprinted by Thacker and Peter Sawyer at the end of the volume; whilst it is Higham who goes further in synthesising this material into a coherent account of Cheshire's development, both texts are very valuable for the study of both Wirral and south east Cheshire and extensive use is made of them in both this chapter and the following one.[120]

From the tenth century onwards it is possible to write a varied and complex history of Wirral on several topic areas, particularly its political history and its links to other regions through trade and cultural exchange. What is more difficult is to arrange the Viking Age evidence for its churches, which remain somewhat shadowy until the Domesday survey and beyond. Nevertheless, as with Tegeingl, there are some tells which signal the presence of a church at a Viking Age date. Once again the clearest is the stone sculpture; these important monuments cluster tightly around church-sites known to have existed by the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries, and such art-historical evidence can push the dating further back again. What follows is an attempt to reconstruct the ancient parishes and churches of Wirral as they were in the tenth century and before. In this I am able to draw on accounts of the territorial organisation of Wirral by Alan Thacker and Nick Higham, though much progress has since been made in mapping technology and the accretion of archaeological finds recorded by the Portable Antiquities Service (PAS).[121] The case studies in this chapter are described in a rough in geographical order, although because of the interlocking nature of the parochial boundaries described, it has not always been possible to observe this strictly. Generally, we progress from north to south and from

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[120] VCH Cheshire, I.
[121] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.107-10, 131-33; see above, p.167-70; VCH Cheshire, I pp.268-73.

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west to east, beginning in the north west of the Wirral peninsula at West Kirby, then taking in the other northern parishes of Bromborough and Eastham, Bidston and Woodchurch and Overchurch, before finishing with Neston. Once again the presence of early medieval stone sculpture is a particularly important qualification for inclusion, and all the parishes above have at least one example; some like West Kirby and Neston contain significant assemblages. It is my intention to consider how a comparison of my findings for Cheshire might illuminate those for north-east Wales and vice-versa, and to see how they might share or differ in their early medieval ecclesiastical development.
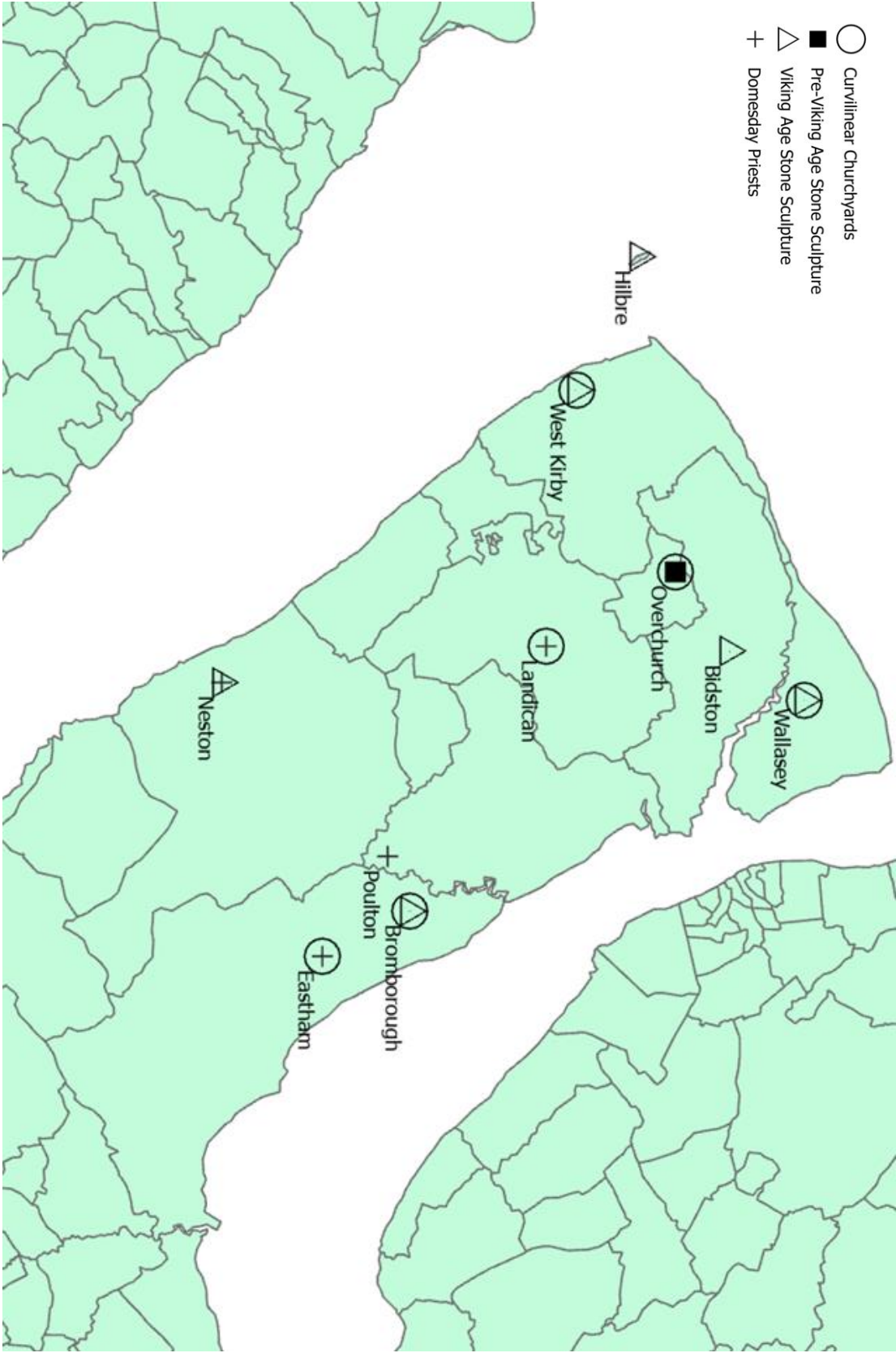
Figure 4.1 – **The Mother-churches of Wirral c.1086**

4.2 West Kirby

Located in the north-west corner of Wirral, the parish of West Kirby encompassed nine townships. Amongst these are several with Norse place-name elements, including West Kirby itself, first attested in a charter of William I dated 1081 and incorporated by Orderic Vitalis in his *Historia Ecclesiastica*. The charter confirms the gifts of various magnates to the abbey of St Evroul in Normandy where Orderic was raised. Amongst these grants were several by earl Hugh I of Chester and the gift of the manor of West Kirby with its two churches by Robert of Rhuddlan:

> Rodbertus uero de Rodelento prefato Hugone Cestrensi comite domino suo concedente dedit sancto Ebrulfo Cherchebiam cum duabus aecclesiis, una scilicet quae in ipsa uilla est, et alia prope illum manerium in insula maris[122]

> 'Also Robert of Rhuddlan, with the consent of the same Hugh earl of Chester his lord, gave to Saint-Évroul Kirby with its two churches, namely one in the vill itself and another near to that manor in an island of the sea'

Kirby is widely thought to derive from Norse *kirkju-býr*, translated as 'village with a church'.[123] It is a common toponym in Scandinavian-settled areas of northern England – Wirral has another example at Kirkby-in-Wirral, later known as Wallasey – and is a strong indication that a church was present during the flourishing of Wirral's Scandinavian community in the tenth century. Assuming that the church was the principal distinguishing feature of the settlement upon their arrival, there may be grounds to suspect a pre-Viking origin.[124] Thomas Pickles' recent survey of the *kirkju-býr* names translates this toponym as 'the farm of the church' and it is therefore ambiguous whether settlements

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[122] Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesastica*, ed. and trans. by Marjorie Chibnell, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969-80), III, pp.238-9.
[123] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.294-5.
[124] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.332.

had their own church at the time the name was coined or not (and of course a settlement called Kirkby which lacked a church could acquire one in later centuries).[125] However, he notes in the specific case of West Kirby that the church there is called a 'monasteri[um]' in a charter of Earl Hugh II of Chester (1154-81) confirming the grant of the church from Saint-Evroul to St Werburgh's Chester.[126] Given that the church was never a reformed monastery, either during the tenth-century Benedictine reformation or the rise of the major monastic orders in the twelfth century, this suggests that West Kirby was an unreformed religious community along the minster model.[127] Against this, there are five other charters in the register of St Werburgh's which reference this transaction, and all of these describe West Kirby as an '*ecclesia*', though some of them are papal confirmations which may have been less attuned to the local context.[128] Elsewhere Pickles has suggested that West Kirby might be an outlying estate of a religious community based to its east, perhaps at Woodchurch, Overchurch or Wallasey.[129]

The second element *býr* is typically Norse and a common general-purpose way of denoting a settlement; it therefore appears frequently on Wirral, although the two other examples from this parish are false friends. It is apparent from the early forms that of Greasby was originally *Gravesberie,* as recorded in Domesday Book, and is therefore entirely English in origin (*græfe*, *burh* / 'stronghold at a wood'); *burh* has been corrupted to -by under Norse influence.[130] Frankby meanwhile is toponymically correct, but the first element likely refers to a Norman landholder mentioned in Domesday living on Robert of Rhuddlan's manor of Little Caldy, suggesting that the name was coined after the

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[125] Thomas Pickles, *Kingship, Society and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp.250-1.
[126] Tait, *St Werburgh's,* , II, 504-509a, pp.291-3.
[127] Thomas Pickles, *Kingship, Society and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire*, pp.250-1.
[128] Tait, *St Werburgh's,*, II, 504-509a, pp.289-91.
[129] Thomas Pickles, 'The Christian Landscape of Early Medieval Chester and Wirral', pp.17-9.
[130] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.291-2.

Conquest.[131] Clearly Norse remained a productive source of place-names beyond 1086 and we cannot assume a tenth-century date in all cases.

Domesday is especially important here; West Kirby itself does not appear in the survey, but several of its townships do, including Meols (recorded twice as *Melas*, denoting Great Meols and Little Meols), Caldy (later Little Caldy), Grange (later Great Caldy) and Greasby, and none of these settlements are recorded with churches except perhaps Hilbre Island discussed below. [132] This suggests a certain long-term unity of territory. Similarly, the 1291 *Taxatio* records no churches or chapels in the other townships of West Kirby parish, suggesting that its clergy were very successful in protecting the jurisdiction of their church, even after it became the subject of a protracted property dispute between the abbeys of St Werburgh's Chester and Basingwerk.[133] At £13 6s 8d, the benefice, whilst not exceptionally valuable by national standards, was the joint second-most lucrative in the Wirral deanery in 1291, tied with Neston and exceeded only by Bromborough. Again, this suggests ancient status as a leading church in the district.[134]

The most unusual aspect of West Kirby's parochial jurisdiction concerns Hilbre Island, the *insula maris* mentioned by Orderic Vitalis above. Later in the Middle Ages, the island fell within with the parish of St Oswald's Chester. However, the 1081 charter clearly associates Hilbre with the manor of West Kirby. This is of particular interest because of the sculptural evidence from the island, consisting of a fragmentary cross-head and a

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[131] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.287-8; DB Cheshire, 3.8, f.264d.
[132] DB Cheshire, 3.8-3.10, 10.4, 25.2, ff.264d, 266c, 267d.
[133] *Taxatio*, CL.CH.WL.04; ChANEC 1, 37, 132, pp.1-2, 52-3, 145-6.
[134] *Taxatio*, CL.CH.WL.02, CL.CH.WL.10

damaged cross-slab, originally recorded in three pieces with only one now surviving.
Both pieces are difficult to date because of their incompleteness, but the cross employs
the familiar Cheshire circle-head design with unpierced spandrels, triquetra knots in the
cross-arms and bold border mouldings. The main innovation on Hilbre Island 1 is the type
2 meander pattern of T-shaped frets which encircles the cross-head. This feature is
evidence that the workshops responsible for the Cheshire group of crosses did incorporate
some variety within their very consistent designs and reinforces the Viking Age date for
Hilbre Island 1 as the pattern is known from other pieces of the period. Hilbre Island 2 is
harder to interpret because of its poor condition; accounts of its discovery in the 1860s
and 1870s record that it was used as a grave marker and then 'a gate-stoop', before being
built into the wall of a shed by 1885. Recovered in 1914, the lower and middle fragments
had disappeared by 1926. Like most sculpture of the era, the piece was therefore not found
in situ, but the association with Hilbre is strong and it would be an unusual item to
transport to the island if it were not there already. Unfortunately, the whitewash has
prevented a detailed petrological study which might otherwise provide further insight.
Nevertheless, the sculpture provides clear evidence of religious activity on the island in
the Viking Age.

We must ask how this knowledge intersects with the history of the hermitage on the
island. It is usually thought to be dedicated to a St Hildeburgh, from whose name the
toponym Hilbre is derived.[135] Hildeburgh is an Old English name, but her origins are
obscure, as are those of her cult at Hilbre. Nevertheless, the evidence for Viking Age
ecclesiastical activity is consistent with a hermitage on the island at that time or even

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[135] VCH Cheshire, I, p.269; EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.302.

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earlier, and the remote location would have obvious appeal to any ecclesiastic looking for an ascetic lifestyle. That the church was linked to West Kirby by Orderic Vitalis in the 1080s may also tell us something about West Kirby, because it was common for major minster churches to have subordinate cells or outlying oratories and these would corroborate the idea that West Kirby was an early mother-church and a minster. There is an interesting contrast in the dedications however; St Hildeburgh, if she existed has an Old English name, which is essentially the only evidence we have for her cultural origin, whereas West Kirby was dedicated to St Bridget, a major Irish saint whose *familia* was centred on Kildare. This dedication is highly likely to have been made under Gaelic-Scandinavian influence in the tenth or eleventh century and there are no definite pre-Viking dedications to Bridget anywhere in England.[136] Hilbre may therefore illuminate events at West Kirby and we may have an example of a pre-existing minster church being rededicated in response to changing cultural tastes following the Hiberno-Scandinavian migration to Wirral. The original dedication is now lost, but this would explain how a pre-Viking Age church acquired a Hiberno-Scandinavian dedication and would reconcile the evidence with Thomas Pickles' argument that West Kirby originated as a minster church.

To summarise the written sources on West Kirby, it emerges as a moderately prosperous church in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest, and successfully defended its parochial rights for several centuries afterwards; if other territories were broken off its *parochia*, this occurred pre-Conquest. Whether it happened at all is unclear, although the arrival of the Scandinavians in the early tenth centuries may have provided an opportunity. Whilst

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[136] Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom*, pp.134-8.

precise views on its organisation differ, the presence of an assembly site at Thingwall (from Old Norse *Þing-vǫllr*, 'field where an assembly meets') and a handful of Norse place-names referencing a boundary mid-way down the peninsula have been used to argue that tenth-century Wirral enjoyed some sort of legal autonomy and that a Scandinavian legal tradition may have prevailed there.[137] This concept of a Scandinavian Wirral enclave may also suggest that the arrival of new population groups was transformative and led to substantial reorganisation of the landscape according to a new set of legal and cultural priorities. Nevertheless, there is nothing that requires us to believe that the tenurial arrangements of the district were transformed in the early tenth century, although one would expect the replacement of the landed elite by incomers. Furthermore, churches may have been well-placed to resist despoiling, because they enjoyed an enduring institutional and quasi-corporate character that was less vulnerable to the random misfortunes, deaths and problems of inheritance of the aristocracy. Even if churches experienced some loss of property, this does not require that they lost their spiritual jurisdiction, and they may still have been able to collect their tithes and other revenues from the local population. In cases where Scandinavian leaders were settled by Christian rulers, it was common that the newcomers be baptised, as in Alfred the Great's 'treaty' with the Viking leader Guthrum in which Alfred became Guthrum's godfather.[138] The *Fragmentary Annals* do not specify if this occurred with Ingimund, but the Mericans would have been unlikely to tolerate the rough-handling of Wirral's churches. Furthermore, whilst the tenth century saw a brief flourishing of pagan practices including furnished burial in parts of western Britain, the Scandinavian population of Dublin had

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[137] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.273-4; Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.107

[138] Asser, *Vita Alfredi*, ed. and trans. by Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983) § 56, pp.84-5; Dawn Hadley, *The Vikings in England: Settlement, Society and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp.29-37.

been established for around 60 years by this time, and therefore some of Ingimund's following may have been Christians and; we cannot assume a rapacious, domineering attitude towards the Church on their part.[139]

Returning to the monuments, West Kirby is distinguished by the richness of its Viking Age stone sculpture. There are five pieces which can be securely dated before the Norman Conquest and their provenance is secure; numbers 1 to 4 were discovered during the demolition of part of the medieval church building in 1869, in-between what had been the south wall of the church prior to 1788 and the line of an earlier arcade (though there is some doubt over West Kirby 3).[140] West Kirby 5 was excavated in 1893 when the churchyard was extended and can therefore be securely linked with the site.[141]

West Kirby 1 is a probable fragment of a cross shaft, while 2 and 3 are partial cross-heads, with West Kirby 2 surviving in two pieces. All three share stylistic features, particularly the use of bold border mouldings (plain on the bottom of West Kirby 1 and the ring of West Kirby 2 and 3, but with a cable-moulded arris design at the corners of West Kirby 1). The two cross-heads also have very similar decorative schemes, featuring an unpierced circle-head design, a raised central boss, smaller bosses in the spandrels and triquetra knot patterns in the cross-arms. No decoration survives from the narrow faces of West Kirby 2, but West Kirby 3 features the same kinds of mouldings as West Kirby 1, but arranged with two bands of cabled moulding within two bands of plain moulding. The combination

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[139] Lesley Abrams, 'The conversion of the Scandinavians of Dublin', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 20 (1998), pp.1-31 (pp.4-5).
[140] CASSS, IX, pp.133-6.
[141] CASSS, IX, p.136.

of a circle-head, triquetra knots and unpierced spandrels with armpit bosses exhibited on West Kirby 2 and 3 has close parallels with Hilbre Island 1 (significant given Hilbre was under the parochial jurisdiction of West Kirby), and several examples from the prolific site at Chester St Johns.[142] It also has decorative similarities with Whitford 2 (*Maen Achwyfan*) across the Dee.[143] The thickness and boldness of the mouldings evoke several pieces from elsewhere in Wirral at Neston.[144] They are therefore typical of the Scandinavian-influenced sculpture of tenth-century Cheshire, Lancashire, north Wales and (with some differences) Cumbria, and can therefore be dated to the Viking Age with relative confidence. West Kirby 3 is catalogued as 'tenth or eleventh century', and may be slightly later, whilst the use of a 'double oval' pattern on the narrow face of West Kirby 1 may place it in the later tenth century.[145] All three of these pieces are carved in local Helsby Formation Sandstone which outcrops extensively across Wirral.[146]

Less typical is West Kirby 4, one of two hogbacks from Cheshire. Such monuments are distributed in a band stretching from northern Yorkshire across the Pennines via the Eden valley to of west Cumbria.[147] South and west of these areas they are rare, with only four examples known from Lancashire and Cheshire, all located on coastal sites. The examples from Lancashire show close similarities; these are Heysham 5 and Bolton-le-Sands 2 in the north of the county.[148] The Cheshire examples are both from Wirral; specifically West Kirby 4, and Bidston 1.[149] Hogbacks represent an accommodation between an incoming

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[142] CASSS, IX, pp.62-9, 81.
[143] *A Corpus Volume III*, pp.366-71.
[144] CASSS, IX, pp.85-90.
[145] CASSS, IX, pp.133-6.
[146] CASSS, IX, pp.12-16, 133-6.
[147] CASSS, VI, p.23.
[148] CASSS, IX, pp.167-8, 201-4.
[149] CASSS, IX, pp.49-51, 135-6.

Scandinavian culture and the pre-existing practice of Anglo-Saxon sculptors, creating a new unique form. They have some Anglo-Saxon antecedents in the form of building-shaped shrines, as well as metalwork shrines and reliquaries, but they represent more of a departure from the existing sculptural forms of southern Britain than even the most heavily Scandinavian-influenced cross designs of the Viking Age.[150] As such they are a stronger statement of Scandinavian cultural affiliation than the motifs of a standing cross or cross-slab, which might be more easily attributed to changes in fashion, though this comes with caveats about assuming the cultural identity of a patron or stonemason from the material artefacts they generated. Nevertheless, the way in which they signal the presence of Scandinavian culture and ground in it the landscape led James Lang to describe them as 'colonial' monuments.[151] On a related point, Lang also suggested that hogbacks were a relatively short-lived sculptural form which became uncommon by the middle of the tenth century.[152] This may account for their distribution, as northern Yorkshire was settled by the Great Army by the 870s, whilst settlement in the west took off some thirty years later and, apart from Lakeland, was less intense.

Regarding West Kirby 4, the use the hogback form must be considered a deliberate choice and it would have stood out amongst the other pieces from the site. The specifically Viking-Age character of the form suggests that its patron felt a strong affinity with the culture of other Scandinavian-settled parts of England and we should note that not all Scandinavian cultural influence in western Britain was necessarily transmitted via Ireland. Regardless, the evidence implies a strong statement of identity in opposition to

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[150] CASSS, IX, pp.38-9.
[151] James Lang, 'The hogback: a Viking colonial monument', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, 3 (1984), pp.85-176.
[152] CASSS, VI, p.23

more Anglo-Saxon kinds of monuments, although this need not imply any enmity along ethnic lines. Such an assertion of cultural affiliation at a church site is not necessarily evidence for any particular kind of church organisation, but it demonstrates the presence of influential patrons who had the means and the motive to assert a foreign identity at an important ecclesiastical centre. Such a person might have held considerable control over that church as a patron, protector or lord, even if the essential character of the site as a minster endured. This willingness to stand out is underlined by the materiality of the monument; the local red sandstones of the other West Kirby monuments were eschewed in favour of a grey Cefn sandstone, the nearest local source of which lies near modern-day Ruabon in Wales, around 28 miles from West Kirby as the crow flies.[153] This reinforces the idea that hogbacks were a prestigious and exclusive form of elite monument, and this example would have been particularly conspicuous in a region where hogbacks were rare.

West Kirby 4 also stands out for other reasons. Several earlier antiquaries and historians who studied the stone in the decades following its discovery noted that its decoration was inconsistent in execution, especially when comparing the two broad faces (labelled A and C in the *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*).[154] A is the more technically accomplished and its decorative scheme is more clearly structured; beginning at the top, a row of ring and bar motif runs parallel to the gently curving ridgeline of the stone, above three rows of type 10 tegulation of somewhat inconsistent size. The bottom row is decorated with a three-strand plait, which again is not entirely regular. C has a similar

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[153] CASSS, IX, pp.16-17, 135-6; Howard Williams, 'Clumsy and Illogical?', pp.93-4.
[154] CASSS, IX, pp.135-6; Williams, 'Clumsy and Illogical?', pp.76-7.

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design but is confused in execution; the top row is mostly lost due to damage near the ridgeline, but the middle row of tegulation is difficult to classify because of its irregularity, with the left side resembling type 10, transitioning into smaller and more overlapping sections to the right similar to type 2c. Because of these perceived flaws, earlier scholars tended to date this stone later in the series, inferring that the inconsistent execution reflect a gradual loss of the skills and understanding of the form exhibited at the height of hogback production, dating it to the early eleventh century.[155] More recently, the stone has been reappraised by Howard Williams, who has provided a number of sidelights on its form. In particular, he notes the tendency of previous scholars (especially Lang and W.G. Collingwood) to view West Kirby 4 as a degraded or poor example of a hogback ('clumsy and illogical' in his title, quoting Lang).[156] To Williams, this has straightjacketed their interpretations, firstly by causing them to fixate on its 'good' side (i.e. *CASSS*'s face A), but primarily by leading them to compare it mostly to other hogbacks.[157] He casts some doubt on the applicability of the term 'hogback' in this case, because West Kirby 4 lacks an obvious and pronounced curve to its ridgeline and it tapers only slightly towards its ends.[158] This deliberately provocative line of argument is intended to address the neglect of interesting comparisons with other, non-hogback pieces in the corpus, and some of his examples have genuine significance for our wider interpretation of West Kirby's status in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

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[155] Williams, 'Clumsy and Illogical?, p.75.
[156] W.G. Collingwood, 'Early monuments of West Kirby' in *West Kirby and Hilbre: a parochial history*, ed. by J Brownbill, (Liverpool: H. Young and Sons, 1928), pp.14-26 (pp.19-21); Lang, 'The Hogback', p.168.
[157] Williams, 'Clumsy and Illogical?, pp.76, 82-3.
[158] Williams, 'Clumsy and Illogical?, p.82-3.

Perhaps the most fruitful comparisons concern the ring and bar motif in the top row of face A. There are possible antecedents for this design on pieces from elsewhere in Cheshire (specifically Prestbury 3 from the east of the county). This evokes a wider iconographic trend to depict figures or creatures bound in fetters, such as the 'devil' figure on Kirkby Stephen 1A, and Williams also suggests that the ring and bar motif is used to form a spit on certain Manx monuments, as used by the Norse mythological figure Sigurd to cook the heart of a dragon on the cross-slabs from Bride, Malew and Andreas.[159] However, the most direct comparisons are to Dyserth 1 and 2 from north east Wales, which are discussed in a previous chapter.[160] Both feature similar plaitwork, but the most striking features are the two ring and bar designs on Dyserth 2, flanking a Latin ring-cross. Significantly, Dyserth 1 is a recumbent cross-slab, while Dyserth 2 is the base of a standing cross; neither could possibly be interpreted as a hogback. The motif therefore suggests an extremely close link between Wirral and north Wales, and the possibility that the same personnel were involved in their creation. The parallel is even stronger given that the churches at Dyserth and West Kirby are both dedicated to St Bridget (albeit in her Welsh guise as St Ffraid at Dyserth), suggesting that in both cases the dedication was the product of a shared cultural context. Other Welsh parallels, for instance the communities of churches dedicated to St Cybi and his acolytes, suggest that these two groups of clergy may have seen each other as part of a broader fraternity joined in service to Bridget, who was understood as the active and powerful proprietor of her churches.[161] The potential for these links to ripple out over the Irish Sea multiplies when one considers the fame and geographical extent of Bridget's cult in Ireland; her principal church in Kildare rivalled Armagh as the most powerful church in Ireland and her cult was carried

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[159] Kermode, *Manx Crosses*, pp.176-7, 180.
[160] Williams, 'Clumsy and Illogical?, ppp.83-6; *A Corpus Volume III*, p.354.
[161] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.601.

all over western Britain by Scandinavian influenced populations who held her in especially high regard. This was important when new Scandinavian landholders founded churches of their own and chose a saint to dedicate them to; it appears they drew on the full range of saints known to them, thereby spreading new cults from Ireland into Britain.[162] This raises an important issue concerning the date of the first church at West Kirby, because if the Bridget dedication resulted from Hiberno-Scandinavian migration in the early tenth century, then the church was either founded anew and dedicated to Bridget, probably by patrons of Hiberno-Scandinavian heritage during a phase of expansion in local and proprietary churches, or that the Bridget dedication supplanted an earlier dedication to a different saint. There are no instances of this particular dedication in England during the pre-Viking era. The spread of the Brigitine cult in the tenth century to Wirral, alongside the cults of other Irish saints, is much better evidenced and is therefore a more likely explanation.

West Kirby was a stable mother-parish, one which was relatively prosperous in the tenth and eleventh century based on the size and complexity of its sculpture and which was protected from the late-eleventh century onwards by a series of powerful monastic proprietors. There is however one potential example of parish fission in this part of Wirral, focused on Thurstaston to the south of West Kirby. In Domesday, Thurstaston was another holding of Robert of Rhuddlan, part of the block of territory he held either side of the Dee estuary.[163] Previously it was held by a certain Leofnoth, who controlled a compact block of manors on the west coast of Wirral which was transferred to Robert

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[162] Fiona Edmonds, *Gaelic Influence in the Northumbrian Kingdom*, pp.132-3.
[163] DB Cheshire 3.7, f.264v; H.C. Darby, 'The Marches of Wales in 1086', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 11.3 (1986), pp.259-78 (pp.273-4).

after the Conquest, along with Leofnoth's three manors in Atiscros hundred. [164] Otherwise, the holding was unexceptional, with four ploughlands assessed at two hides with one plough in demesne and one and a half held by four villeins and four bordars.[165] Crucially, no priest or church is recorded. However, in the great charter of confirmation supposedly granted by Earl Ranulf I of Chester (r.1120-29) to the abbey of St Werburgh's Chester, there is record of Matthew of Rhuddlan's grant of *ecclesiam de Tursteinestun cum suis pertinentiis*.[166] Likewise, in Earl Ranulf II's sweeping charter of confirmation dating to 1151 or 1152, there is another confirmation of Matthew's grant of *ecclesiam de Thurstanestona cum omnibus que ad eam pertinent*.[167] That this Matthew of Rhuddlan is a descendant of Robert of Rhuddlan is unclear, but Thurstaston belonged to Robert in 1086 and the concurrence of byname is striking. [168] Matthew could feasibly be an illegitimate son of Robert's, in which case he would be at least in his mid-twenties in 1120; he could also be descended through the William of Rhuddlan who perished in the White Ship disaster. The disposition of Robert's lands after his death is unclear; some were given by Earl Hugh I to St Werburgh's in the 1090s and must have come into his hands upon Robert's death in 1093, while some of Robert's Welsh holdings were lost in the fighting between the earls of Chester and Gwynedd around that time.[169] Robert's Wirral holdings were his most secure in Cheshire, and therefore the most likely to pass to a descendant. Once the Welsh lands were lost, it appears that the family took the 'de Thurstaston' name from the mid-twelfth century onwards.[170]

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[164] DB Cheshire 3.3, 3.5, 3.7-3.10, f.264v.
[165] DB Cheshire 3.7, f.264v.
[166] ChANEC, 13, p.23; Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 6, p.48.
[167] ChANEC, 28, p.43; Tait, Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 8, p.60.
[168] DB Cheshire, 3.7, f.264v.
[169] ChANEC, 3, p.4; Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 3, p.16.
[170] ChANEC, 89, p.125.

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In both charters, Thurstaston is explicitly described as an *ecclesia*, the term one would expect of a full parish church. However, there is a later charter which records a quitclaim of *Willelmus filius Matthei de Thurstantona'* regarding *capellam de Thurstanton*.[171] The text is severely abbreviated and no witness list survives, but if this William's father was the same as Matthew de Rhuddlan in the first two documents, then it could reasonably date to the late-twelfth century. Even if it was later, it is unusual for a church to revert to a chapel in this way, strongly suggesting that Thurstaston was a chapel all along, or at least subordinate to another church somehow (perhaps lacking full burial or baptismal rights). The *Taxatio* of 1291 is no help as Thurstaston escapes mention altogether; had it been a dependent chapel it would most likely have been recorded with its mother church. The absence suggests that Thurstaston was a full parish church by 1291, omitted because of its low valuation, as benefices of little value were exempt from papal taxation and therefore went unrecorded. This accords well with the small area of the parish and indicates the late-twelfth or thirteenth century date for the elevation of the chapel.

The evidence of later tithes maps is indicative here. The parish of Thurstaston has a complex eastern boundary, and it contained small parcels of land from the neighbouring townships of Irby and Greasby which were otherwise included in the parishes of Woodchurch and West Kirby respectively.[172] The entangling of the different townships and parishes here suggests that at some point the boundary has been redrawn. This raises the possibility that Thurstaston was referred to as a chapel in William of Thurstaston's charter because it was split off from a larger neighbouring parish. Thurstaston was bordered by three other parishes; West Kirby and Woodchurch as mentioned, and also

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[171] ChANEC, 89, p.125.
[172] Cheshire Record Office, EDT 171/2, EDT 218/2, EDT 394/2.

Heswall to the south. Heswall has no early medieval or Viking Age stone sculpture and though it is recorded in Domesday, no priest or church is mentioned, nor does it feature in the early charters of the Earls of Chester and their barons. It is therefore the least likely candidate. If one admits the possibility that that early parochial boundaries reflected the organisation of landholdings into large blocks of economically diversified but dispersed settlement, then Thurstaston could be linked to West Kirby, whose parish boundaries roughly correspond with the block of Domesday vills held by Robert of Rhuddlan in 1086, and before him by Leofnoth.[173] Leofnoth held Thurstaston, Caldy and both Meolses, as well as Gayton and Leighton further south, forming an almost continuous block of land along the western coast of Wirral.[174] Within this territory, West Kirby is the only site with Viking Age stone sculpture, and has an unambiguously ecclesiastical toponym, making it the most feasible candidate for the mother church of the district. Woodchurch cannot be ruled out, because there is also evidence that indicates pre-Viking ecclesiastical activity there, but it lacks the tenurial connection that exists between the parish of West Kirby and the vill of Thurstaston in Domesday, and so its case is weaker.

4.3 Bromborough and Eastham

Another major assemblage of Viking Age stone sculpture can be found on Wirral's eastern coast at Bromborough. Eleven pieces are known from the site, all of them discovered during the demolition of St Barnabas' Church in 1863, which had itself replaced a medieval building in 1828.[175] Most of the fragments were scattered in 1909, with some remaining inside the church while others were used to decorate the gardens of

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[173] DB Cheshire, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7-3.10, f.264v.
[174] DB Cheshire, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7-3.10, f.264v.
[175] CASSS, IX, p.52.

the nearby rectory.[176] A majority of the stones disappeared during the redevelopment of the rectory in the 1930s, leaving only three remaining fragments which have since been combined into a single monument in the churchyard; these are the two cross-shaft fragments Bromborough 1a and 1c, and the cross-head fragment Bromborough 3.[177] The relationship between the fragments is ambiguous; 1a and 1c are similar in their tall slender proportions and use of three-strand plaitwork (in two parallel plaits on the broad faces, and a single plait on the narrow faces), but a deep circle cross-head like Bromborough 3 would normally sit atop a wider shaft as seen on Whitford 2 and several crosses at Neston and Chester St John's.[178] However, there is precedent for a circle cross-head on a slender cross-shaft across the Dee with Dyserth 1.[179] Furthermore, Dyserth 1 and Bromborough 3 both have unusual decoration on their cross-arms, showing a wider range of spiral and knotwork patterns as opposed to the usual triquetra which prevail in the Cheshire circle-head group.[180] Whatever the relationship between them, it is apparent that the nearest parallels for the Bromborough pieces are the other circle-headed crosses from north western Britain, particularly Cheshire and north Wales.

Important though the Bromborough sculpture is, the utility of the site as an example of Viking Age church organisation lies more in the textual records pertaining to it. Beginning with the 1291 *Taxatio,* Bromborough is listed together with its chapel of Eastham which lay a short distance to the south.[181] Eastham chapelry, later a parish in its own right, covered most of Bromborough's parish, including 8 of its 10 townships.[182]

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[176] CASSS, IX, p.52.
[177] CASSS, IX, p.52-4.
[178] CASSS, IX, p.52-4, 85-90; *A Corpus Volume III*, p.367.
[179] *A Corpus Volume III*, p.351.
[180] CASSS, IX, p.32.
[181] *Taxatio,* CL.CH.WL.10.
[182] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.187.

That Bromborough remained the senior church indicates that it was the original mother church of the district and that Eastham was a later foundation. A second quirk of Bromborough's parish boundaries concerns the exclave of Brimstage, divided from Bromborough by Poulton cum Spital township in Bebington parish.[183] Here the place names may indicate the antiquity of the link between these two places, as the Old English personal name *Brūna* can be detected in their earliest forms; Brimstage is attested in the thirteenth century as *BrunestaÞe*, *Brunstath* or similar, while Bromborough is similarly spelt as *Brunburg, -burch, -burh or -burgh*, or as *Bruneburgh, -bur'* in various charters from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. [184] This is how John McNeal Dodgson interpreted these two toponyms, as well as the now-lost Brimston ('*Brūna*'s tun').[185] Bromborough is perhaps the most intensively researched toponym in England, because it forms a key piece of evidence placing the battle of *Brunanburh* in 937 in Wirral, when Óláfr Guðrøðsson, of Dublin and Causantín II of Alba led a military coalition to a decisive defeat at the hands of the English king Athelstan. Bromborough is the leading candidate for the site of the battle, as its modern forms clearly evolved from Old English *Brunanburh*. It is however worth noting that Dodgson sidestepped the debate around the battle-site by not listing the earliest forms from the chronicle sources for the battle of *Brunanburh* in the Cheshire volumes of the *English Place-Name Survey*; these include six versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A through E). Instead, his earliest forms are supplied from a 1285 royal *inspeximus* of a charter from the reign of Henry I (*Brunberg*) and three charters from the cartulary of St Werburgh's Chester (two dated to 1153, the

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[183] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.235.

[184] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.235-8; John McNeal Dodgson, 'The Background of Brunanburh', *Saga Book of the Viking Society*, 14.4 (1957), reprinted in EPNS Cheshire, V(II), pp.249-61, p.249-50; Paul Cavill, 'The Place-Name Debate' in *The Battle of Brunanburh: A Casebook* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011, pp.327-49 (pp.329-30).

[185] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.234, 237.

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other to 1155, with the forms *Bruneburgh*, *Brumburg* and *Brunberg* respectively).[186] The voluminous literature on the subject has therefore produced other interpretations of these forms, and some recent research has preferred to read the first element as Old English *brune*, meaning 'dark, brown, shining', or a form of Old English *burne*, meaning 'stream, well or spring' modified under the influence of the cognate Old Norse word *brunne*.[187]

The main reason to dwell on the derivation of Bromborough and Brimstage concerns the early territorial organisation of Wirral. Assuming that the initial element in these names is the personal name *Brūna*, following Dodgson, then their occurrence several miles apart associates this *Brūna* with a broader tract of land, suggesting he was a man of considerable local importance. Whilst not necessarily suggestive of an early administrative unit, this toponymic link implies the existence of a larger tract of land associated with *Brūna* who had his *burh* or fortified place at Bromborough, probably his main seat in the area.[188] The prolific sculptural deposits at Bromborough and the large size of its parish may reflect that it was the mother-church of this *Brūna*'s landholding or area of influence. Such a unit may reflect the division of Wirral into tenurial blocks at a much earlier date than our records, as argued for other parts of Cheshire.[189] In these arguments, there is an assumption that at some very early point in the tenurial history of these larger units, there would have been a broad correlation between each block and the parochial boundaries of its church, which gradually broke down over time as the expediencies of lay noble inheritance and their land-use strategies differed from the

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[186] *Calendar of the Charter Rolls Preserved in the Public Records Office*, 13 Edw. I 11.6, p.317; Tait, *St Werburgh's,* , I, pp.233.
[187] Clare Downham, 'A Wirral Location for the Battle of Brunanburh', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 170.1 (2021), pp.15-32 (p.25).
[188] Dodgson, 'The Background of Brunanburh', pp.249-61.
[189] VCH Cheshire, I, p.264; Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.127.

Church's. If a large and early estate centred on Bromborough and named for *Brūna* could be proved, then it might also be possible to prove that the boundaries of that unit were mirrored by the early mother parish of Bromborough. Dating such a unit would be difficult with no independent textual evidence for anyone called *Brūna* active in Cheshire or the north west of England, but this model provides a feasible reconstruction of the territorial organisation of Wirral before the Viking Age both tenurially and parochially. However, this argument is dependent on an uncertain place-name derivation, and there may be reasons to prefer the other suggested etymologies of Bromborough. For instance, the derivation from *burne* or *brunne*, meaning stream, might reference Bromborough Pool and the stream which feeds it (nowadays known as Dibbinsdale or Dibbinsdale Brook, the former first recorded in 1278 as *Pultundale*, 'valley of a farm by a pool or creek').[190] This stream has cut a short valley through the low sandstone ridge west of Bromborough and passes within half a mile of St Barnabas' Church, making such a toponymical link very feasible. The existence of an early *regio* around Bromborough is also indicated by the Domesday record. In 1086 the manor of Eastham, one of Earl Hugh d'Avranches' most valuable possessions in Cheshire, was assessed at 22 hides with the same number of ploughlands and was extensively subinfeudated to Hugh's leading vassals.[191] Eastham's importance is immediately apparent from its size and value, but it is also notable that its chief tenant in the time of King Edward was Earl Edwin of Mercia, Cheshire's last pre-Norman ealdorman.[192] The size of the manor and its longer-term associations with local comital power suggests Eastham was a place of customary importance in the eleventh-century

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[190] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.241, 250-2.
[191] *DB* Cheshire 1.22, f.263v.
[192] *DB* Cheshire 1.22, f.263v.

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There are signs of the importance of the manor of Eastham elsewhere in Wirral. It has long been noted that the combined area of Eastham and Bromborough parishes is very low for its Domesday assessment at 22 hides, which is more than a fifth of the value of the entire hundred.[193] This can be explained if one accepts the argument that many of the unnamed townships of Wirral in Domesday were grouped together in the entry for Eastham and formed the different fiefs which Earl Hugh had carved out for his leading men by 1086.[194] A likely example is the seven hides held by a certain Hamo, most likely Hamo de Mascy, whose family name was later recorded in the township of Saughall Massie.[195] This township formed the westernmost part of the parish of Bidston, a parish of 5 townships encompassing much of the flat plain at the northern end of Wirral which stretched from Saughall Massie to the banks of the Mersey at Birkenhead. This is a broad swathe of land located near the important trading site of Meols, granting easy access to the markets there. The Domesday record may therefore record a larger Eastham manor on the verge of its disintegration; smaller pieces such as the township of Storeton were already held separately from the rest of the manor in 1086.[196] A similar process can be deduced in the southeast of Wirral, where there is clear charter evidence placing the townships of Stanney and Whitby within the parish of Eastham; namely, an agreement dated 1178-90 in which the abbey of Stanlow acknowledged that any tithes due from the laymen of Stanney shall pay them along with any other dues to St Werburgh's, which is precisely the kind of residual rights a mother church to might retain over later churches

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[193] *DB* Cheshire 1.22, f.263v.
[194] J. Brownbill, 'Cheshire in Domesday Book', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 51 (1899), pp.1-26 (pp.21-25).
[195] Brownbill, 'Cheshire in Domesday',pp.21-25.
[196] DB Cheshire 25.3, f.267v.

founded inside its original parish.[197] Consequently, the manor's eastern boundary would have been formed by the marshy valley of the River Gowy. Natural boundaries were also important at the northern end of the parish, where The Birket forms the boundary between Bidston parish and the parishes of West Kirby and Wallasey. It is worth noting that the latter two parishes taper to a narrow strip along the northern edge of Wirral, which just barely deprives Bidston of a coastline. Such an unusual arrangement might be ascribed to coastal erosion, as the sandy dunes of the north Wirral coast have retreated considerably even in the past two centuries and it is feasible that West Kirby and Wallasey parishes were somewhat larger in the Middle Ages. Against this, one must remember that in the Viking Age sea levels are likely to have been different and there is evidence that Wirral experienced periodic inundation by the sea. This is explicitly demonstrated in the toponym Wallasey, meaning 'Welshmen's-, or Britons' island', suggesting that the parish was periodically separated from the rest of the peninsula by water.[198]

The extent of the manor of Eastham begs the question of how the pastoral needs of its population were met by the Church, and how this changed over time. As already mentioned, in southern England the gradual fragmentation of large mother parishes can be traced, with wealthy minsters tending to decay, their parishes splintering as new parish churches were established. This process is envisioned as mostly, perhaps entirely, one-way, so that while mother churches might retain residual rights over their daughters, they were unlikely ever to regain full parochial control over them. In these arguments there is often an underlying assumption that parochial and secular land divisions broadly aligned

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[197] William Adam Hulton, ed. *The Coucher Book or Chartulary of Whalley Abbey*, 4 vols (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1847-9), II, p.532; Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 305, pp.195-6.
[198] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.324.

at a very early point but then diverged, with the parochial boundaries more likely to preserve elements of the initial organisation of land in the early Middle Ages. However, it is uncertain whether this holds for Wirral, because of the potential disruption caused by the Scandinavian migration in the Viking Age. The manor of Eastham, so great in size and strongly associated with the local ealdormanry, might be a relic of the initial division of land at the Anglian settlement of Wirral in the seventh century. But it might also result from the agglomeration of several land units in the tenth century as the area was integrated into the English kingdom. The distinction matters because affects our understanding of the early parochial history of the area; if Eastham is a genuinely early unit, then we would be justified in assuming a single parochial centre of early date from which other parishes were later carved out. However, if Eastham is a tenth-century amalgamation of holdings, then the possibility arises that there were other churches in the large area covered by the manor, which went unrecorded in Domesday because they were a still part of Eastham in 1086 and therefore these places were omitted entirely, as we saw above with Bidston parish. Bidston is important because an unusual miniature hogback of Viking Age date was discovered there in the 1990s, as is Bebington, which is not mentioned in Domesday but is recorded in Earl Hugh I's *Sanctorum Prisca* charter which confirms the grant of the *capella* of *Bebintone* by a certain Scirard to St Werburgh's Chester[199] Bebington is relevant because it divides the parish of Bromborough from Bidston, and it is unfortunate that we cannot trace any ecclesiastical activity there before the Conquest as this could confirm or disprove a continuous parochial block from the Gowy round to Saughall Massie. Nevertheless, that Bebington was referred to as a *capella* during Hugh's time is encouraging and suggests that it was subordinated to another church; Bromborough or Eastham are the only reasonable candidates.

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[199] ChANEC, 3, p.6.

The relationship between Bromborough and Eastham is illuminated somewhat by Domesday. Whilst Eastham has a lengthy entry detailing Earl Hugh's demesne there and the parcels of land subinfeudated to his men, Bromborough is omitted entirely. A reasonable assumption is that Bromborough was accounted for somewhere within the entry for Eastham.[200] This omission must be remembered when one considers the priest counted amongst the population of Eastham; he could have resided anywhere in the manor, from Saughall Massie in the north to Whitby in the southeast. Unhelpfully, the Eastham entry does not record a church, which is rather puzzling but again may reflect the *de jure* primacy of Bromborough as the mother-church. A similar problem arises with the priest noted at Poulton in Bebington parish in Domesday; if Bebington was once part of the parish or Eastham, then this suggests that the parish had multiple priests, or that the *capella* at Bebington, in which parish Poulton lies, was already in operation by 1086.

However one reconstructs the link between Bromborough and Eastham prior to the Norman Conquest, from the twelfth century we can place this connection on a stronger textual footing. In December 1153, as he lay dying, Earl Ranulf II of Chester granted the two manors of Bromborough and Eastham to St Werburgh's Abbey, Chester as compensation for some unspecified injuries he had inflicted. [201] Three known confirmations of this grant were subsequently issued, one by Henry II in July 1155, and the other two by Bishop Walter Durdent of Coventry and Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury respectively. [202] All three texts use standard formulae to describe the

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[200] *DB* Cheshire 1.22, f.263v.
[201] Tait, *St Werburgh's*,.349, I, pp.231-233; ChANEC, no.34, pp.48-49.
[202] Tait, *St Werburgh's*,.100, 101 and 350, pp.129, 233.

appurtenances of the two manors and refer to the *ecclesiis* or churches of Bromborough and Eastham, suggesting their equal status.[203] However, two later texts clearly specify that Eastham was a chapel, presumably under the jurisdiction of Bromborough. The first is a heavily abbreviated papal bull of Honorius III (r.1216-27) from the chartulary of St Werburgh's, confirming the abbey in its possessions, *specialiter ecclesiam de Brumbur[gh] cum capella de Estham*.[204] The other is a confirmation issued by the convent of Coventry under its prior Geoffrey of the appropriation of several Cheshire churches by St Werburgh's, again including *ecclesia de Brunburch cum capella de Estham*.[205] Given that the 1291 *taxatio* also records Eastham as a *capella* within the parish of Bromborough, the link is secure well into the thirteenth century.[206]

Taking this evidence together, a rough narrative of the development of Bromborough, Eastham and their parishes can be outlined. In 1086 there was at least one, perhaps two priests present in the area, discharging such pastoral care and sacraments as available to the local laity. Quite where their churches were is not entirely clear, but in the Viking Age Bromborough must be the preferred answer on the grounds of its greater antiquity, as suggested its stone sculpture which can be dated to the tenth century. If one places any significance on the personal name *Brūna* in early forms of the toponyms Bromborough and Brimstage, then the foundation of Bromborough might be pushed earlier still, as it would be well positioned to serve an extended tract of land in east Wirral associated with *Brūna*, who was presumably a very early Anglian lord of the region. Together the evidence for Bromborough's early date clearly outweighs that for Eastham, which occurs

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[203] Tait, *St Werburgh's*,.100, 101 and 350, pp.129, 233.
[204] Tait, *St Werburgh's*,.68, p.114.
[205] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, no.114, p.135.
[206] *Taxatio*, CL.CH.WL.10.

in the written record for the first time in Domesday Book and has no stone sculpture. The great size of the parish may have forced the priest in Domesday to travel extensively within this territory, and the provision of services from multiple sites might explain the ambiguities in the evidence. The priest at Poulton is significant here; in a later medieval context we would expect most parishes to have only one priest, perhaps assisted by other minor clergy. It must also be noted however that a small community of priests would not be completely normal in eleventh-century England, and this would suggest that Eastham was a relatively prosperous and prestigious establishment. Furthermore, as the tenurial seat of the Domesday manor, Eastham would have been the ideal place to position a private estate church or oratory of a kind frequently mentioned and regulated in royal law codes from tenth and eleventh-century England and is another feasible origin for the chapel at Eastham.[207]

A final point is that this rather unusual situation, of a subordinate chapelry covering the vast majority of its mother-parish, could result from a shift in the tenurial centre of the district from Bromborough to Eastham prior to the Domesday survey. Given the concern in eleventh-century English royal lawcodes to protect the rights of ancient minsters from newly founded churches, one can imagine a situation where a wealthy local lord used their influence to make Eastham the principal church of the district for all practical purposes, with its subordination to Bromborough being mostly nominal in order to comply with new legislation prohibiting the division of mother parishes. The church at Bromborough may therefore have fallen on hard times fairly quickly after the tenth-century boom in sculpture there and if such a transfer of the parochial focus of the district

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[207] II Eadgar, in *English Historical Documents* ed. by Whitelock, p.431.

did occur, it probably did so after these pieces were carved, giving a likely date in the later-tenth century early-eleventh century. In objection to this, it might be asked that if the subordination of Eastham to Bromborough was simply a figleaf, then how did it endure until the end of thirteenth century.

Taking this argument further, it may be possible to refine the chronology for this transfer and to suggest who instigated it. The first few decades of the eleventh century were of crucial importance to the development of the office of ealdorman, the leading local official of a region who usually governed several counties at once, often equating roughly to the area of an earlier Anglo-Saxon kingdom. Cheshire fell under the writ of the ealdorman of Mercia, an office usually held by the descendants of ealdorman Leofwine of Mercia from the 1030s until the Conquest.[208] Leofwine's ealdormanry was initially centred on the territory of the Hwicce, roughly the counties of Worcestershire and Gloucestershire.[209] His sons however had broader interests across the Midlands and beyond, and his grandson Ælfgar was Ealdorman of East Anglia and then Mercia, and also father-in-law to Gruffudd ap Llywelyn.[210] In Domesday, the serving ealdorman of Mercia in 1066 was Edwin, son of Ælfgar, who held extensive territories in Cheshire, including in Wirral, and across the Dee in Atiscros. Amongst them was Eastham which, just as for Earl Hugh in the 1080s, was one of Edwin's most valuable possessions in Cheshire.[211] This pattern of landholding suggests the deliberate assemblage of a block of lands in a strategically important border region in order to secure the Welsh frontier and to project English power into the Irish Sea. If so, then the Earls of Mercia seem the most

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[208] Stephen Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp.32-3.
[209] Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia,* p.19.
[210] Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, p.565.
[211] DB Cheshire 1.22, f.263v.

likely candidates to have begun the reorganization of Bromborough and Eastham, and this connection would place the rise of Eastham as a church site to the mid-eleventh century.

4.4 Bidston

Having dealt with this maximalist version of the parish of Bromborough-Eastham, we must consider those sites within that supposed district which had churches of their own at or shortly after the Conquest. We have already encountered Bidston since it appears in Domesday Book, but there is also important sculptural evidence which allows us a glimpse of developments in the tenth century. A highly unusual hogback stone was discovered in the grounds of the former vicarage during the 1990s, only a few doors down from St Oswald's Church.[212] This discovery allows us to argue for a tenth-century date for the earliest ecclesiastical activity at Bidston, as this is the usual date for most hogbacks. Such stones generally occur in or near churchyards, and in this respect Bidston 1 follows the pattern of the Lancashire and Cheshire hogbacks which are also closely associated with churches. What makes this stone so distinctive is its diminutive size. At only 47.5cm in length, it is easily the shortest hogback yet discovered; the next shortest is Brompton 16 at 76cm, whilst the average length for an English hogback is 142.4cm.[213] This has important implications for its intended purpose. Uncertainty abounds as to how hogbacks functioned as funerary monuments and the proposition that they were grave markers cannot be backed with hard archaeological evidence. An antiquarian account of an early nineteenth-century excavation at Heysham suggests that a spear was found beneath the stone, perhaps part of a furnished Viking Age burial, but the author did not

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[212] Bailey and others, 'A miniature Viking-Age hogback from the Wirral'pp.345-7.
[213] Bailey and others., 'A miniature Viking-Age hogback from the Wirral', pp.347, 349-50.

witness this first-hand and the spear itself is lost.[214] In this context Bidston is important because it simply is not large enough to cover an adult grave. This does not preclude some purpose as a grave marker, and there is also the possibility that the stone marked the grave of a child, but Bidston 1's dimensions are clearly unusual and must be regarded as a deliberate choice. This singular character is reinforced if one follows Richard Bailey's reading of the stone, which notes that the closest parallels for its decorative scheme come from North Yorkshire, particularly the hogbacks from Brompton.[215] Of note are the aforementioned Brompton 16, which is also relatively short for a hogback and represents another example of the 'extended niche' type like Bidston 1.[216] Therefore, we can read the stone not just as a 'colonial' monument after Lang, but also as one which declares a cultural affinity with the Scandinavian population of North Yorkshire.[217] This is an important corrective to the assumption that the Scandinavian population in Wirral travelled mostly from Ireland. It also opens the possibility of useful comparisons with the Viking Age churches of Yorkshire, revealing how existing Anglian and Scandinavian cultural influences were refracted through different hybrid contexts in Viking Age Britain. This has long been evident to scholars of the toponymy and archaeology of north-west England, but is less often appreciated when thinking about the pre-conquest history of its churches. Whether there was a tenth-century church at Bidston is still difficult to say; on the one hand the close association between the findspot, and the church is encouraging, but on the other a single monument is not proof positive of a church and may indicate only a burial ground. Furthermore, the small size of the monument would have made it more portable than a typical hogback. Its size may also say something about

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[214] Potter and Andrews, 'Excavation and Survey at St Patrick's Chapel and St Peter's Church, Heysham, pp.55-134.

[215] Bailey and others., 'A miniature Viking-Age hogback from the Wirral', p.351.

[216] CASSS, VI, pp.73-4

[217] Bailey and others., 'A miniature Viking-Age hogback from the Wirral', p.352.

the person or persons who commissioned it. One change in the pattern of sculptural production during the Viking Age is we see a greater proportion of smaller, more modest pieces, as seen at Chester and York, and some rural ecclesiastical sites.[218] Such monuments have been read as evidence for greater numbers of merchants and traders in Viking Age Britain, an expanded middling class which acquired the habit and resources to imitate elite styles of funerary monuments on a more modest scale. Certain churches, notably St John's Chester, have been interpreted as centres for the pastoral needs of a mobile merchant community, where Christianised voyagers could receive the sacraments between journeys and where, should they die locally, they might be buried.[219] This presents an interesting analogy with Bidston, which lay close to Meols. In the tenth century, when the Irish Sea trade was at a height, Meols would have seen particularly large numbers of merchants from various cultural backgrounds, most of them Christian or at least Christianising. Such communities would still have required the use of a church nearby, and Bidston would be a convenient choice because of its proximity. An objection might be raised on chronological grounds, as Meols's Viking Age revival took off late in the tenth century, as demonstrated by the sequence of coin finds which has a long gap from the mid-eighth century to the 970s.[220] If Bidston 1 was a monument to a Meols trader, this would contradict Lang's idea that hogback production peaked in the early tenth century in the decades immediately the Scandinavian settlement. Nevertheless, the occurrence of such an uncommon sculptural form for the north west and a major trading site in close proximity is striking.

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[218] Everson, and Stocker, 'Transactions on the Dee, pp.163-5.
[219] Everson, and Stocker, 'Transactions on the Dee, pp.163-5.
[220] Griffiths, Philpott and Egan, *Meols: The Archaeology of the North Wirral Coast*, pp.343-4.

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4.5 Woodchurch, Overchurch and Landican

The remaining mother-parishes of northern Wirral belong to Woodchurch and Overchurch. The former, much the larger of the two, covers an inland area, ringed by the parishes of Bromborough, Bebington and Bidston to its east and north. Continuing anti-clockwise, West Kirby, Thurstaston and Heswall lie to the west, and there is a short border with Neston in the south. A large parish of ten townships, Woodchurch lies within the zone settled by Hiberno-Scandinavian migrants in the tenth century and this has impacted the toponomy of the area. Most prominent amongst the Norse place-names is Thingwall, derived from the Old Norse *þing-vǫllr*, 'field where an assembly meets'.[221] This toponym points to the existence of a Scandinavian-style assembly site which would have been an important focal point where the local free population gathered to transact its legal business. Such sites can be paralleled across early medieval Europe and beyond and similar (though by no means identical) practices can be identified in a range of contexts from Britain, Scandinavia and beyond.[222] Such assemblies were key to the self-regulation of society at a local level in an era when the projection of central governmental power was extremely difficult, and whilst the exact nature of proceedings and the associated locations and architecture will have differed, the key issues for discussion would have been perceived across cultural boundaries; these similarities may explain how Scandinavian migrants to Britain succeeded in planting elements of their legal culture in their new homelands.[223] The Thingwall sites were therefore likely to have some diagnostically Scandinavian features, but fulfilled broadly the same political and cultural needs as the hundredal court seated at Hadlow in Willaston.[224] Whilst any case based on

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[221] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.273.
[222] Sarah Semple and others., *Negotiating the North: Meeting-Places in the Middle Ages in the North Sea Zone* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), pp.5-6.
[223] Semple and others, *Negotiating the North*, pp.12-14.
[224] DB Cheshire 1.24, f.263v.

a single toponym should be treated with caution, the name Thingwall has been used to argue that the Scandinavian enclave in Wirral may have enjoyed a degree of legal autonomy where Scandinavian legal and political practices were observed.[225] The existence of such a legal and political community is corroborated by other examples of thing-sites attested toponymically, and the presence of a second Thingwall across the Mersey in south west Lancashire suggests that such a system was not uncommon.[226]

Other signs of the Scandinavian presence occur in the township names of Pensby, Irby and Arrowe, though in each case the influence of Celtic languages is also apparent. Taking Pensby first, this hybrid toponym combines both Brittonic and Norse elements; -by, derived from Old Norse *býr*, refers to a farmstead or settlement, while *pen* is a Brittonic word still in use in Welsh with a range of senses, but which in toponyms usually carries the meaning of 'extremity, end, beginning, headland, promontory, projecting point of rock'.[227] Arrowe is first attested at a late date for a major Wirral toponym, first occurring in the thirteenth century, but it derives from the Old Irish word *áirge*, meaning a shieling or summer pasture.[228] This term was widely borrowed by Hiberno-Scandinavian populations and occurs in Old Norse-influenced forms as *erg*.[229] *Áirge* and related elements occur frequently in areas settled by Hiberno-Norse populations, particularly in areas where pastoral agriculture prevailed, especially when this involved transhumance and the use of seasonal upland pastures.[230] There are concentrations in

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[225] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.107.

[226] Gillian Fellows-Jensen, *Scandinavian Settlement Names in the North West* (Copenhagen: C.A. Reitzels Forlag, 1985), pp.168-9.

[227] '*pen¹*', GPC

[228] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.261-2.

[229] Gillan Fellows-Jensen, 'Common Gaelic Aírge, Old Scandinavian Ærgi or Erg', *Nomina*, 4 (1980), pp.67-74 (p.70-1).

[230] Ryan Foster, 'Reconstructing early shieling landscapes & land-use in Cumbria during the Viking Age', *Folk Life*, 59 (2021), pp.1-17 (pp.4-5).

West Cumbria, where the word entered the local dialect and became a productive element in place-name formation for several centuries.[231] This is another example of Irish cultural influence being mediated through the migration of a Hiberno-Scandinavian population into western Britain.

That this population was not solely Scandinavian is strongly suggested by the toponym Irby. The first element is *Íri* (*Íra* in the genitive), meaning 'the Irish', whilst early forms of the second element vary between the Old Norse *býr* and Old English *burh*; together they give the sense of the 'farm of the Irishmen' This is an uncommon place-name, but there are two other places called Irby in Lincolnshire, and two Irebys (one each in Lancashire and Cumberland).[232] The name clearly indicates the presence of a distinctively Irish community which would have stood out amongst the settlements of the district. However, we do not know if the inhabitants of Irby described themselves as Irish, or if they were so-called only by their neighbours. Either way, Irish cultural influence was clearly transmitted to Wirral in the tenth century, and if this occurred for language and other cultural identifiers, then it is perfectly feasible that it could include aspects of ecclesiastical practice. This Irish stratum in Wirral's cultural makeup Viking Age is also attested by another Woodchurch township name, Noctorum.[233] Later medieval sources have corrupted this and given it a Latin genitive plural ending, but it is originally an entirely Old Irish place-name, *cnocc tírim,* meaning 'dry hill'.[234] This accords well with its position on the low rolling hills of central Wirral. The major toponyms of the area

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[231] Ryan Foster, 'Reconstructing early shieling landscapes & land-use in Cumbria, pp.5-6.

[232] A.M. Armstrong, A. Mawer, F.M. Stenton, and Bruce Dickins, *The Place-Names of Cumberland*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950-2), II, pp.299-300; Ekwall, *The Place-Names of Lancashire,* p.183; Kenneth Cameron, *A Dictionary of Lincolnshire Place-Names* (Nottingham: English Place-Name Survey, 1998), p.70.

[233] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.268-9.

[234] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.268-9.

therefore demonstrate that the parishes of Woodchurch and Overchurch hosted a linguistically diverse population in the Viking Age, with large proportions of both English and Norse speakers, and also an Irish-speaking population. Another township in Woodchurch parish which we must consider is Prenton, which was first attested as *Prestune* in Domesday.[235] In his survey of Cheshire place-names, Dodgson appears to disregard this early form, and instead focuses on other forms beginning *prem-* or *pren-*, neither of which he is able to evidence prior to the thirteenth century.[236] He therefore renders this name as 'Pren's farm', from an unusual OE personal name *Præn* and the common element *tūn*.[237] Here the earliest forms are surely to be preferred and Prenton looks to be a clear example of a prēosta-tūn toponpym. Intriguingly Dodgson disregards and argues that the *Prestune* forms must be a mistake, despite being able to supply three different attestations of it.[238]

The major place-names of this part of northern Wirral clearly give us a glimpse into cultural makeup and the economic organisation of the area in the Viking Age. What is harder to explain is the spatial extent of the parishes of Woodchurch and Overchurch and their mutual relationship. The two differ greatly in size; Woodchurch boasts nine townships to Overchurch's one, and unusually that single township is not called Overchurch but Upton, a name which occurs in Domesday when it was a substantial holding of William Malbank assessed at three hides.[239] Based on the usual rules of thumb used to identify mother-parishes, a church which retained a large parish like

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[235] DB Cheshire 7.4, f.265r.
[236] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.272.
[237] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.272..
[238] EPNS Cheshire, IV, p.272.
[239] DB Cheshire 8.8, f.265r.

Woodchurch's could be an early and important site, but it is Overchurch which has produced an impressive runic-inscribed stone from the ninth-century. This is an unusual monument in the form of a deep slab with curving sides which once have been considerably longer than the surviving fragment; the inscription on the long side suggests it was not used as a grave marker, at least not by itself, and so may have formed part of a larger and more complex monument; Richard Bailey suggests a shrine or sarcophagus.[240] It is best known for the runic inscription from one of the long edges of the stone, which has been read as *folc arærdon bec[un]* | *[gi]biddaþ fore Æðelmund*, or 'the people raised up a monument / pray for Æðelmund'.[241] The use of the word *folc* has attracted attention as it could have several different senses, but it certainly conveys the idea of a communal or joint effort to raise a tribute for Æðelmund who was clearly held in high regard.[242] Bailey assigns the stone an eighth-century date, placing it comfortably before the Viking incursion into Wirral; he also notes that because most pre-Viking stone sculpture occurs in clearly ecclesiastical contexts, that Æðelmund could easily be a respected and fondly remembered priest whose parishoners decided to honour him in this way.[243] *Folc* could therefore carry the sense of congregation in this case. However one chooses to speculate over the exact content of the stone's production, it is clear that Overchurch 1 is proof of Christian burial and memorial practice in northern Wirral in the eighth century. The site of the church is now largely vacant, whatever medieval fabric there once was having been demolished in 1813 after a period of disrepair, and a short-lived replacement erected around three quarters of a mile to the south in the Greenbank neighbourhood of Upton; this was in turn replaced by the present St Mary's Church at Upton which was completed

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240 CASSS, IX, pp.91-2.
241 CASSS, IX, pp.92.
242 CASSS, IX, pp.92
243 CASSS, IX, pp.92

in the late 1860s.[244] The original site does however contain some additional signs of its antiquity, notably an enclosing ditch or *vallum* of roughly curvilinear shape, much one might expect in an early Welsh *lann*.[245] This should be regarded as very tentative; the only archaeological survey of the site regarded the outer ditch as a modern creation, whilst holding that the inner ditch may be older and perhaps even a sign that a prehistoric monument was appropriated when the first church was built; in the absence of firm dating or excavations this does seem somewhat fanciful, though the curvilinear nature of the site is clear enough.[246]

What is harder to tell is whether Overchurch was the original mother-church for the area, because another candidate appears when one notes another township name in Woodchurch parish. This is Landican, which contains the Welsh element '*lann*', referring to a church enclosure and first recorded as *Landechene* in Domesday.[247] The element is ubiquitous throughout Wales, but is highly unusual in a Mercian context. The most likely explanation is that this toponym is a rare survival of the pre-Anglian settlement phase, and dates before the Mercian takeover of Wirral in the seventh century. It can therefore be suggested that Landican was the original mother-church for this part of Wirral. There are however difficulties with this place-name; in particular the second element in *lann* compounds is often a personal name belonging to a saint or holy figure to whom the church was dedicated or who played a role in its foundation. We might therefore expect Landican to refer to the *lann* of Tecan, an Old Welsh form of the modern personal name

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[244] D. O'Hanlon and K Pealin, 'The Site of Overchurch, Upton, Wirral: A Survey', *Journal of the Merseyside Archaeological Society*, 9 (1995), pp.71-8 (p.71)
[245] O'Hanlon and Pealin, 'The Site of Overchurch', p.71, 73.
[246] O'Hanlon and Pealin, 'The Site of Overchurch', p.71.
[247] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.266-7 ; DB Cheshire, 8.7, f.265r.

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Tegan.[248] However, no saint of that name is known, but this is not a unique problem.[249] Some *lann* sites record the names of very obscure saints whose cult was highly localised, and the total obscurity of St Tegan might suggest they were a local Wirral saint whose cult was extinguished as the Mercians arrived, or by the foundation of Overchurch or Woodchurch sometime in the early Middle Ages. Ultimately, most of this part of northern central Wirral became part of Woodchurch's parish, the name of which is a simple compound of OE *wūdu* or 'wood' and *cirice* or 'church', which other than some indication that the area was forested in the early Middle Ages gives us little other evidence to deduce the earlier ecclesiastical organisation of the area. Subsequently, a small stone church was built at Woodchurch dedicated to the Holy Cross, and which to this day preserves some twelfth-century fabric, but this again suggests that Woodchurch was not the original mother-church of the district.

4.6 Neston

There is one further site in the Wirral peninsula which boasts a substantial collection of stone sculpture, which is Neston on the eastern bank of the River Dee. Consisting of eight townships, the late medieval borders of the parish included the western coast of Wirral between Ness and Leighton, and stretched inland across a large part of the centre of the peninsula. This inland section includes the township of Raby, which on toponymic grounds marked the border of the Norse-settled zone during the Viking Age. The parish has a panhandle in its southeastern corner (see Figure 4.1), where the townships of Willaston and Ledsham form a narrow strip pinched between the parishes of Burton to the west and Eastham to the east. This interlocking of parishes is notable and there are

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[248] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.266-7.
[249] EPNS Cheshire, IV, pp.266-7.

grounds to suspect that Burton emerged as a parish out of Neston in the early Norman period. This panhandle also gives Neston a short border with the parish of Shotwick to its south. Little can be deduced about Shotwick's ecclesiastical arrangements before Domesday as it lacks sculptural evidence, except that, like Great Neston, it was held by the canons of St Werburgh's in Domesday. Quite when they acquired these lands is unclear and neither is included in the lone surviving pre-Conquest charter to St Werburgh's, a grant of lands in Cheshire and north Wales by king Edgar in 959. Great Neston, Raby and Saughall form a compact block of territory northwest of Chester, but what this means for the relationship between the church of Neston and St Werburgh's is unclear.

The church of St Mary and St Helen at Neston has produced six early medieval sculptural fragments; whilst one is now lost and of indeterminate date, the other five are now on display in the church. Four of the fragments were found built into the fabric of the predominantly Norman church during restoration work in 1874, whilst Neston 3 formed part of the lintel for a window in the belfry until its removal in 1987.[250] These five fragments are from cross-shafts or cross-heads; Neston 6 is known only through antiquarian descriptions but was probably a grave cover or slab of early Norman date.[251] The five cross fragments have all been dated to the tenth or eleventh century, and they display close affinities with the rest of the Cheshire group of circle-head crosses. Neston 2 and 5 both preserve sections of a cross-head; the latter is more complete and comprises the lower half of a circular cross head.[252] The initial similarities with other Cheshire

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[250] CASSS, IX, pp.85, 87.
[251] CASSS, IX, p.152.
[252] CASSS, IX, pp.89-90.

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crosses from West Kirby, Bromborough and Chester St John's are apparent, including the unpierced spandrels and the use of a triquetra knot in the lower cross arm of both broad faces. There are innovations however, particularly the use of further interlace patterns within the spandrels (either more triquetra or other interlace designs depending on one's interpretation) which demonstrate a degree of individuality.[253] The cabled moulding on the outside of the cross arms is also more unusual, although the motif is used as a border moulding on other cross-shafts in the Cheshire group. Face C of Neston 2, is mostly a fragment of cross-shaft but does preserve the lower edge of the cross-head, featuring a step-patterned moulding to divide the head from the shaft which is unique within Cheshire, although other cross-heads incorporate similar patterns in this position, particularly Hilbre 1's Type 2 meander pattern on both faces.[254] The overall impression is therefore of broad alignment with the Cheshire group, but with some unusual or unique features which demonstrate some variety in the region's Viking Age sculpture.

What makes the Neston assemblage particularly interesting is the prevalence of figural ornament. These images of human figures are almost unique within the Cheshire group and are paralleled only by Chester St John's 8, which is now lost; the surviving photos show too little of the figure or figures from that fragment to make any reasonable interpretation.[255] The cross-shaft fragment Neston 1 is especially interesting from an ecclesiastical perspective because it features an image of a priest. He stands upright with his arms aloft in an *orans* position, with a maniple hanging from his left forearm and a chalice of Insular form in his right hand.[256] The figure is elaborately decorated and wears

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[253] CASSS, IX, p.89-90.
[254] CASSS, IX, pp.81, 86-7.
[255] CASSS, IX, p.68.
[256] CASSS, IX, p.85.

full mass vestments, including a prominent pointed chasuble with added decoration around the neck and down the centre of the garment.[257] The figure is bearded and has clearly incised facial features; in particular his mouth seems to hang open. Taken together, the image conveys a sense of the physical and visual spectacle of the mass, with the priestly figure in full ceremonial dress and holding the chalice up high, as during the climax of the mass when the wine and wafer have been sanctified and the body and blood of Christ are present. Likewise, the priest's open mouth emphasises his role in leading the liturgy, guiding his congregation in prayer and sermonising. The fragment is therefore loaded with symbolism which displays the important role played by priests and their power to give communion to their community. To extrapolate the nature of the entire site at Neston over two centuries from a single image would be naïve, but Neston 1 is a confident and imposing display of priestly power and importance, and indicates that we are looking at a centre dominated by some kind of priests or canons. Direct parallels with this depiction are difficult to identify; one or two of the figures on the complex Nunburnholme 1 monument, a standing cross from eastern Yorkshire dated to the late-ninth or early-tenth centuries, may represent priests of clerics of some kind.[258] Whether or not one agrees or not, it is notable that these clerical figures play a secondary role, and the monument is dominated by its distinctive depiction of the Virgin Mary and child and by a figure of a saint with halo.[259] This stands in contrast with Neston, where the priest takes centre stage. It should be remembered however that Neston 1 is a fragment, and the original monument may have had a similarly varied and decorative scheme.

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[257] CASSS, IX, p.85.

[258] Pickles, *Kingship, Society, and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire*, pp.237-8; CASSS, III, pp.189-93.

[259] CASSS, III, pp.189-93.

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A second, closer comparison is the cross-shaft Brompton 3, which shares with Neston the idea of a priest or cleric facing the viewer and probably holding a maniple.[260] This piece, part of a very large assemblage of Viking Age sculpture, is noted for the high quality of its carving and the technical complexity of its design, which is formal, well-organised and shows clear continuity with preceding Anglian-period sculpture; for example, it uses well-established motifs such a placing figures within arches, and Anglian vine-scroll carvings.[261] The first priestly image, on face D, places the cleric within an arch with his arms crossed in front of his body, perhaps grasping a book.[262] Another figure is seen on face A, in a similar position but with a rectangular feature across his chest which connects to what the *Corpus* describes as curtains or wings; if the latter, the image may reflect both Christian depictions of angels and the Norse myth of Wayland the smith and his man-made wings.[263] The idea of a priest and an angel depicted in this face-on manner on the same monument is immediately reminiscent of Neston 1 and, as we shall see, the angel on Neston 2, and so the two monuments might be making a similar point about the role of the clergy at their respective church-sites. In particular, Pickles has suggested that Brompton's large and varied collection of Viking Age monuments may reflect its importance as a pastoral centre, one where priestly concerns and learning coincided with a rich vein of lay resources and patronage to produce such a flowering of stone sculpture.[264] Neston cannot compete with Brompton in terms of quantity of surviving pieces, but a similar set of motivations to raise monuments, and a similar cultural milieu may explain their shared decorative preferences.

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[260] CASSS, VI, pp.66-7.
[261] CASSS, VI, pp.66-7.
[262] CASSS, VI, pp.66-7.
[263] CASSS, VI, pp.66-7; Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, p.11.
[264] Pickles, *Kingship, Society, and the Church in Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire*, pp.237-8; CASSS, III, pp.266-7.

Taking each of the Neston fragments in turn, we return to Neston 2. Both broad sides feature figural decoration directly beneath the cross head, though these differ markedly in their subjects. Face A features an angel depicted on its side; this may be a way of depicting it flying through the air, or may reflect a different early medieval attitude to perspective and artistic realism.[265] The figure has clearly carved wings with incised lines to possibly depict feathers, and wears a short flared kirtle which is clearly plaited.[266] As with the priest on Neston 1, the facial features are prominent, if carved a little less deeply, and there is an obvious halo around the head. The use of an angel to evoke the pastoral duties of the priesthood has been identified in other pieces of sculpture, including in northern England and the Peak District.[267] In such cases, links have been drawn between these angel images and the angelology of Gregory the Great, who reformulated older ideas about the relationship between angels and human beings. His innovation was to shrink the gap in status between humans and angels, arguing that after Christ's sacrifice had redeemed humanity and offered them the opportunity to join God's new covenant, human beings could now aspire to the status of angels through living virtuously on earth, a conclusion he arrived at by comparing how angels interacted with humans in the Old and New Testaments.[268] Another part of Gregory's thinking was that the best path to this quasi-angelic status combined both solemn contemplation and spiritual thinking with practical action; it therefore helped to elevate the prestige and value of the pastoral role of the clergy with the Church, and encouraged a more outward-looking form of

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[265] CASSS, IX, p.86-7.

[266] CASSS, IX, p.86-7.

[267] Thomas Pickles, 'Angel Veneration on Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture from Dewsbury (West Yorkshire), Otley (West Yorkshire) and Halton (Lancashire): Contemplative Preachers and Pastoral Care', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 162.1 (2009), pp.1-28 (pp.13-14); Jane Hawkes, 'Gregory the Great and Angelic Mediation: The Anglo-Saxon Crosses of the Derbyshire Peaks', in *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, ed. by Alistair Minnis and Jane Roberts (Turnhout: Brepols 2007), pp.431-448 (p.442).

[268] Pickles, 'Angel Veneration on Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture', pp.13-14.

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Christianity which better balanced monastic and pastoral activities, presenting the ideal priest as a 'contemplative preacher'.[269] As others have already noted, the deployment of such images in a Viking Age context may reflect the transition from a Church built primarily from mixed communities of regular and secular clergy, to one where the two groups were largely separated and communities of priests began to monopolise pastoral care; whether the sculpture at Neston reflects such a shift at this particular site is impossible to say, but it may indicate a general direction of travel.[270] The use of an angel could therefore be interpreted as a way of conveying the influence and virtue of the priestly class and the fact that it occurs as part of a cluster with the image of a priest on Neston 1 again suggests that the church community there was led by priests rather than monks. It is worth noting that the ideological content of the cross may also be evidence of continuity during arrival of Scandinavian settlers in Wirral, because the use of such images is well attested in northern England from the late-eighth and early-ninth centuries and Gregory's works were widely-read in England before then. Read in this way, the angelic imagery on Neston 2 shows how different cultural and religious influences were layered on top of one another by the tenth century in north west England; the cross builds on the prolific Anglian stone sculptural habit by adding decorative and structural elements popular in Ireland and amongst Scandinavian populations, whilst continuing to conveying Gregory's thought which ties the monument into the intellectual mainstream of Latin Christianity. This should caution us against assuming that the relative paucity of evidence for Church organisation in north west England was the result of isolation or backwardness.

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[269] Pickles, 'Angel Veneration on Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture', pp.13-15.
[270] Pickles, 'Angel Veneration on Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture', pp.22-23.

A contrast between these images can be made with face C of Neston 2, which depicts a very different scene; two human figures are engaged in a fight, both with one arm raised holding what appears to be a knife as if trying to stab the other.[271] The figure on the right has his hand on his opponent's face and seems to be pushing him away.[272] The scene is therefore charged with violence and comes across as unexpectedly graphic, the shoving of the face giving the sense of a real struggle or brawl. Images of warriors on Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture are not uncommon, either in a straightforward manner which may reflect the interests of an aristocratic lay patron, or combined with images such as ravens which may link them with Odin and his cult.[273] Several attempts have been made to identify the Neston fight scene with either a Biblical parallel or a tale from Norse mythology. The difficulty is that both figures are armed; in his discussion of the monument Richard Bailey rules out Cain's killing of Abel and Peter removing the ear of Malchus for this reason.[274] He suggests that the image might depict the fight between David and Goliath, although this presents a problem in that the two figures are of equal size and neither weapon looks much like a sling.[275] However, these objections can be explained with reference to depictions of the two men being of equal stature in Irish and eastern Christian representations of the fight.[276] That this scene appears on the same monument as the angel discussed above, in corresponding positions on the same cross shaft, seems highly deliberate, and the two images may have been deliberately juxtaposed to convey some idea of the violence that could prevail on earth as opposed to the peace of heaven, though we lack the rest of the monument which would provide much needed context. Through this lens, Neston 1 and 2 seem less contradictory, because the secular

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[271] CASSS, IX, p.86.
[272] CASSS, IX, p.86.
[273] Kopár, *Gods and Settlers*, p.110-3.
[274] CASSS, IX, pp.86-7.
[275] CASSS, IX, pp.86-7.
[276] CASSS, IX, pp.86-7.

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image of two men fighting could have had an edifying purpose, showing the consequences of straying from God and enhancing the appeal of paradise in the afterlife. This also aligns with the image of the priest on Neston 1, which could have a role in guiding and shepherding the parishioners who saw it and cautioning them against violence. Overall, it is quite possible that the priest or priests of Neston influenced the content of the sculpture displayed around their church and ensured that complemented each other.

However, the cluster of sculpture at Neston was not entirely priestly in its outlook. Perhaps the most striking of all the images in the collection are found on Neston 3, another cross-shaft fragment. Beginning with face A, we see a large panel filled with figural decoration; at the top the lower halves of two figures are visible, with that on the right wearing a short kirtle while that on the left wears a long dress or gown.[277] The long, wide sleeve of the garment hangs from the figure's arm as if it is held out toward the other figure, and the left-hand figure is also placed slightly higher than the other.[278] Below this is a complete hunting scene, centred on a stag. To its right, a dog seems to leap up and bite its neck, whilst above the stag and to its left, another human figure stands while driving a spear through the stag's body; the spearhead has pierced straight through and is clearly seen beneath the stag's abdomen.[279] The opposite face C contains similarly violent imagery, this time consisting of two figures on horseback riding at each other with spears.[280] The rider on the right is noticeably larger than the one on the left, and the spears cross in the centre of the image; they appear to be aimed above each rider's head, but it

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[277] CASSS, IX, p.88.
[278] CASSS, IX, p.88.
[279] CASSS, IX, p.88.
[280] CASSS, IX, p.88.

is hard not to think of later medieval jousting scenes even if the usual shields are absent. In Bailey's view such a scene is unparalleled anywhere in England, and the best comparison is with some of the intricate Pictish carved stones, particularly the spectacular battle scenes on the back of Aberlemno 2, an eighth or ninth-century stone-slab from Angus.[281] Whilst it is tempting to view this as a purely secular fighting scene, it could represent a metaphor for a spiritual struggle, conveying the idea of a battle for Christianity which would combine military and religious themes in a very appropriate manner for an aristocratic audience. This could also link to the fight scene on Neston 2; if it does depict David and Goliath, that scene was also interpreted as an example of a fight against a heathen enemy a victory for the people of God. The hunting scene on Neston 3 has less obvious religious significance, but may again be a way of interacting with the interests of a lay noble audience. If these crosses were grave-markers, then they can be read as a reminder for subsequent generations about both the nobility of their ancestors, and the need to maintain this spiritual struggle. Above the 'battle scene' is a horizontal moulding (possibly cabled though wear makes this uncertain) and above that a pair of quadrupedal animals; the one on the left looks directly at the one on the right, which returns the gaze by glancing backwards over its shoulder.[282] Cabled mouldings are a regular part of the repertoire of the Cheshire group of crosses and again suggest that Neston's patrons shared their decorative tastes with others from Wirral, Chester and north Wales. Overall the monument reflects the interests and aspirations of a lay noble audience, because of the association of hunting scenes with high social status, military prowess and masculinity, and would again be an appealing choice for the memorial of a local aristocrat.

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[281] CASSS, IX, p.88.
[282] CASSS, IX, p.87.

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The richness of Neston's Viking Age stone sculpture can rival anywhere in Cheshire in its size and the execution of the carving, and exceeds that found at West Kirby or Bromborough in its conceptual content and the variety of imagery employed. The prevalence of figurative ornament is striking, especially as it comparatively uncommon in the Cheshire group of crosses which usually employ interlace, knot patterns and fretwork. The image of the priest from Neston 2 is especially notable and is the clearest demonstration from any Wirral church site of the importance of a priestly class and its power, influence and prestige. This would be entirely consistent with a well-established minster church perhaps inhabited by several priests, a type of establishment usually founded in the seventh or eighth centuries, as opposed to the smaller local churches usually associated with the Viking Age. As a corollary to this point, it may be asked why was there such a sudden flourishing of sculptural production in the tenth and eleventh centuries if the church itself was significantly older. Two likely cause present themselves. One is the change in mortuary and memorial fashions brought about by the Scandinavian settlement of western Britain from the early tenth century. The pre-existing Anglo-Saxon habit of raising sculpted stone memorials and crosses was given fresh impetus with the arrival of new and exotic Hiberno-Scandinavian art styles and decorative motifs which brought new opportunities to display power, wealth and prestige, factors which attracted both lay and ecclesiastical patrons alike. Based on the Cheshire examples in this chapter, crosses were especially popular in this milieu, and may have been inspired by the particularly impressive and complex crosses found in Irish monastic contexts. When evaluating this argument, it should be remembered that the paucity of stone sculpture at Neston before the tenth century is typical of Wirral, Cheshire (except in the far east) and Lancashire south of the Lune Valley. The question therefore has relevance to a broad swathe of northwestern Britain. Considering the particularly prominent role given to the priesthood in the iconography of the Neston crosses, we have a credible candidate for a

church arranged along the lines of a minster, with a small community of priests living together; if this was the case, then Neston could credibly have been founded prior to the Viking Age, though this cannot yet be confirmed.

4.7 Regional overview: Church organisation on the Wirral peninsula

The churches of Wirral display diversity in their status and cultural affiliations, but there are patterns which can be identified at a regional level. In particular, whilst it cannot be ruled out that some churches may have suffered in the short-term from the Scandinavian arrival in the region, it is striking that the richest assemblages of Viking Age sculpture occur at those churches which had the largest parishes, and which have many characteristics of a mother-church. West Kirby, which as we saw was sometimes referred to explicitly as a *monasterium* is instructive, as it was clearly a site of great local importance based on the economic resources expended on its standing crosses and hogback, despite lying deep with the Scandinavian-settled zone. Here it seems that the takeover was relatively peaceful, and that the socioeconomic benefits of acting as a patron to a church were realised quickly, preserving site's high status. There is little suggest a despoiling of the church, either through raiding or the erosion of its parochial rights through the establishment of estate churches, something which preoccupied English lawcodes of the tenth and eleventh century. Neston also emerges as a long-established site of church activity, and the emphasis placed on priests and their importance in the decorative schemes of the sculptural remains at this site suggest that the secular clergy and their pastoral role was highly valued and celebrated. These were important ecclesiastical sites in the tenth century and their economic and cultural vitality is apparent.

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Where there is still more doubt is whether this vitality had its origins prior to the Viking Age. As mentioned the evidence for this period is slim and it is difficult to build a precise picture of ecclesiastical activity in Wirral between the Mercian arrival in the seventh century and the coming of Ingimund around 902. However, on the balance of probability at least some of the major churches of Wirral had a pre-Viking phase. In particular, the size of their parishes and the way in which examples of parish fission later in the Middle Ages can be identified (Eastham being a strong example here) is consistent with the pattern of church development seen in other parts of Mercia, and Britain more widely, in which an early phase of churches was endowed on a generous scale, which then gradually saw their rights and revenues eroded as local populations of Britain expanded and the demand for pastoral services by the laity increased. Similarly, the *lann* toponym at Landican is a clear sign of Brittonic influence in the naming of ecclesiastical sites and cannot reasonably date much after the Mercian takeover of the seventh century. The Scandinavian arrival in Britain may have accelerated the process of parish fission in certain regions, but this merely reinforced processes which were already underway. That we cannot identify early minsters with the same confidence as we can in Kent or Northumbria is partly down to archival filters; no repository of pre-Norman documents survives from the north west of England in the way they have at, for example, Worcester in south west Mercia, and we have no major works of chronicling or narrative history to match those of Bede with his emphasis on Northumbrian history. Economic development may also have played a role; a glance at Domesday for Cheshire and the assessed values of land show a region less intensely cultivated and less densely populated than some other regions, particularly on Britain's eastern coast. This will have made it difficult to found and endow churches to the same lavish extent seen in other regions and restricted the

development of the kind of activities likely to survive in the historic record such as the production of stone sculpture or the development of local church scriptoria.

One key point though is that whilst the evidence is somewhat lacking, the lens of the minster model developed elsewhere in England is clearly applicable to Wirral. Regional variation is apparent, but the basic processes of church foundation and fission can be traced and the picture that emerges in the tenth century is entirely compatible with developments elsewhere in the English kingdom. That is not to suggest that we can make a sweeping argument from analogy in every case; each church site has its own biography to be written and these must be traced as thoroughly as the evidence allows. Nevertheless, Wirral demonstrates how even the furthest parts of the Mercian and English kingdoms were emmeshed in the same religious culture as the rest of England, with broadly similar results modified only slightly by the unique regional context. In this regard, the comparison with Tegeingl is illuminating because of its shared history of Scandinavian settlement. Similarities include the tendency for Viking Age stone sculpture to occur at the largest and most prestigious sites, with smaller and less well-attested churches only coming to light later in the historical records, likely as the daughters of those original major centres. The precise pattern of sites is different, and is slightly denser in Tegeingl than Wirral, which is turn denser than eastern Cheshire, but the overall processes at work are recognisable across the different case studies. A distinctive feature of Wirral is the stronger evidence for a pre-Viking phase of church activity in the form of the Overchurch stone, the potential *monasterium* at West Kirby and the Brittonic toponyms at Landican and Wallasey. Such activity can be assumed in Tegeingl and eastern Cheshire, but hard

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evidence for it is elusive. Finally, the role of bishops in this system of local churches is almost as obscure in Wirral as in Tegeingl; whilst the bishops of Lichfield are much better attested before the Norman Conquest than those of St Asaph, evidence for their activities on the ground is sparse to non-existent in Wirral, at least through the topographical lens adopted here. We are therefore largely reliant on normative texts like the canons of church councils to suggest what their duties may have been; where and when they executed them and the frequency with which they toured their diocese has to be inferred and assumed rather than conclusively proven.

5 Warmundestrou and Mildestuic

5.1 Introduction

Located in the south east of Cheshire, the Domesday hundreds of Warmundestrou and Middlewich hundred represent a topographic contrast with the two other case studies in this thesis. Most obviously, they are landlocked, and therefore have much less of a maritime dimension to their early medieval history compared to Tegeingl or Wirral. Furthermore, together they border both Shropshire and Staffordshire, and so their relationship with the Irish Sea region is more ambiguous than the previous two examples. As we shall see, these links are present and are attested sculpturally, archaeologically and politically, but the connection is more diffuse and must be considered alongside the possibility that the area had a more southwards orientation, and looked also to the core of the Mercian kingdom in the upper Trent Valley. Their name gives little clue as to its history; *Warmundestrou* first occurs in Domesday in 1086 and is named after 'Wærmund's tree', from the OE personal name Wærmund and OE *trēou*, and the same personal name might occur at Warmingham in Middlewich hundred to the north.[1] Who this Wærmund was and where the hundred court would have met is now lost however.

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[1] EPNS Cheshire, II, p.262; III, p.1.

Middlewich, or *Mildestvic* as it first occurs in Domesday, takes its name straightforwardly from the eponymous salt-wich, which itself is named for its position between Nantwich and Northwich; there is therefore little we can deduce about religious or cultural developments in the area from this toponym.[2]

We have already surveyed the difficulties of Cheshire's early medieval history in the Wirral chapter above, and many of the same problems face us in Warmundestrou and Middlewich. In particular, we lack any sort of ecclesiastical archives or charter evidence which might along us to date the foundation of the churches of these districts, or to explore the relationships between them prior to the Norman Conquest. Likewise, the role of local bishops, particularly those of Lichfield, is obscure because of a lack surviving manuscript collections. The earliest holders of this office are known from Bede and his contemporaries, but from the late eighth century they are glimpsed only dimly, usually through the witness lists of charters relating to other parts of Mercia, or records of ecclesiastical councils. Whilst valuable sources, these give us little indication as to their day to day duties or how they treated specific churches under their diocesan jurisdiction. Once more we are left reliant on Domesday, the early Norman charters of the earls of Chester and the abbey of St Werburgh's Chester, plus occasional mentions in pre-Norman chronicle texts and wills, in order to provide a chronological skeleton for the present discussion.

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[2] EPNS Cheshire, III, p.184.

In terms of landscape, there are also further contrasts with the other case studies and this region is somewhat varied; in its north it takes in the flat plains for which Cheshire is widely known, particularly along the River Weaver, an important tributary of the Mersey which drains much of the hundred. Its southern edge however takes in some of the more rolling, broken country which marks Cheshire's southern boundary, whilst in the east the terrain begins to rise towards the Pennines and the Staffordshire moors. Another consideration for the area's early history is the great woodland known as the Lyme which extended from south east Lancashire around Ashton-under-Lyne, along the fringe of the Peak District into eastern Cheshire and onwards to Staffordshire around Burslem and Newcastle-under-Lyme. [3] The precise extent of this woodland is unclear, but the occurrence of place names such as Audlem in the south of Warmundestrou give us a rough idea; first attested as *Aldelime* in Domesday, the second element clearly derives from the Lyme.[4] The first element is less clear and one possibility is a personal name such as Alda or Ealda, but the preferred solution is OE *ald*, meaning old, or former, which occurs in most of the early forms down to the late-thirteenth century and indicates that Audlem had been removed from the Lyme by the time the name was coined.[5] Clearly the Lyme was not a static unit and its extent could change over time.

What is less certain is the extent to which this forest had been cleared in the early middle ages and the Viking Age; the pattern of toponyms recorded in Domesday inform us that the whole district was not entirely wooded, but equally the prevalence of the place-name element *leah* suggests that significant areas of forest remained.[6] Some light may also be

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[3] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.94-6
[4] EPNS Cheshire, III, p.83.
[5] EPNS Cheshire, III, pp.82-3.
[6] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.141.

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cast on ecological conditions in the early medieval period by pollen records, and in certain parts of Britain, notably in northern regions close to Hadrian's Wall, there is good evidence for the regeneration of woodland in the middle of the first millennium AD, though dating this to specific events is still fraught with difficulty.[7] In Cheshire's case, the number of available pollen diagrams is relatively small and they occur in other parts of the county.[8] Three sequences are known from the area, clustered in the north and east at Tatton Park, Lindow Moss and Adders Moss. At the first site, there is evidence for marked contrast in conditions, with the proportion of arboreal pollen increasing gradually throughout the Roman period, suggesting a relative lack of intense agricultural activity, but then decreasing into the early medieval period when increasing arable and grazing activity is suggested, contradicting the view that the Roman withdrawal led to the abandonment of agricultural land on a large scale, at least in the north west which was a less Romanised region and may therefore have had less far to fall.[9] The two other sites also provide little evidence for severe economic or agricultural dislocation. At Lindow Moss for example, the landscape changed relatively little across the Roman and early medieval periods, with a mixed landscape of woodland and open grasslands prevailing.[10] Adders Moss presents a similar picture, perhaps with a slightly greater tendency towards forest regeneration in the early medieval period.[11] The question is important in this context because the pattern of land use and different kinds of landscape will have informed the selection of ecclesiastical sites in the early medieval period and may inform

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[7] Petra Dark, 'Pollen-Analytical Perspectives on the End of Roman Britain', *Environmental Archaeology* (2022) <https://doi.org/10.1080/14614103.2022.2083926>, p.2

[8] Stephen Rippon, Chris Smart and Ben Pears, *The Fields of Britannia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.256-8.

[9] Nick Higham and T. Cane, 'I: The Tatton Park Project, Part 1: Prehistoric to Sub-Roman Settlement and Land Use', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 74 (1997), pp.1-61 (pp.42-5).

[10] N.P. Branch and R.G. Scaife, 'The stratigraphy and pollen analysis of peat sequences associated with the Lindow III bog body', in *Bog Bodies: New Discoveries and New Perspectives*, ed. by R.C. Turner and R.G. Scaife (London: British Museum Press, 1995), pp.19-31 (pp.21-3).

[11] Rippon, Smart and Pears, *Fields of Britannia*, p.257.

our understanding of what kind of churches these were. As has been discussed in relation to other parts of England and Wales, a church built in a deliberately inaccessible or secluded location may reflect a desire to escape the influence of ordinary lay life, hinting at a more monastic or even ascetic kind of community, whilst a wealthy minster church might more naturally belong in an area of high-quality agricultural land, or in a strategically important area. If the Lyme was still densely forested in the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries, then this may have created suitable locations for a secluded monastic community; if it had been extensively cleared, then this would not necessarily apply. It should also be remembered that these landscapes were not static and that the settlement and economic activity generated by the presence of a church, particularly a large and wealthy one, may have in itself lead to forest clearance. This could occur on the initiative of such an establishment, or it might happen indirectly, for example by encouraging population growth, placing economic pressure on the availability of land and incentivising an expansion of the area under settlement and cultivation.

On the balance of probabilities, the overall picture in this region is of a landscape which was not continuously cleared by any means and where overall levels of economic output were modest when compared with other parts of Britain, but where both arable and pastoral agriculture was viable in the early medieval period. These conditions may not have been entirely conducive to the foundation and endowment of early churches, but they do not in themselves preclude this development. The term Lyme itself is likely to derive from British *lemo*, although the exact forms are highly complex and suggest a long history of gradual evolution through both Welsh and English phases.[12] Nevertheless,

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[12] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.92-6.

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the British origins of the term are not disputed and this reflects the broader pattern of Brittonic toponyms surviving in major landscape features, especially rivers. A further occurrence might appear in the Annals of Clonmacnoise, which describe how the battle of Brunanburh was fought 'on the plains of othlynn'.[13] As with most points concerning the toponomy associated with the Brunanburh campaign, other explanations are available, but this might mean it took place on the plains within or up to the Lyme, which would describe the Cheshire lowlands very well, especially from an Irish perspective. The links with older British toponomy suggest the Lyme was an ancient landscape feature, and Nick Higham has argued that it served as a frontier between the inhabitants of Cheshire and their Pennine neighbours in the west, especially the Pecsæte.[14] It retained this delineating role well into the Middle Ages, when the Duchy of Lancaster continued to distinguish between its lands within and without the Lyme.[15]

Another distinguishing feature of the district is the production of salt, focused on the towns of Nantwich, Middlewich and Northwich. These towns lie in an area with a long history of salt-making going back well into the Iron Age. Salt was clearly of great importance to the Iron Age economy of Cheshire, and the pottery type known as Cheshire Stony Very Coarse Pottery or Stony VCP is usually interpreted as briquetage used in the production, storage and transportation of salt from the Cheshire salt-wiches. [16] Petrological analysis has revealed that the clay used in these vessels closely matches deposits found in the Nantwich and Middlewich areas which was therefore the most likely

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[13] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.95-6; Cavill, 'The Place-Name Debate, pp.335-6;
[14] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.95-6.
[15] EPNS Cheshire, I, p.4.
[16] E.L. Morris, 'Prehistoric Salt Distributions: Two Case Studies from Western Britain', *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies*, 32 (1985), pp.336-79 (p.353).

centre of production.[17] Such finds are concentrated in Cheshire, but are also found throughout Shropshire, Herefordshire and the Welsh marches, and along the coasts of north Wales, at distances up to 130km from the site of production.[18] These finds mostly date from the fifth to the first century BC, with some indications of a somewhat wider date range, and they speak to the ease with which the Cheshire salt springs could be exploited and the breadth of the prehistoric economic networks in which Cheshire was enmeshed.[19] The value of these resources were not lost on the Romans and it was they who led the development of the first settlements at Nantwich, Middlewich and Northwich. The demands of the Roman state, and especially the military, stimulated increased production of salt, as did improvements to the road network; Nantwich was located near a known Roman road linking Middlewich with Whitchurch in Shropshire (Margery 700), whilst Middlewich and especially Northwich lay on important junctions on the principal north-south route through Cheshire towards the Mersey and beyond into what would become Lancashire and Cumbria (Margery 70a).[20] By the end of the first century, Chester had become a major legionary fortress, and its development into a military, political and economic centre laid the foundation for its importance both in the Roman period and the centuries beyond as we have seen. Whilst the withdrawal of Roman power no doubt impacted on levels of trade and production, salt remained an essential commodity to early medieval life and production likely continued. Some sub-Roman trading activity at Chester is evidenced by a modest scatter of Class B IV amphora sherds and other imported Mediterranean wares from the Abbey Green excavations, which give some reason to

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[17] Morris, 'Prehistoric Salt Distributions', p.366.

[18] Morris, Prehistoric Salt Distributions, pp.367-70; Morris, E.L., 'Production and Distribution of Pottery and Salt in Iron Age Britain: A Review', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 60 (1994), pp.371-93 (p.386)

[19] Robert A. Philpott and Mark H. Adams, *Irby, Wirral: Excavations on a Late Prehistoric, Romano-British and Medieval Site, 1987-96* (Liverpool: National Museums Liverpool, 2010), p.181.

[20] Ivan Margery, *Roman Roads in Britain*, Revised edn. (London: John Baker, 1967), pp.302-4.

extend the occupation of Chester into the sixth century and may suggest that the port remained active, though evidence for any trade in salt is so far absent.[21] By Domesday all three salt-wiches were clearly important local economic centres and their salt-houses were lucrative holdings for their various owners. Taking Nantwich as an example, in 1066 it boasted a saltpit and 8 salt-houses, with two thirds of all the income going to the king and the other third to Earl Edwin, whilst the Earl also had a ninth salthouse all of his own which pertained to his manor of Acton and from which he could take salt for his own household without paying any tolls (though if any of it was sold, two thirds went to the king).[22] The whole proceeds of the salt industry to its lords were valued at £21 in 1066, and whilst production had clearly suffered during the Conquest, it had recovered to a still substantial £10 in 1086. [23] Salt forms a key part of the connection between Warmundestrou, Middlewich and the other hundreds in this study, because it provided a valuable, portable export commodity which could be traded over long distances, including at Chester. The movement and consumption of salt is not especially visible archaeologically, other than by tracing the distribution of Stony VCP, but such resources were clearly being developed in the eleventh century and earlier. Whether salt was transported over longer distances is uncertain, though the need to keep it dry would hinder attempts to export it around the Irish Sea. Nevertheless, during the Viking Age the economic growth and wealth of Chester may have stimulated demand and suggests one way in which the different case studies in this thesis and their churches could have been connected by larger networks of economic exchange.

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[21] J.C. McPeake, 'Excavations in the Garden of No.1 Abbey Green, Chester, 1975-77 : Interim Report', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 53 (1980), pp.15-37 (p.29).
[22] DB Cheshire, S1, f.268r.
[23] DB Cheshire, S1, f.268r.

Turning to the formal ecclesiastical context, Warmundestrou and Mildestuic, like Wirral, lay within the jurisdiction of the diocese of Lichfield and almost certainly had been since the seventh century. Unlike Wirral however, it did not experience notable levels of Scandinavian settlement and this seems to be one reason why the volume of stone sculpture from the area is much lower than for Wirral. In this regard the hundred sits awkwardly between two areas which boast larger volumes of sculpture and in very distinctive styles, namely the Cheshire ring-headed cross group already discussed extensively in the previous sections, and the family of Peak District pieces. This second corpus is also large and contains a wide variety of pieces, with a particular concentration of richly carved and complex free-standing crosses, often of clear intellectual and biblical sophistication and exhibiting frequent use of plant motifs and figures arranged into arcades.[24]

By contrast, Mildestuic and especially Warmundestrou hundreds have relatively few pieces to work from, and from a limited number of sites, but those surviving pieces are of great historical and artistic value. First and foremost are the Sandbach standing crosses. This visually imposing collection of cross-shaft fragments is a complex source to work with, largely because as we shall see, the crosses were demolished in the seventeenth century and subsequently reassembled by local antiquaries and collectors; the current monuments are therefore comprised of many fragments which have been mixed and matched to create new crosses which do not reflect the original designs of their

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[24] Andrew Sargent, *Lichfield and the Lands of St Chad*, Studies in Regional and Local History 19 (Hatfield: Hertfordshire University Press, 2020), pp.96-9.

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sculptors.[25] Regardless, the concentration of pieces and their quality is obvious and speaks to a site of great religious importance and economic prosperity in the ninth century, which is important in itself because that period is often seen in other parts of Britain as one of decline and despoliation of churches prior to the religious and cultural revival of the tenth century, partly due to Scandinavian incursions and partly due to the rise of new networks of more local churches.[26] It also marks Sandbach out as one of the major early churches of the district and its role and status is explored below.

Other possibilities for early and important ecclesiastical sites are not so obvious, but a topographical approach does suggest other strong candidates, each of which will be explored in turn. Previous work in this region has already highlighted the local importance of the church of Acton, less than a mile and a half west of Nantwich. Again we have no early medieval sculptural or architectural remains to guide us, but the size of the parish and the value of the Domesday manor are clear, and the process of parish fission is apparent as late as 1677 when the long-standing chapelry of Nantwich gained full parochial status. Acton is also the clearest example of the phenomenon described by Nick Higham and already touched upon in previous chapters, that several Cheshire hundreds can be divided into two zone of parochial and manorial jurisdiction, one of which was held by the Church, which tended to decay over time, the other held by a leading member of the local lay nobility, which tended to survive more intact in Domesday Book. In this case, the second, episcopal centre in the hundred was at Wybunbury, where the bishop of Chester held lands in Domesday and which features a dedication to St Chad, both of which may suggest a long-standing link with the Mercian church and potentially an early

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[25] CASSS, IX, pp.99-100.
[26] Blair, *The Anglo-Saxon Church*, pp.308-11.

date of foundation. A case may also be made for Barthomley, again because of its status as a mother church and the extent of its ancient parish, but also its rare dedication to Bertoline, a later corruption of the Mercian saint's name Beorhthelm. Two other saints, namely Bertram and Berteline, are associated by later medieval hagiography or stone sculpture with churches at Stafford and Ilam, Staffordshire which are explored below, and if this link can be substantiated, it would securely place Barthomley as a pre-Conquest church. In the rest of Middlewich hundred, whilst no site can muster the kind of evidence for early medieval ecclesiastical activity as Sandbach, other extensive parishes can be found, particularly those belonging to Astbury and Davenham, whilst the origins of the churches at Middlewich and Northwich are also considered briefly given the importance of the salt industry as already mentioned.

The case studies in this particular chapter were, in common with the other chapters, chosen because they provided the most evidence for pre-Conquest ecclesiastical activity, with the case studies from Warmundestrou hundred presented first, followed by those in Mildestuic. As a consequence we proceed roughly from south to north, starting close to the border with Staffordshire in the parishes of Acton and Wybunbury and finishing on the northern boundary of Mildestuic at Northwich. Particular attention was paid to Sandbach because of the great richness of the stone sculpture there, whilst the Cheshire salt-wiches present a great deal of archaeological material on account of their Roman associations, as well as the remains of the salt-making industry itself. As we will see the pattern of mother-parishes in this region was certainly clearer than in Tegeingl and to a limited extant than Wirral, and for this reason it has been easier to split out the less well-evidenced sites such as Warmingham into their own dedicated sections, whereas in Tegeingl these tended to be grouped with other, better-attested sites. This has also made

it possible to be somewhat more comprehensive in coverage than Tegeingl and as laid out in the provided map (see Figure 5.1), it is simpler to construct a continuous picture of parochial arrangements in these parts of Viking Age Cheshire than it is in Wales.
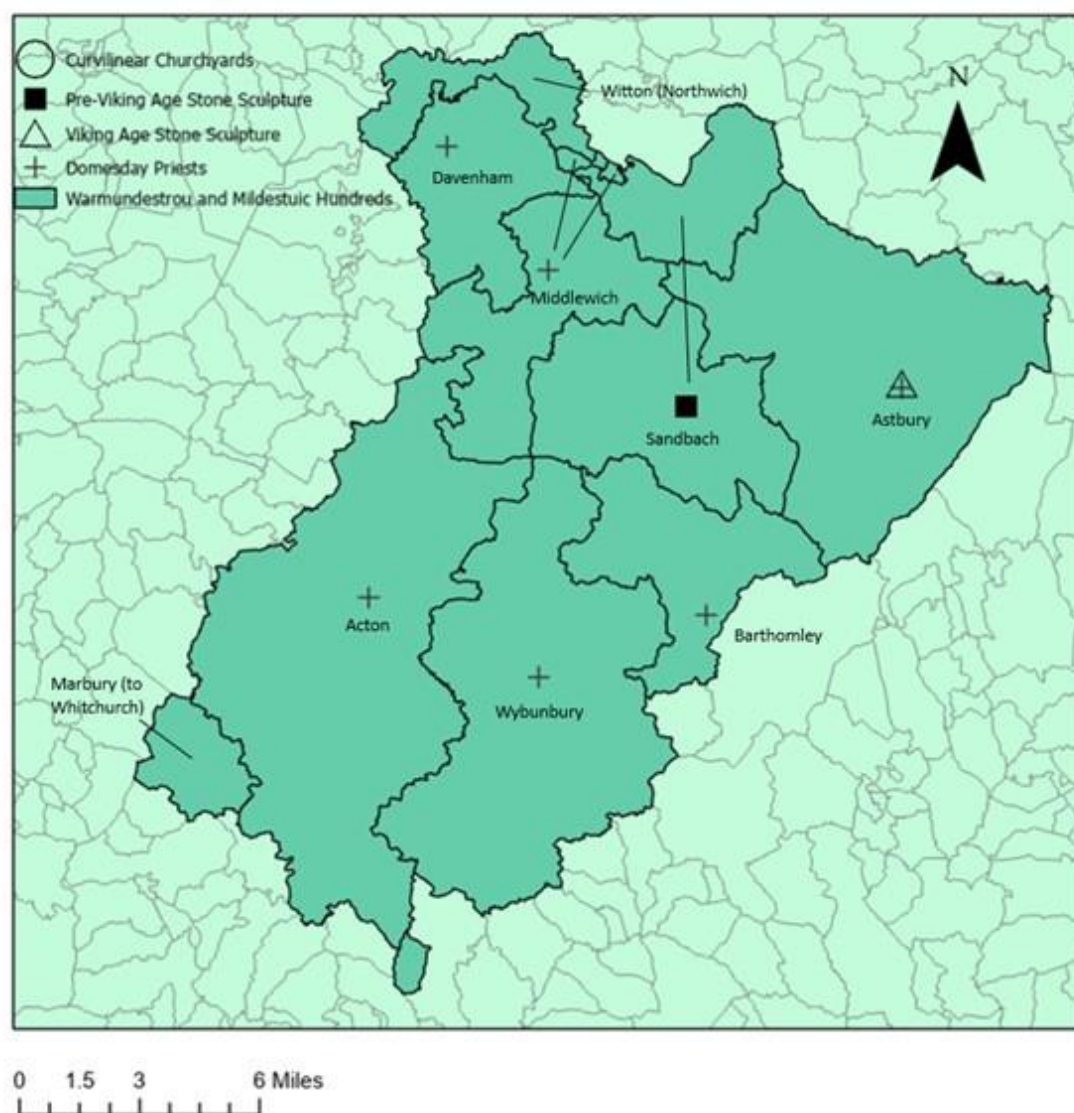
Figure 5.1: The mother-parishes of Warmundstrou and Mildestuic c.1086. Note that
Witton in the north was a chapelry of Great Budworth in Bochelau hundred, and Marbury
in the southeast was a chapelry of Whitchurch in Shropshire. Sandbach is shown with its
dependent chapels of Goostrey and Church Hulme (later Holmes Chapel) and the likely
daughter parish of Warmingham included. It may also have originally encompassed at
least Middlewich and Davenham but the evidence is equivocal and these parishes are
shown separately. Likewise Astbury may once have been a daughter of Sandbach but
evidence points to its separation by the tenth century. Some boundaries in the dataset may
reflect later boundary changes, for example some of the very southernmost parts of Acton
parish in the maps properly belonged to Wybunbury. The early history of the detached
portions east of Witton is obscure and they are displayed separately here, but likely
belonged to other mother parishes in 1086.

5.2 Wybunbury

Wybunbury first emerges in Domesday Book, where it was held by the Bishop of Chester in both 1066 and 1086.[27] It was not an especially valuable holding, worth 64d at the Conquest and 48d at the time of the survey, and was assessed at half a hide for two ploughlands.[28] The bishop's holdings in the county were fairly sparse, especially in comparison with his lands in Staffordshire, and Wybunbury was his only manor in Warmundestrou hundred.[29] Ecclesiastically, a priest was recorded and this is the first piece of evidence which pushes the date of the church back before the Conquest.[30] It also boasts a dedication to St Chad, which reinforces the link with the bishops of Chester and Lichfield. Their lands here would have facilitated their visitations in this part of Cheshire from an early date, and formed a convenient stop on the route between Lichfield and Chester, a route they must surely have travelled on diocesan business. An argument has also been made on toponymical terms, namely that the element *burh* meaning 'fortified place' is indicative of a particularly old and important settlement, though again John Blair's reassessment of *burh* names must be remembered here and many such places may actually have been satellites of a site or cluster of sites with its focal point elsewhere, especially in this border region of Mercia where we cannot necessarily apply the logic of the West Saxon Burghal Hidage.[31] It is however an appropriate name, for the church sits at the end of a low ridge from which the land drops away quite steeply to the south, east and north, and any approach from the latter direction is further hindered by the peat bog at Wybunbury Moss, making it a highly defensible position. Nevertheless, Wybunbury's ancient importance is strongly evidenced by the sheer size of its original parish. Even in

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[27] DB Cheshire, B8, f.263r.
[28] DB Cheshire, B8, f.263r.
[29] DB Cheshire, B8, f.263r.
[30] DB Cheshire, B8, f.263r.
[31] Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.234-5.

the nineteenth century it was extensive and covered a large swathe of the hundred, taking in eighteen townships; to these can be added two dependent chapels recorded in the 1291 *taxatio,* namely the later parishes of Wistaston and Coppenhall to the north. [32] Furthermore, there is strong evidence that the parish of St James's Audlem was divided from Wybunbury's in the thirteenth century, because it is only attested for the first time in the reign of King John (r.1199-1216), giving a total of 27 townships.[33] To the bishops of Lichfield and Chester, it therefore seems likely that the principal value of their holdings at Wybunbury lay not in the value of the manor, but in the potential tithes and other ecclesiastical revenues which pertained to the church there.

A second, earlier source of revenue for ecclesiastical activities in the hundred may also be detected within Wybunbury parish. The vitality of the salt industry in late Roman Cheshire is clearly demonstrated by a collection of lead salt pans found close to Nantwich, especially a cluster from Shavington, less than four miles to the east of the church. Three such pans are known from the site, tightly clustered in the shallow, low-lying valley of the Swill Brook to the east of Shavington village. The first, discovered in 1993, is notable for its inscription, which reads 'VIVENTI [] COPI'; the first element is almost certainly a personal name, Viventius, whilst the second word is more ambiguous because the first part is cut off due to a missing section of the pan.[34] In their publication of the find, Stephen Penney and David Shotter argue that the most likely reconstruction is the word *episcopus*, meaning either an overseer or, in a Christian context, a bishop.[35] Viventius derives from

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[32] *Taxatio*, CL.CH.NB.06
[33] EPNS Cheshire, III, p.82.
[34] S. Penney and D.C.A. Shotter, 'An Inscribed Roman Salt-pan from Shavington, Cheshire', *Britannia*, 27 (1996), pp.360-5 (p.362-3).
[35] Penney and Shotter, 'An Inscribed Roman Salt-pan', pp.362-3

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Latin *vivere*, 'to live', and is an uncommon name in Roman Britain, being more common in Gaul, and it occurs most often in Christian contexts in the fourth and fifth centuries.[36] It is therefore possible that the pan was the property of a bishop Viventius, with his seat probably at Chester (though Lichfield or Wroxeter are both feasible), and that the Church was exercising a degree of control over this key industry in the late-Roman era.[37] This picture was refined by the discovery of two other lead pans close-by in 1998, one of which was professionally excavated following metal detecting in the area. That second pan bears an inscription reading 'FL VIVENTIVS', taken by Penney and Shotter as standing for Flavius Viventius, possibly the same figure noted from the first pan discovered in 1993.[38] This cluster of finds is therefore strong evidence that salt remained important to the economy of late-Roman Cheshire and that the Church may have been deriving an income from its control of key salt-bearing sites and the associated tools of production. It also shows that salt-making was not an entirely urban phenomenon and was not the exclusive preserve of the salt-wiches at this time, and that such sites were more evenly distributed across the landscape in the fourth century.[39] It may also be possible to extend the life of the Shavington salt-making site into the fifth or sixth centuries, because of a sixth-century copper alloy penannular brooch discovered only a few metres from the salt-pans which may be a sign of continued settlement on the site.[40] As an example of Anna Booth's Type H, it has characteristically flat expanded terminals.[41] The type is uncommon but is thought to occur in a range of early medieval contexts prior to c.700 and they can be found

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[36] Penney and Shotter, 'An Inscribed Roman Salt-pan', pp.362-3

[37] Penney and Shotter, 'An inscribed Roman salt pan from Shavington, Cheshire', p.365.

[38] S. Penney and D.C.A. Shotter, 'II: Further Inscribed Roman Salt Pans from Shavington, Cheshire', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 76 (2001), pp.53-61, (pp.55, 58).

[39] Penney and Shotter, 'An inscribed Roman salt pan from Shavington, Cheshire', p.364.

[40] PAS, 'LVPL-2035' <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/42088> [Accessed 11th September 2023].

[41] Anna Booth, 'Reassessing the long chronology of the penannular brooch in Britain : exploring changing styles, use and meaning across a millennium (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 2015), p.38.

across Britain, including an example from Pentraeth in eastern Anglesey. [42] Early medieval penannular brooches have in the past been used to argue for cultural continuity in western and northern Britain across the end of Roman rule, and the survival of the penannular forms into the Viking Age in Ireland and Scotland has been taken as proof of 'Celtic' cultural survival.[43] More recent work has however complicated the origins of these brooches, which may owe more than once thought to continental influence, and also drawn attention to their occurrence in clearly Anglo-Saxon contexts. Nevertheless, a British context for the Shavington brooch does seem more likely given that Cheshire was only drawn into Mercian control towards the end of the currency of Type H brooches. Their utility as an indication of date (albeit a very rough one) remains but the question as to the cultural background of the people making salt at Shavington in the sixth and seventh century and beyond is still open. This survival of the salt industry is paralleled by the revival of salt-making at Droitwich in Worcestershire in the early medieval period. Excavation at Upwich, one of the best-known brine-pits in the town, suggested a hiatus between Roman and Anglo-Saxon phases, the boundary being marked by riverine deposits suggestive of flooding.[44] Above this, ten brine-boiling hearths were discovered, and charcoal samples from these hearths produced a range of radiocarbon dates from the fifth century to the seventh.[45] Where Shavington and Droitwich may differ is in the concentration of production into a tight cluster at Droitwich, as opposed to the diffuse, small-scale production site apparent at Shavington. This would change by Domesday however, which indicates that the salt industry was increasingly based in denser, increasingly economically complex settlements in the Cheshire salt-wiches. Further

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[42] Booth, 'Reassessing the long chronology of the penannular brooch in Britain', pp.49-50

[43] Booth, 'Reassessing the long chronology of the penannular brooch in Britain', pp.39-40.

[44] J.D. Hurst, *A multi-period salt production site at Droitwich: excavations at Upwich*, Council for British Archaeology Research Report 107 (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1997), pp.16-7.

[45] Hurst, *A multi-period salt production site at Droitwich*, pp.17-25.

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evidence from Shavington can also be found in the local field names; the Viventius salt pan was discovered in Little Wall Field, which neighbours Wall Field and Big Wall Field, all of which are first attested in the tithe survey of 1839 (plot numbers 277, 278 and 284 respectively).[46] All three toponyms refer to wall or walling, a local term referring to the boiling of brine to produce salt, suggesting a long-lived memory of such activity in the locality.[47]

Shavington therefore presents the possibility that even at a site which did not become either a major salt-wich or a notable ecclesiastical centre, the religious and economic activities of the Church were entwined at a very early date, and it also provides important evidence for the presence of bishops in the Cheshire area in the fourth century, something which is very reasonably assumed but often difficult to substantiate. In this context there are also two saltpans from Nantwich itself which are worth considering; these have the abbreviated term CLE or CLER and in light of the Shavington pans, Penney and Shotter suggested that this might record a *clericus*, again reinforcing the connection between salt production and the Church.[48] A further link between the late-Roman Church and industry emerges when one considers the other lead items known to archaeologists from the fourth century, particularly lead tanks and coffins. The tanks in particular are frequently decorated with a chi-rho symbol and some examples feature other Christian motifs such as *orantes*, figures with their hands raised in prayer, and the chi-rho gives good reason to date the pieces to the fourth or early fifth centuries.[49] For this reason, they have in the past been interpreted as portable baptismal tanks, large enough for an adult to be immersed in

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[46] EPNS Cheshire, III, pp.71; V(1:ii), p.384.
[47] EPNS Cheshire, V(1:ii), p.384.
[48] S. Penney and D.C.A. Shotter, 'An Inscribed Roman Salt-pan from Shavington', p.363.
[49] Belinda Crerar, 'Contextualising Romano-British Lead Tanks: A Study in Design, Destruction and Deposition', *Britannia*, 43 (2012), pp.135-66 (p.136).

water.[50] However, the chi-rho is not always definitively Christian in its implications and many of the tanks have simple geometric decoration into which it is hard to read any religious content.[51] Other uses have therefore been suggested, some religious (for example, holding water for diluting wine during the *refrigium*, a Christian feast in honour of the dead), some secular (they may have been simple water troughs or storage containers).[52] The manner of their disposal is also significant and some of the surviving fragments seem to have been carefully cut in order to preserve iconographically important scenes, as on the frieze from the Walesby tank from Lincolnshire.[53] This would be in contrast to the Viventius pan from Shavington which was simply sliced into even-sized pieces, which cut straight through the inscription. On these grounds some sort of ritual or religious aspect to the deposal of the tanks has been suggested, though at Walesby this could result from a general respect for different deities rather than specifically Christian veneration. A further contrast is the distribution of these tanks, which skews heavily to East Anglia and the east midlands, with only one Roman-era outlier discovered in the northwest at Ireby, Cumberland; clearly they were known in north west Britain, although the extent to which this distribution reflects Roman-era patterns of usage, or instead results from different hoarding practices or modern incidence of excavation and metal detection can be debated.[54] The other larger body of large lead containers are coffin liners, of which over 270 are now known from Roman Britain.[55] These had a long currency both before and after the official conversion of the empire to Christianity, but their use in the later Roman period as a way of better preserving the body of the deceased may have

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[50] J.M.C. Toynbee, *Roman Art in Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp.353-5.
[51] Crerar, 'Contextualising Romano-British Lead Tanks', p.140.
[52] C.J. Guy, 'Roman circular lead tanks in Britain', *Britannia*, 12 (1981), pp.271-6 (p.274).
[53] Crerar, 'Contextualising Romano-British Lead Tanks', p.142.
[54] Crerar, 'Contextualising Romano-British Lead Tanks, p.137.
[55] Alison Taylor, 'A Roman Lead Coffin with Pipeclay Figurines from Arrington, Cambridgeshire', *Britannia*, 24 (1993), pp.191-225 (p.209).

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reflected Christian belief in the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead at the day of judgment.[56] Once again though the distribution skews heavily to those areas which had most thoroughly adopted aspects of Roman culture and which were most economically developed; this accounts for the particular concentrations in eastern Britain, whilst a correlation between lead-lined burials and the hinterland of Romano-British urban centres has also been noted.[57] They are, by contrast, relatively absent from north western Britain, but again outliers exist, a notable example being the Rhuddgaer lead coffin from Anglesey with its strongly Christian '*HIC IACENT*' inscription and which could be either late Roman or early medieval in date.[58] These differ in form from the salt pans, but share a great deal in dating and also the sheer quantity of lead required to produce them. Its access to large amounts of lead was clearly of spiritual use to the Church, but would also have made it well-placed to exploit local brine deposits for salt-making, reinforcing the idea of a connection between the Church establishment and salt. A subsequent question is where did these quantities of lead come from; whilst the archaeological evidence is not emphatic, nearby deposits were available in what is now north east Wales, which were worked by the Romans and there is clear evidence of first and second-century settlement at Ffrith, conveniently located within the lead-bearing zone.[59] That lead was being exported from Tegeingl into Cheshire in the first century is evidenced by finds of Roman-era lead pigs inscribed with the name of the Deceangli, the tribal grouping which inhabited north east Wales at the time. Two examples from the reign of Vespasian (r.69-79) are known from Chester and now housed there in the Grosvenor Museum, whilst a third was discovered in Rosset, close to Wrexham, in 2019 from the reign of Nero (r.54-

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[56] Taylor, 'A Roman Lead Coffin with Pipeclay Figures', p.209.
[57] Taylor, 'A Roman Lead Coffin with Pipeclay Figures', p.209.
[58] David Hopewell and Nancy Edwards, 'Early Medieval settlement and field systems at Rhuddgaer, Anglesey', *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 166 (2017), pp.213-42 (p.215).
[59] Kevin Blockley, 'Excavations on the Romano-British settlement at Ffrith, Clwyd, 1967-9', *Flintshire Historical Society Journal*, 32 (1989), pp.135-64 (pp.163-4).

68).[60] This production is most often associated with the known Roman site at Ffrith, and more recent discoveries have included a probable industrial settlement in Pentre Ffwrndan, on the eastern outskirts of Flint, which lay astride the Roman road leading west out of Chester and where there may also have been a quayside to facilitate lead exports.[61] This site has the added distinction of lying extremely close to the supposed site of the standing cross after which the Domesday hundred of Atiscros was named, suggesting that the area retained it economic and political importance across the early Middle Ages. This lead was exported in the form of pigs into a wider hinterland encompassing Cheshire and north east Wales where it was then subsequently reworked; an important characteristic of the Shavington lead pans is that at least one of them had been chopped up into sections, presumably to make it easier to handle and smelt down to be recycled. This suggests that metalworking was also taking place alongside salt boiling at Shavington, and that whilst it was not urban in nature, the site was beginning to acquire a range of economic functions. A final point is the group of 20 lead pigs supposedly discovered in the River Mersey near Runcorn around 1590, as recorded by the antiquary William Camden in his *Britannia*.[62] One of the group also had an inscription to Domitian (r.81-96) and must date after 84 when he took the epithet *Germanicus*, whilst Camden writes that others had inscriptions of Vespasian on them.[63] The cluster has been interpreted as the result of a shipwreck or similar incident, suggesting the importance of waterborne transport to sustaining the kind of economic networks described above.[64]

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[60] RIB 2404.31, 2404.32, Brit. 51.90.
[61] N.W. Jones, 'Roman settlement and industry along the Dee Estuary, pp.145-6, 151-2.
[62] RIB 2404.34, 2404.36
[63] RIB 2404.34, 2404.36
[64] RIB 2404.34, 2404.36

The upshot of this evidence is that Wybunbury has a good claim to be an early medieval church, based primarily on its association with the bishops of Lichfield, its dedication to St Chad and the considerable extent of its parish even after Audlem had been separated as a parish in its own right. What cannot be proved is continuity from an earlier Romano-British or sub-Roman phase of ecclesiastical activity, but the evidence from the area for salt production and particularly the Shavington lead pans do give us some insight into patterns of economic activity and settlement in the district. Of particular interest is the link between organised Christianity, salt production and lead mining implied by the salt pans, which seem to be the product of a particular local set of circumstances in Cheshire and its neighbouring reasons. Whether this connection was purely practical, or whether salt and may lead mining formed part of the economic basis of the Church in the late Roman period cannot be proven, but it is an interesting possibility and one that may help to illuminate the nature of the salt industry in Cheshire between the Roman withdrawal and Domesday, which is similarly obscure. It also demonstrates the value of considering different case studies across the Anglo-Welsh border, as the likely source of the lead used in the pans lies in Tegeingl and this suggests that economic links between two areas predate the Viking Age and the growth of trade through Chester. Further investigation of the Cheshire salt-wiches in the Roman period, their early medieval development and their subsequent parochial history may be useful, as would further comparison with other similar sites such as Droitwich.

5.3 Acton

Located around less than two miles to the west of Nantwich, St Mary's Church at Acton was the seat of a very extensive parish which took up almost the entire western half of

Warmundestrou hundred. At Domesday the manor there hosted not one but two priests, who also held a plough in demesne, and it was assessed at eight hides for an area of thirty ploughlands.[65] Valued at £10 in 1066 and £6 in 1086, it was comfortably one of the most lucrative manors in eastern Cheshire. In 1066 It was held by Morcar, earl of Northumbria, the younger brother of earl Edwin of Mercia and his ally in rebellion against William the Conqueror in 1068; by 1086 it was held from Hugh I of Chester by William Malbank, one of Hugh's leading barons and the largest landholder in this part of Cheshire.[66] As with Eastham above, we have another close association of the local comital dynasty with a rich and important manor which was also the seat of an extensive ecclesiastical parish at an early date. That two priests are noted is potentially significant and might indicate either the presence of a community of priests living together, or that the parish was so large that it required multiple clergy to serve the entire area effectively. As William Malbank also had his court there in 1086, it may also have been that one of these clerics was essentially a household chaplain to William.[67]

The most striking piece of evidence surrounding Acton concerns the extent of its parish, which remained very large into the early modern period. As it survived into the nineteenth century, the parish contained fifteen townships, with Acton itself located in the far east. To the west it stretched to the townships of Brindley and Faddiley, adjoining two other major ancient parishes of Bunbury and Malpas. To these can be added three chapelries, namely St Mary's at Nantwich, St Margaret's at Wrenbury and St Bartholemew's at Church Minshull.[68] Located over the border in Mildestuic hundred, Church Minshull

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[65] DB Cheshire, 8.16, f.265v.
[66] DB Cheshire, 8.16, f.265v.
[67] DB Cheshire, 8.16, f.265v.
[68] Taxatio, CL.CH.NB.03.

covered only its single, eponymous township, but Wrenbury and Nantwich contained all or parts of seven and four townships respectively. In the west, this assigns the township of Chorley to Acton, and its boundary here essentially follows the upper course of the River Weaver as it flows from its source in the mid-Cheshire ridge which divides Warmundestrou from the hundred of Dudestan. This also leaves Baddiley parish completely surrounded by Acton and its dependencies, and on balance it too is likely to have formed part of Acton parish; its omission from the 1291 *Taxatio*, presumably on grounds that the such a small parish did not meet the threshold for papal taxation and was therefore not worth recording, means that its early history is not definitively known. The remaining parts of western Warmundestrou are composed of Marbury cum Quoisley and Norbury, belonging to the chapelry of Marbury which pertained to the parish of Whitchurch over the border in Shropshire, and Wirswall, which was directly under Whitchurch's jurisdiction. These were also part of the manor of Whitchurch in 1086 and are described as berewicks in Domesday, when they were held by William Malbank.[69] The only irregularities with these boundaries concern some of the southern townships of the parish, some of which are split between Acton and Audlem, the latter being a chapelry under Wybunbury as discussed above. The most striking of these is Dodcott cum Wilkesley, in the far south on the Shropshire border, which is divided almost evenly between Audlem and Acton's chapelry of Wrenbury; it also has a detached portion just to the north of Acton itself. Much later, in the sixteenth century, a chapel of ease is recorded at Burleydam, a hamlet just in the Wrenbury portion of the township, but this was not an ancient foundation. The township formed another part of the block of lands assigned to William Malbank after the Conquest, when he held Wilkesley in 1086; it had previously been held as two manors which may account for how the township came to

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[69] DB Cheshire, 8.21, f.265v.

straddle this parochial border, as two previously separate units may have been combined under Williams' lordship.[70] The ambiguity may also be accounted for by the presence of Combermere Abbey, a Savignac house founded around 1133 under the patronage of Hugh Malbank, son of William. Hugh's grant of the manor of Wilkesley is recorded in its foundation charter, and the abbey was also endowed with lands by Earl Ranulf II of Chester, including extensive holdings mostly within the ancient parish of Acton and eventually including the church itself; several of the dependent chapelries of Acton were also appropriated by the abbey over the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[71] It is worth pointing out that many of the Combermere charters have a poor reputation and some of them are clearly forgeries, but the abbey's control over these churches features repeatedly and is also acknowledged in the 1291 *Taxatio*.[72] The establishment of the abbey, and its demesne lands in Dodcott cum Wilkesley probably explains the inconsistencies of the later parochial boundaries in this part of Cheshire as these are likely to have become detached from their original parishes. Whilst attested much later, the chapel of St Michael at Burleydam may have originated as a chapel *ad portum*, to cater to the needs of the local laity who did not have access to the abbey church. A similar situation occurs at Newhall, the main body of which is also divided between Wrenbury and Audlem. This settlement is absent from Domesday and is first attested in 1227 when a fortified house was built (the 'new hall') was built by the local Audley family, and so assigning it definitively to one parish or the other is not possible.[73] A further example includes the southernmost strip of Coole Pilate township, which lay in Audlem, whilst the rest of the township was in Acton. These somewhat confused boundaries are not

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[70] DB Cheshire, 8.32, f.265v.
[71] VCH Cheshire, III, p.151.
[72] Taxatio, CL.CH.NB.03.
[73] EPNS, III, p.101.

entirely surprising as the boundary between Cheshire and Shropshire is less clearly defined by major topographical features or rivers than the rest of Cheshire's borders and some reorganisation of the boundary is evident around Whitchurch; in these rather fluid set of circumstances in the centuries prior to Domesday, there would have been more potential for split townships such as these to occur. Therefore, the later boundary between Acton and Wybunbury parishes may not exactly reflect the early medieval situation, but it remains clear that both parishes were extensive and that together they had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over almost the entire hundred prior to the twelfth century.

Turning to the east of the parish, St Mary's Nantwich is first attested in 1133, when the chapel of Wich Malbank was granted to Combermere Abbey in its foundation charter, and it remained a subordinate chapel to Acton until 1677, in spite of the growth of the town, demonstrating how entrenched the status of an early mother church could be.[74] At the Conquest it was Acton where the salters of Nantwich must have travelled to receive communion linking it again to the salt-making industry. As we have seen the revenues to be derived from the salt-wiches were considerable, though in the case of Nantwich none were held directly by the bishop or any other ecclesiastic. In 1066 the salt tolls had been divided with two thirds going to the king and the other third to Earl Edwin, whilst by 1086 William Malbank had been granted all these dues, and he likewise held all the revenues of the hundredal court which was also seated at Nantwich.[75] There is however no mention of any church or priest at Nantwich and this should make us question the nature of the settlement there. Domesday records a salt-pit and eight salt-houses in 1066,

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[74] James Hall, *A History of the Town and Parish of Nantwich, or Wich Malbank, in the County Palatine of Chester* (Nantwich: T. Johnson, 1883), p.299; VCH Cheshire, III, p151.
[75] DB Cheshire, S1, f.268r.

plus an additional ninth salt-house pertaining to the earl's manor of Acton.[76] When Earl Hugh first received it c.1070 the wich was derelict bar a single salt house, and the gradual nature of the post-Conquest is revealed in the overall revenue it generated; £21 in 1066 had become £10 in 1086.[77] The local customs at Nantwich record that the salt-houses were located between the river and a ditch or dyke, and there were specific fines and rules governing how crimes were punished within this area.[78] This is not to assume that this was the entire area of the settlement, but these bounds seem to suggest a compact area. As we shall see it is still unclear whether the centre of salt production in Nantwich lay on one particular side of the River Weaver at this time, or if it was common to both sides; both banks have produced evidence for salt making in the Roman and Norman periods. The lack of any specific church or standalone provision to the laity again suggests a relatively modest population and that Nantwich had not yet acquired the full range of economic functions or population density of a fully urban settlement. This again points to Acton's primacy as a focus of ecclesiastical and tenurial power in the district. This arrangement was prolonged long after the church of Acton came into the possession of Combermere Abbey around 1133 and a proper living for a vicar at Nantwich was not established until 1285.[79]

In many ways there is an unfortunate gap in the archaeological evidence for Nantwich's growth, in that both the Roman and early Norman phases are well represented, but the intervening centuries are not. Evidence for Roman activity, in addition to the salt-pans discussed in the introduction to this chapter, include a wooden tank and possible

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[76] DB Cheshire, S1, f.268r.
[77] DB Cheshire, S1, f.268r.
[78] DB Cheshire, S1, f.268r.
[79] Hall, *A History of the Town and Parish of Nantwich*, pp.273-4.

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briquetage used for salt boiling from excavations at Davelyn House, St Annes Lane, in the west of the present town, alongside a funerary urn of the second or third century AD.[80] Another important indicator of the Roman presence is a very large assemblage of sherds of pottery dated from the second to fourth centuries which was discovered during excavations in a car park behind the present Crown Inn, also the proposed site of the Norman castle.[81] Definitive evidence of Roman settlement was uncovered in 2004 on the east bank of the Weaver, when timber remains including structural posts and wattle hurdles were discovered in the course of excavating the foundation for an electrical substation in the Snow Hill district of the town; of the nine samples which could be analysed, dendrochronological analysis dated them broadly from the first century BC to the early second century AD, whilst two samples where both sapwood and heartwood survived were assigned felling dates of 129 AD +/- 18 years and 125 AD +/- 18 years at the 95% confidence interval.[82] The same site also produced five shards of Samianware, a smaller number of other local coarse pottery shards and a preserved leather shoe, and the richness of the finds and good preservation of organic material suggests great potential for further discoveries in the area.[83] However, because of the limited size of the site (only an area 2m by 3.5m was subject to professional archaeological observation) and the accidental nature of its discovery, it has not been possible to make a determination as to the purpose of these structures. Overall the evidence for a Roman settlement at Nantwich is very strong, but its exact nature remains to be confirmed. However, that it did not grow to become the principal ecclesiastical focus of this part of Cheshire, instead of Acton, indicates that it did not attain truly urban functions at this time, and greater similarities

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[80] Peter Connolly and David Power, 'Introduction' *Roman Nantwich: A Salt-Making Settlement* ed. by Arrowsmith and Power (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), pp.1-3 (p.2).
[81] R. McNeil, 'Nantwich, Three Years of Excavations and Observations', *Cheshire Archaeology Bulletin*, 7 (1980-1), pp.30-3 (p.31).
[82] Malcolm Reid and others., 'II: Archaeological Observations at Snow Hill Car Park, Nantwich, Cheshire', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 79 (2004), pp.25-36 (pp.26-30).
[83] Reid and others., 'II: Archaeological Observations at Snow Hill Car Park, pp.30-3.

with the dispersed, rural salt-making site at Shavington come to mind. This should also
caution against the assumption that former Roman sites were most likely to develop into
early medieval mother-churches; whilst this is not unreasonable for a major settlement
like Chester, the situation at a more local level is more ambiguous. The lack of early
medieval remains at Nantwich is not conclusive proof of a lack of post-Roman or Mercian
activity there as the total excavated area in the town remains modest, but given what is
known about patterns of elite settlement in western and northern Britain and the
reappearance of certain pre-Roman practices such as the reoccupation of hill forts, a more
general reorientation away from the proto-urban or industrial sites like Nantwich towards
more rural ones may explain why Nantwich did not emerge as a major parochial centre.[84]
This would begin to change in the first decades after the Conquest when a castle was built
there; no fabric of the castle survives but it must have existed by the 1160s when a later
William Malbank granted it to one of his daughters, and its presence is recorded by the
name of Castle Street which runs through the area.[85] The presence of the salt industry to
the area west of the river by the thirteenth century has been comprehensively proven
through excavations at Second Wood Street, where several coopered vessels for boiling
brine were discovered in an excellent state of preservation.[86] The general sequence
therefore demonstrates that continuity in the economic function of a particular site is not
always straightforward, and for many early medieval places it is wise to consider a
slightly broader district in order to understand larger cultural and economic changes.

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[84] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, pp.268-75;
[85] EPNS Cheshire, III, p.32.
[86] Leigh Dodd and others, 'IV: Second Wood Street, Nantwich, 2003/4', *Journal of the Chester
Archaeology Society*, 84 (2014), pp.39-110 (pp.44-7).

One further reason for discussing Wybunbury and Acton together, besides their obvious geographical proximity, is the idea put forward by Nick Higham, that in several Cheshire hundreds it is possible to discern two major centres of both tenurial control and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and that these may mark the seats of two separate *regia* or 'small shires' into which the hundred was divided early in its history, before the shiring of Mercia in the tenth century.[87] By identifying these sites we may be able to stretch our understanding of the administrative geography of these areas back further into the pre-Conquest period. Higham also suggests that in several of these cases, the two beneficiaries of the division were on the one hand a leading lay noble, usually a powerful thegn, and on the other a leading ecclesiastic, usually the bishop (presumably of Lichfield), and that over the course of the early medieval period, the control of the bishop over their lands tended to be less durable than that of the local lay nobles, and that therefore we tend to see one of these blocks survive more intact than the other.[88] In building this case, Warmundestrou is one of his prime examples, and he contrasts the great size of the manor of Acton, covering most of the ancient parish and the way in which even those manors carved out of its putative *regio* were still held *en bloc* by earl Edwin of Mercia and then the Malbank barons, with the small and decayed state of the bishop of Chester's holdings in Wybunbury in Domesday.[89] This pattern is one we have also seen in Wirral, where Higham tentatively suggests that Eastham or Bromborough was the foremost centre of lay tenurial power in the district, whilst the bishop's meagre holdings around between Neston and Chester may reflect what remained of his predecessor's lands. However, the Warmundestrou example is much less equivocal.

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[87] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.139-40.
[88] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp. 140-46.
[89] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp. 140-46.

5.4 Barthomley

Stradling the boundary between the Domesday hundreds of Warmundestrou and Mildestuic, and between Cheshire and Staffordshire, the parish of Barthomley is at first glance less obviously important than either Wybunbury or Acton. It consisted of five townships, three in Warmundestrou (Barthomley, Crewe and Haslington), one in Mildestuic (Alsager) and one in Staffordshire (Balterley). Again the precise arrangement of hundredal boundaries seems to have been somewhat fluid as Alsager was in the later hundred of Nantwich, which evolved out of Warmundestrou by the thirteenth century.[90] Evidence for ecclesiastical activity at Barthomley first occurs in Domesday, when a priest is noted living there, albeit with no mention of a church.[91] Much later, Alsager was a chapel of ease to Barthomley, but this was a late-eighteenth century development rather than part of the normal fission of a medieval mother parish.[92]

The main piece of evidence which might further illuminate the pre-Conquest history of the church at Barthomley is its dedication to St Bertoline, which in this form is unique throughout the whole of England. However, there are two nearby dedications to similarly named saints which have customarily been linked together and may all relate to the same figure. These are St Bertelin of Stafford, and St Bertram of Ilam, also in Staffordshire.[93] These latter two are better attested although in both cases the main evidence is post-Conquest. St Bertelin of Stafford first occurs in the Peterborough Chronicle compiled by Hugh Candidus in the twelfth century and containing a list of saints and their resting

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[90] EPNS Cheshire, III, pp.2-3.
[91] DB Cheshire, 8.30, f.265r.
[92] VCH Cheshire, III, p.54.
[93] Sergeant, *Lichfield and the Lands of St Chad*, pp.137-9.

places; in this text his remains are placed at Stafford.[94] His *vita*, occurring only in a later sixteenth century source, is somewhat derivative and draws heavily on local folklore and parts of the Life of St Guthlac authored by Felix, and it appears that the life of a little-known St Beccel, a follower of Guthlac's, has been interpolated into the life of Bertellin in order to flesh out the narrative.[95] A variety of dates for its compilation have been proposed, and most recently Lindy Brady has argued incisively for the twelfth-century on the basis of the text's attribution to Alexander of Ashby, prior of Canons Ashby in Northamptonshire from 1148/54 to 1208-14; whilst Alexander is not the author in Brady's view, the other *vitae* credited to him are acknowledged as twelfth century works and she sees no reason why the *Vita Bertellini* should be different.[96] A further interesting point is that in his *vita*, Bertelin apparently travelled to Ireland, where he stayed with an unnamed king and won his favour, but then 'carried off' the latter's daughter back to Britain after he had made her pregnant; mother and daughter subsequently died in a wolf attack whilst Bertelin left them to seek out a midwife, leading him to repent and live a less dissolute life.[97] Such journeys across the sea are not uncommon in hagiographical sources, but these Irish contacts draw to mind both the great expansion of links between Britain and Ireland in the Viking Age, and those of an earlier period in the seventh century when Irish ecclesiastics were highly influential in the Church hierarchies of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, reminding us that even inland, awareness of Irish culture in Mercia was strong.

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[94] Sergeant, *Lichfield and the Lands of St Chad*, pp.137-9.
[95] Lindy Brady, 'An Analogue to *Wulf and Eadwacer* in the Life of St Bertellin of Stafford', *The Review of English Studies*, 67.1 (2016), pp.1-20 (pp.18-20).
[96] Brady, 'An Analogue to *Wulf and Eadwacer* in the Life of St Bertellin of Stafford', pp.15-7.
[97] Brady, 'An Analogue to *Wulf and Eadwacer* in the Life of St Bertellin of Stafford', pp.5-6.

Our second related figure is St Bertram of Ilam, who has no separate surviving *vita*, nor is he the dedicatee of the church there which instead honours the Holy Cross.[98] The main evidence for the antiquity of his cult is the shrine which was built up over his purported grave; this consists of an inscribed stone slab with a tomb-shrine shaped stone placed on top.[99] This surviving phase is now located in a small chapel adjoining the church and has been dated on stylistic grounds to the thirteenth century, but the practice is highly unusual in an English context and potentially unique.[100] It has also been mooted that it might incorporate earlier pieces of sculpture.[101] The best comparison is with Welsh examples of the *capel-y-bedd* or 'chapel of the grave', where saints' remains were more often left in their original graves and shrines and chapels erected above them.[102] Ilam is still somewhat unusual in that the chapel is built into the church, but this is not unknown in Wales and the example at Pennant Melangell described in chapter one was likewise incorporated into the church within an apsidal extension, probably of the twelfth century, likely as part of the development of a pre-existing cult.[103] A further link with the narrative of the *Vita Bertellini* is a carved stone font from the church at Ilam, which is richly carved and includes two panels depicted a wolf-like beast; in both panels a human head is placed between the jaws, whilst in one a figure is also trampled underfoot by the beast.[104] Further evidence comes from the adjacent parish of Tissington, where another carved font also

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[98] Taxatio, CL.ST.AL.05.

[99] John Blair, 'A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England', in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), pp.455-94 (p.473).

[100] Sergeant, *Lichfield and the Lands of St Chad*, p.138; John Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints in the Early Christian West, c.300-1200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp.262-3.

[101] Crook, *The Architectural Setting of the Cult of Saints*, pp.262-3.

[102] Sergeant, *Lichfield and the Lands of St Chad*, p.138

[103] R.B. Heaton and W.J. Britnell, 'A Structural History of Pennant Melangell Church', *The Montgomeryshire Collections*, 82 (1994), pp.103-126 (pp.107-8).

[104] 'Holy Cross, Ilam, Staffordshire', *Corpus of Romanesque Stone Sculpture in Britain and Ireland* <https://www.crsbi.ac.uk/view-item?i=10858> [Accessed 27th November 2023]

has images of a wolf.[105] These images are both though to be products of the twelfth century, much like the *Vita Bertellini*, and suggest that Bertelin's cult was well-established by this time.

Beyond their spatial proximity, the principal piece of evidence linking Bertelin and Bertram on the one hand and Bertoline of Barthomley on the other is their names, all of which can be taken as evolutions of the OE personal name Beorhthelm. A likely context for the spread of this cult occurred in the tenth century, because of the link between Bertelin and Stafford, which was refounded as a *burh* by Æthelflæd as Lady of the Mercians in 913.[106] This would be entirely consistent with Æthelflæd's ecclesiastical patronage at other Mercian *burhs* which tended to venerate earlier saints with connections to the rulers of Mercia; Bertelin was, if the much later life can be believed, a Mercian prince, and similarly Æthelflæd endorsed the cult of Werburgh (a Mercian princess) at Chester following the latter's translation from Hanbury, Staffordshire.[107] Furthermore, Stafford was not the only *burh* with a church dedicated to Bertelin; the same dedication occurs at Runcorn, another of Æthelflæd's northern *burhs* founded in 915, and the Bertelin connection there has an early first attestation from 1115.[108]

At Stafford, which by Domesday had grown into a substantial town, the collegiate church of St Mary's was well established with thirteen canons. This church clearly absorbed the

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[105] 'St Mary, Tissington, Derbyshire', *Corpus of Romanesque Stone Sculpture in Britain and Ireland* <https://www.crsbi.ac.uk/view-item?i=14964> [Accessed 27th November 2023]
[106] ASC CD 913.
[107] Alan Thacker, 'Kings, saints and monasteries in pre-Viking Mercia', *Midland History*, 10 (1985), pp.1-25 (pp.18-19).
[108] ASC C 915; John Blair, 'A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Saints' in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Alan Thacker and Richard Sharpe (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002), pp.495-565 (pp.515-6).

earlier chapel of St Bertelin at some stage, but the interpretation of its physical remains have been contentious; a rectangular wooden post-built structure was discovered in 1954 within the foundation of the later stone-built chapel of St Bertelin.[109] This may have been the original church on the site, and a long wooden object was also discovered within beneath a coin dated c.1000.[110] In the original excavation report, it was thought that this might represent the remains of a standing cross, but by 1971 it had been reappraised as a 'cruciform coffin'; the most recent assessment of the evidence suggested it may have been a tree trunk coffin of a type more often found in East Anglia.[111] The principal difficulty is that radiocarbon analysis of this object in 1971 produced a date range centred on the year 1180, which confusingly is later than the overlying coin of Æthelred and crucially, an upper layer from which charcoal deposits produced earlier dates. However, the recording of the sample and its context was not done to modern standards and the possibility of confusion with samples from other wooden coffins from the site remains. The coin of Æthelred does support the general sequence of a wooden chapel preceding a later stone-built church, as do the radiocarbon dates of the charcoal samples from around the coffin; on the basis of subsequent work at Stafford, recalibrated dates for these samples give date expected date ranges of 880-980 at one sigma and 800-1000 at two sigma, placing them well within the expected range for a Late Saxon church. [112] Additional support comes from a few pieces of typical ninth or tenth century metalwork.[113] Therefore, the wooden object is still most plausibly interpreted as a oak tree trunk burial of the ninth or tenth century, and the wooden structure makes a very credible candidate for an early church. A further question that presents itself if who was

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[109] Martin Carver, *Anglo-Saxon Stafford: Archaeological Investigations 1954-2004: Field Reports Online*, (2010) FR 3.2, p.1.
[110] Carver, *Anglo-Saxon Stafford,* FR 3.2, p.4.
[111] Carver, *Anglo-Saxon Stafford,* FR 3.2, p.2.
[112] Carver, *Anglo-Saxon Stafford,* FR 3.2, p.3.
[113] Carver, *The Birth of a Borough*, FR 3.2, p.3-4.

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the individual buried under the chapel, and whether it might be St Bertelin; if so, what does this mean for the shrine at Ilam, and do we have two different saints with highly localised cults who just so happen to share a similar name? Whatever the answer it must surely impact our assessment of Barthomley, as should the Beorhthelm link be proven between the three churches then it would place them all together as part of a shared community honouring the same patron saint. If not then the dedication to Bertoline becomes unanchored from the tenth and eleventh century origin suggested above and could easily be a product of later centuries. Another objection which might be raised is that no form of Beorhthelm occurs in *Secgan*, the eleventh-century list of saints and their burial places, and that there is a contradiction between the Peterborough Chronicle stating that Bertelin was buried at Stafford and the presence of the shrine at Ilam, unless the remains were translated or divided between the two sites.

For Barthomley, the consequence of all these connections is that it could be connected to the same phase of church foundation and dedication that produced the cult centre at Stafford and this episode provides a likely *terminus post quem.* However, it should be noted that the link between Stafford and Ilam and Barthomley is not quite secure as it might be and its historicity takes an blow when the local toponomy is considered. Barthomley had been thought by Eilert Ekwall to contain a personal name compounded with *lēah* / 'wood', but proper analysis of the early forms does not support this.[114] In Domesday the name is written as '*Bertemeleu*' whilst forms beginning '*Bertumleg*' are also common from the thirteenth century.[115] On this basis, the Cheshire EPNS suggests

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[114] Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* 4th edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p.28.
[115] DB Cheshire, 8.30, f.265v; EPNS Cheshire, III, p.5-7.

that a more likely interpretation is OE *Bert-hǣma-lēah*, meaning 'wood of the dwellers at a bere-tūn', with the middle element being a genitive plural rather than OE *hām* meaning a village or settlement.[116] This poses a difficulty because had Domesday or some earlier source preserved a form that contained a form of Beorhthelm or similar, this would have pushed the link between saint and place back to at least 1086. Beyond this, the link does seem appealing and Barthomley's location on the edge of Cheshire, just short of where the land begins to rise towards the moors of northern Staffordshire, makes it all the more feasible. If Barthomley did originate as part of an earlier mother parish it must have been separated at an early date and Higham notes the possibility that the Siward who held Barthomley in 1066 could be the same figure of that name who held Buerton in Audlem chapelry and that a family of wealthy thegns would have been well-placed to establish their own church in a peripheral, heavily-wooded part of Wybunbury parish.[117] Against this however, it could be argued that the twelfth century, when our first textual attestations of St Bertelin of Stafford occur, saw a revival of interest in his cult, and it could be that Barthomley was founded and dedicated at this time, and was probably carved out from some of the outlying lands of one of the neighbouring parishes of Sandbach or Wybunbury. Sandbach may in fact be the stronger candidate because part of Hassall township, otherwise in Sandbach parish, was assigned to Barthomley in the tithe assessments of the 1840s, with all the usual caveats about using such late evidence for early medieval developments.

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[116] EPNS Cheshire, III, p.6.
[117] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, p.142-3; DB Cheshire 8.30, f.265v.

As is often the case in Wales, we are therefore presented with the difficulty of tracing the development of a highly local saint's cult with a limited distribution of known sites where our principal sources are hagiographical texts written at notable chronological distance from the figures they claim to describe. That being said, the choice of an obscure saint is difficult to explain if they never existed or had no link to the church, but as we have seen obscure saints might be erased through confusion with better-known figures with similar names, especially where those do have an attested local prominence. Therefore when corroborated with other evidence, these highly localised cults can prove to have early medieval origins, but this cannot be assumed in all cases. On balance, it seems unlikely that the dedication to Bertoline at Barthomley could be read as a dedication to any other saint, given the cult centres at Stafford and Ilam were close by. This dedication cannot be attested prior to the pre-Conquest period, and so the matter hinges on the Domesday priest and the arrangements one envisions for serving the laity at that time; if one assumes that this priest had a church in the district where he served, then this may well have been dedicated to Bertoline and date to the tenth or eleventh centuries, but the evidence does not allow us to date the church at Barthomley with the necessary precision.

5.5 Sandbach

Moving northwards into Mildestuic hundred, perhaps the most notable of the early medieval churches of the area can be found at Sandbach. At Domesday it consisted of six townships, though a small part of Hassall may have been in Barthomley parish as we have seen and both Hassall and Betchton ended up over the border in Nantwich hundred after

reorganisation in the twelfth century.[118] Amongst scholars the town is best-known for its expansive collection of Mercian stone sculpture, consisting of two standing crosses and their socket stones in the market square and a further collection of cross-shaft fragments and other stones now kept at St Mary's Church. The history of these monuments is complicated and is responsible for their now fragmentary character; the first attestation of the crosses occurs in 1585 but they are absent from a description of the town in 1621, and it is widely assumed that they were deliberately felled by a group of puritan iconoclasts around this time whose activities are known from a case brought against them in the Court of Star Chamber in 1614.[119] In the intervening centuries the pieces were divided, with some passing into the ownership of the local gentry and being removed from the town, whilst others were recycled and used in the masonry of some nearby buildings. [120] There is evidence however to suggest that the socket stones and the lowermost part of Sandback Market Square 2 (2a in the *CASSS* nomenclature) remained in place at this time.[121] In 1816 a deliberate effort was made to reunite the known pieces and assemble them into complete crosses, led by the prominent Cheshire historian and antiquary George Ormerod, at which point they assumed more or less their current form, though further alterations in the 1950s included the removal of some other associated pieces to St Mary's Church where they remain today.[122] These additional stones are first reliably attested in 1901, and so their exact relationship with the crosses is unclear; CASSS records them separately as Sandbach St Mary's 1-5 and they are briefly discussed later in this chapter.[123] At some point they were built into the stepped platform which the

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[118] EPNS Cheshire, III, p.2; George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (London: Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor and Jones, 1819), III, p.158.

[119] Jane Hawkes, *The Sandback Crosses: Sign and Significance in Anglo-Saxon Sculpture* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), pp.15, 20.

[120] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.21-2.

[121] CASSS, IX, p.100.

[122] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.22-3; CASSS, IX, p.100.

[123] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.24; CASSS, IX, pp.122-5.

crosses stood in 1585; Hawkes takes this as clear evidence that these stones, probably fragments of additional cross shafts, were reused when the crosses were raised in the market square, and the fact that they were available in broken form strongly suggests that the crosses were re-erected there having previously stood somewhere else.[124] This would account for the otherwise curious distance between the crosses and the church.

Sandbach Market Square 1 consists of six fragments, labelled a-f, whilst Sandbach Market Square 2 exists in at least three pieces, a-c.[125] The latter is also surmounted by a fourth fragment which is part of a cross-head, though whether it is associated with the rest of the cross is unclear; there are close parallels with the decorative scheme of Sandbach Market Square 1 and it is only in more recent years that scholarship has recognised that the fragment may have been fitted upside down.[126] For this reason, *CASSS* records the cross-head separately as Sandbach Market Square 3.[127] The socket-stones of crosses 1 and 2 are denoted as Sandbach Market Square 4 and 5 respectively; any decoration these once bore has been comprehensively worn away but they are a close fit for the crosses they now support and they are highly likely to be contemporary with the cross-shafts, especially number 5 which still housed fragment 2c prior to the reconstruction of 1816 (whether this was the case in the Mercian period remains uncertain).[128] Sandbach Market Square 6 is a likely headstone of uncertain date and therefore not considered here, whilst Sandbach Market Square 7 was a further cross-shaft fragment recorded as being built into the basement of a building overlooking the market square in the nineteenth century, but it is now lost and its current state entirely

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[124] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.25-7.
[125] CASSS, IX, pp.99, 113.
[126] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.164.
[127] CASSS, IX, pp.120-1
[128] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.23.

unknown.[129] A further five pieces survive at St Mary's Church in Sandbach; these are further three cross-fragments (numbered 1 through 3) which repeat several motifs found on the Market Square crosses and are closely associated with them, although Hawkes also floats the possibility that they were shorter, *stelae*-type grave markers.[130] It is fairly likely however that the three pieces do not belong together as part of a single original cross, and so if they are cross-fragments, as *CASSS* assumes that they are, then they must be evidence for a larger assemblage of crosses with a wider variation in size and complexity. The final two pieces, Sandbach St Mary's 4 and 5, are a pared of coped slabs which likely belonged together when first completed.[131] The whole collection is renowned for the quality and ambition of its carving and decorative scheme, and its richness is only emphasised when one considers that only two other sites in Cheshire have produced any kind of pre-Viking stone sculpture. Regarding dating, the crosses are widely dated to the ninth century, and usually to the earlier part of that century, whilst the St Mary's coped slabs might be slightly later, either late-ninth or early-tenth century.[132]

Because of the size of the collection, its outstanding artistic value and the need to understand its difficult and complicated provenance, the Sandbach crosses have been the subject of a great detail of scholarly attention. The two most important modern texts are the extensive CASSS entries, published in 2010, and Jane Hawkes' thorough analysis of the collection published in 2002.[133] Both these texts draw on the extensive body of antiquarian material and other sources which has been built up over the decades in order

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[129] CASSS, IX, pp.148, 153.
[130] CASSS, IX, pp.122-4; Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.126-7.
[131] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.127.
[132] CASSS, IX, pp.106-7, 120,
[133] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*; CASSS, IX, pp.99-121.

to understand what happened to the stones between the felling of the crosses around the beginning of the seventeenth century, and it is because of their work and many others that we can be reasonably confident that the stones have mostly been reassembled in something resembling their original ninth-century form. Hawkes and Bailey are not in total agreement, but their interpretation of the monuments shares a great deal and there is a broad consensus that the crosses were originally products of the early ninth century. The dating of the crosses is largely on art historical grounds and by comparison with other stone sculptures and artefacts such as manuscripts, but the richness of the imagery has allowed a strong argument to be built. In the case of Sandbach Market Square 1, Jane Hawke's work on the crosses' iconographic content shows a broad range of influences, but crucially these span the fifth to ninth centuries, and it is primarily on this basis that the crosses must pre-date the Viking Age. Some of these points are recounted here, though this is not an exhaustive description of these complex and richly-decorated monuments. Amongst the earliest images Hawkes refers to are the Crucifixion and the Adoration of the Manger, whose depictions draw heavily on Late Antique images, though perhaps showing some influence of Carolingian art; these are found on stones 1dA and 1eA in the *CASSS* terminology.[134] The style and shape of the figures, frequently depicted with a nimbus and oval-shaped features, is also evidence of Late Antique influence in Hawke's assessment, as seen in the figure of both the crucified Christ and the Virgin Mary and in the Adoration of the Magi (stones 1dA and 1cA respectively).[135] Other influences are also apparent however, such as the use of heads in profile with elongated foreheads and pointed chins, to which she points to the Pictish images of the eighth or ninth centuries such as the Aberlemno stones, some of the early medieval standing crosses from Iona and the Book of Kells, suggesting a wide-range of influence and an openness to ideas

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[134] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.38-49, pp.128-9.
[135] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.130.

originating in the Pictish kingdoms and the Irish-speaking world.[136] A third point is the tendency of both crosses to arrange different figures and images in frames, frequently arch-shaped though sometimes rectangular or lozenge-shaped.[137] This tendency may reflect the influence of pieces of eighth- and ninth-century metalwork, which often required such framing in order to preserve the structural integrity of the piece and have been adopted as skeuomorphs in the Sandbach crosses. Hawkes also notes the use of framing devices in other Mercian stone sculpture, particularly from some of the other, larger collections of Peak District cross-shafts from Bakewell, Bradbourne and Eyam.[138] On this strong basis she argues for an early-ninth century date for Sandbach Market Square 1, with the second cross perhaps following a few decades later.[139]

Sandbach Market Square 2 survives in three fragments, and whilst it lacks a cross-head most of the shaft survives and the current reconstruction stands over three metres in height. Similarities with Sandbach Market Square 1 are apparent, particularly the use of quadrupedal beasts with long-necks and curved tails and bodies on face A, some of which have distinctive triangular 'Trewhiddle' shaped bodies; this is another strong indicator of a ninth-century date.[140] Further animals occur on face B, which seems to be closely related to face B on Sandbach Market Square 1 and may have been copied in part from it, perhaps making this the marginally later piece.[141] Here they feature knotwork emerging from their mouths and across their bodies in a motif familiar from other Insular stone sculpture and in manuscript sources. Face C is perhaps the most complex, particularly on

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[136] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.130.
[137] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.133-5.
[138] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.134.
[139] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.137.
[140] CASSS, IX, p.118.
[141] CASSS, IX, p.119.

the lowermost fragment (2c), which features three figures with a pair of doves in the top corners of the frame, standing over a series of ten arched niches arranged in four rows each containing another figure.[142] The traditional interpretation of this scene sees the central figure at the top as Christ presiding over the Last Judgement, a common scene in Irish stone sculpture, but Jane Hawke's re-evaluation of the cross has spawned new interpretations; in particular, the three figures at the top may be part of an entirely separate image from the those within the niches below, which most likely relate to the Adoration of Mary who is depicted in the centre of the composition holding the infant Christ, although wear to the carving makes precise analysis difficult.[143] In this case the surrounding figures represent angels, saints or other figures attending to Mary as the Mother of God. Face D, a narrow face, features a related design with a series of different figures again contained within arch shaped niches.[144] The use of the arch-niches gives the cross a strongly architectural feeling and may be intended to invoke the actual buildings and indoor space of a church but in an outdoor, public-facing sphere. The exact identification of figures in uncertain and there were probably more of them on the upper parts of the shaft which are now lost, and so there are more than would be expected if they depicted Jesus' disciples.[145] Each figure has somewhat different distinguishing features, and many of them carry a rod or wand.[146] The idea that they represent an assortment of saints has been advanced and is feasible, but does not explain the preponderance of rods and would be somewhat of a contrast with the strongly Biblical and Christological imagery found elsewhere on the crosses.[147] Here again Hawkes has been able to propose a different and convincing interpretation, that the figures represent

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[142] CASSS, IX, p.116.
[143] CASSS, IX, p.117-9.
[144] CASSS, IX, p.120.
[145] CASSS, IX, p.120.
[146] CASSS, IX, p.120.
[147] CASSS, IX, p.120.

the ancestors of Christ.[148] This is a rare image for the ninth century but other examples are known in manuscript sources of the eleventh century and this seems to represent an early innovation on the part of the Sandbach sculptor who was clearly a very able artist and also well-versed in Biblical images, or at the very least followed the guidance and knowledge of others who were.[149] This explanation has the benefit of both more effectively explaining the iconography of the crosses whilst also emphasising their thematic consistency, with a clear focus on Christ, his life and the Church's role in continuing his work.

In terms of the imagery and conceptual content of the crosses, they are evidently very complex monuments that refer to a wide range of Biblical events. Consequently these can be read in different ways, but it is possible to discern particular strands of thought that unite the different collection of images across their individual panels. In the case of Sandbach Market Square 1, these focus particularly on events from the life of Christ. On face A, beginning from top to bottom, we have on stone 1c the Adoration of the Magi, with three figures offering gifts to an enthroned Mary and Child, whilst stone 1d features a Crucifixion scene with Christ depicted on the Cross surrounded by figures representing the four Evangelists.[150] Continuing, the lower part of stone 1d displays a Nativity scene, then what is likely an image of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.[151] The final scene on this face, whilst not entirely certain, has been interpreted as a depiction of Saints Peter and Paul receiving the keys of heaven and the book of the New Law respectively.[152]

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[148] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.118-20.

[149] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.118.

[150] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.30-46.

[151] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.46-56.

[152] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.56-62.

This all stands in sharp contrast to the Viking Age sculpture which dominates the corpus in Wirral and Tegeingl and which displays a marked preference for geometric designs such as interlace and knotwork and where figural ornament is much less common. Even where figures do appear, as at Neston in Wirral or on *Maen Achwyfan* in from Tegeingl, there are often fewer of them, and the scenes depicted are just as likely to be images of lay noble activity as religious depictions. This may reflect a different approach to stone monuments prior the Viking Age and a different set of purposes behind them. In particular, it is often assumed that the expansion of stone sculpture in the tenth century in regions subject to Scandinavian settlement or cultural influence was associated with a growing desire for durable grave markers in stone, which may have been one way in which newly-established population and kin groups established permanent sites of memory in their new homes and thereby cemented their claims to land ownership or high social status. Likewise, existing elites may also have been attracted to the novelty and visual power of these monuments and adopted similar tastes.

Another feature which distinguishes pre-Viking from Viking Age sculpture in Cheshire, is that the much smaller corpus of pre-Viking Age pieces from Cheshire (essentially from just three sites, Sandbach, Overchurch and Over) tend to have more complex public functions beyond acts of remembrance for the departed.[153] The Sandbach crosses display this complexity most of all, as the varied collection of images could have been put to a variety of uses. The images of scenes from the Gospels may have functioned as a valuable pedagogical aid, allowing clerics to convey the story of Christ's life, death and resurrection in a visual manner and thereby improve the understanding of their lay

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[153] CASSS, IX, pp.21-2.

parishoners. Moreover, it acts in an intensely ideological manner, one which draws explicit links between Christ, the Evangelists and the foundation of the organised Church, as demonstrated in the four Evangelist symbols from the crucifixion scene and the images of, for example, Peter receiving the keys of Heaven, a crucial legitimising moment in the early history of the Roman Church.[154] Likewise, Hawkes has argued that the depiction of Christ's Transfiguration, which is a fairly uncommon image in early medieval artwork, was a way of conveying not only Christ's divine nature and power, but also the divine nature of his Church, drawing on the sermons of Augustine who also made this link.[155] It therefore speaks powerfully to several different concerns that an ecclesiastical patron might have, and to different audiences who might have understood it on different levels; a learned priest or cleric would have the Biblical knowledge and context to read into the different images, whilst a comparative novice or lay person could still understand these events as part of Christ's familar biography. However it was read and by whom, this is clearly a broader and more ambitious range of functions than a purely funerary monument, and whilst all such monuments and memorials are by their nature public, the concern of the Sandbach crosses to edify the viewer and to legitimise the foundation of the Church speaks to a particular sense of religious duty which is not commonly found in the predominantly lay monuments of tenth century Wirral and Tegeingl.

The other part of the sculptural collection from Sandbach comprises the five stones monuments designated Sandbach St Mary's 1-5 by the *CASSS*, which were removed from the Market Square in the 1950s.[156] At which exact point they were brought together as

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[154] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.60-2.
[155] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.55-6.
[156] CASSS, IX, p.122.

part of that monument is uncertain and relies upon the descriptions and sketches made by the various antiquaries and other figures who investigated them, but most of these stones were clearly placed with the crosses following the rearrangement of 1816 and at least some of them were also there when the crosses are first attested in that position in 1585.[157] They therefore share a similar provenance and, whilst not necessarily in their original early medieval position, are closely associated with Sandbach and have been for many centuries. These pieces include a further three pieces of cross-shaft. Their condition is generally poor and they are now heavily worn and in places damaged by pollution, but some of their decorative motifs can still be observed and they broadly align with those found on the two Sandbach crosses. In particular, Sandbach St Mary's 1 and 2 both set humanoid figures within arched niches, a device which features prominently on the two crosses, especially the crucifixion scene on Sandbach Market Square 1's face A and the depiction of the Transfiguration of Christ on Sandback Market Square 2's face C.[158] Sandbach St Mary's 1 also features a robed figure who may be holding some kind of rod, similar in execution to the figures on Sandbach Market Square 1 face A and Sandbach Market Square 2's face A.[159] As well as these clear stylistic parallels, Jane Hawke's analysis suggests that the units of measurement used to lay out the St Mary's stones are the same as those on the main crosses, suggesting that the two were the product of the same workshop or school.[160] Their proportions also suggest that these three pieces were not part of the same cross however, and we should therefore envision at least five substantial standing crosses at Sandbach, suggesting that the surviving pieces may represent only a fraction of the original ninth-century assemblage.[161]

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[157] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.26-7.
[158] CASSS, IX, p.123.
[159] CASSS, IX, pp.122-3.
[160] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.123-4.
[161] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*.126-7.

The final two stones, Sandbach St Mary's 4 and 5 are coped slabs which probably once formed part of the same recumbent monument, with one highly decorated broad side and three sides with little or no decoration, again suggesting the monument was designed to be viewed flat.[162] Whilst also worn, these have survived better than the St Mary's cross shafts and their decorative scheme incorporates familiar elements. The same device of an inner frame within a cabled moulding unites both numbers 4 and 5 and the two Market Square crosses, and we also see figures ensconced within arch-shaped niches.[163] There is something of an innovation in the use of interlace to form the body of some of these figures, a device also familiar from other pieces in Derbyshire and Staffordshire and given the quantity and quality of the Sandbach carvings, it may be that these stones began a wider fashion for such figures in northern Mercia. [164] These slight differences notwithstanding, the overall collection of Sandbach stones displays a consistent repertoire of decorative motifs and religious imagery which is apparent even on the most worn and damaged stones in the assemblage. For this reason it is likely that they were produced by the same hands or by the same workshop, and in a relatively short time frame. A possible exception is the recumbent monument surviving as Sandbach St Mary's 4 and 5, which *CASSS* assigns to the 'late ninth or tenth century', but given how closely they echo the other Sandbach stones, a date early in this range or even somewhat before is to be preferred.[165] The purpose of this last monument is not certain, but a recumbent monument is especially suited to acting as a grave cover or marker and this may originate from a burial ground which would be entirely expected around the church. Whether this would

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[162] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.127.
[163] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.127.
[164] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.127.
[165] CASSS, IX, pp.124-5; Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.127.

have been for a lay or ecclesiastical burial is an important but difficult question; it would have been entirely normal for a priest to be interred within the grounds of the church where they served and lived, and the similarity of these stones with the distinctly Biblical imagery on the crosses is striking. It does open the important possibility that our surviving stones are only a sample of a much larger ninth-century assemblage and that the visual impact of the Sandbach stones would have been even greater when first produced.

The sophistication of the images inscribed upon the crosses and the sheer size of the collection has been taken clear evidence of the wealth of the community at Sandbach in the ninth century, and given what is known about the development of minster churches, it is likely to have been important at an earlier date, during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. Compared to the churches known from Wirral, Tegeingl and elsewhere in Cheshire, this places in the very earliest stratum of churches, prior to the proliferation of stone sculpture which occurred following the arrival of Scandinavian cultural influence from the late ninth and early tenth century onwards. In this respect it therefore accords most closely with the classic conception of a minster church, in terms of its date and obvious affluence. What is more difficult to assess is the actual structure of the community at Sandbach, for which we must rely on the testimony of prose sources like Bede or the life of St Wilfred, which give us a sense of what minster life may have been like, but which can flatten our perception of regional variation, how these places changed in the centuries afterwards, and the natural idiosyncrasies that might occur at any single site. One slight note of caution when interpreting the stones is that their context is somewhat ambiguous; they were not found within the church of St Mary's or its churchyard, and it cannot necessarily be assumed that they now stand in their original

position.[166] Whilst the socket stones are unlikely to have moved since the late sixteenth century, it is not guaranteed that they always stood at their present location, although the similarity between the crosses and socket stones in the material they are carved from does offer some reassurance that they are broadly contemporary. Likewise, presently they stand in the middle of Sandbach's market square, but the town did not receive a market charter until 1579 and so the context in which they were viewed in the ninth century is unknown; some sort of settlement likely existed around the church, as this would form the seat of William Malbank's Domesday manor in 1086, but clearly the early medieval context would have been different to that which prevailed several centuries afterwards.[167]

As has already been implied, the principal upshot of this rich outpouring of creativity is that the Sandbach sculpture was likely produced on the initiative of a wealthy and powerful church community, one which we would expect to be organised along the lines of a minster church staffed by a resident community of priests who maintained some sort of organised religious life, but not necessarily to strict monastic standards. This latter point is, as often the case, difficult to prove explicitly, but the economic resources which must have been expended in commissioning such a large and fine array of sculpture were considerable and our prose sources treat the presence of communities of clerics and priests at these churches with such nonchalance that the practice must have been commonplace. The dating of the two standing crosses to the early ninth century is highly significant as it means we can confidently place the existence of the church at Sandbach before the Scandinavian arrival to Britain's western coasts in the beginning of the tenth century, and

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[166] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.27.
[167] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, p.127; DB Cheshire, 1.33, 14.10, f.264r, f.266v.

indeed before the subjugation of the Mercian kingdom by the forces of the Great Heathen Army in the 870s. This places Sandbach in a firmly Anglo-Saxon tradition of large minsters or collegiate churches and suggests a broadly southwards outlook, to the rest of Mercia and its spiritual leaders based at Lichfield. That is not to exclude external cultural influences which are also apparent and the appearance of the Sandbach crosses just as high crosses were spreading across Ireland should be remembered, as should Hawkes's stylistic comparison which look variously to Italy, Francia, the Pictish kingdom and Ireland.[168] In this respect Sandbach sits on the very edge of an Irish Sea zone, on the frontier of an intrinsically maritime district but which had a hinterland stretching an unknown distance inland. Furthermore, the role they may have played in inspiring later Irish Sea cultural phenomena must be considered, and whilst a great deal of attention has been paid to the importation of Irish and Scandinavian cultural signifiers into north west Britain in the Viking Age, Sandbach may have provided a homegrown model for the sculptors at Chester St John's whose hands are often suspected behind the stone crosses we have already seen in Tegeingl and Wirral.[169] It should therefore be remembered that the exchange of culture in this Irish Sea Zone was bi-directional and that churches, as centres of both production and consumption of high-status material artefacts would have been closely entwined with this complex network of cultural influences, styles and fashions.

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[168] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.128-30.
[169] CASSS, IX, p.27.

5.6 Astbury

A more ambiguous situation presents itself at Astbury, to the east of Sandbach. At first glance this is a large parish of eleven townships, and also once included the parishes of Swettenham (two townships), Church Lawton and Brereton, for a total of fifteen. A generous assessment of £33 18s and 8d in the 1291 *Taxatio* corroborates the large swathe of lands from which the church could draw its tithes, and Domesday confirms that there was a priest in the area in 1086.[170] He resided at Newbold, a manor of Gilbert the Hunter, also known as Gilbert de Venables, who was one of Earl Hugh I's barons and a kinsman who also held neighbouring Brereton; the two had previously been held by a certain Wulfgeat, suggesting the link between the two extends into the Mercian period.[171] The exact position of Newbold is lost and the later township is named Newbold Astbury, suggesting that the two manors had been merged, or that the focus of local lordship was deliberately transferred between the two locations. It was at Astbury that the parish church was located, and where the primary settlement in the township developed. This may have been affected by the monks of St Werburgh's Chester, who were granted by Gilbert de Venables the '*ecclesiam de Esteburi cum medietate bosci et omnium que pertinent ad Neobold*', according to Earl Hugh's great charter of foundation.[172] As we have seen this document purports to be a product of the 1090s, but a date during the reign of Stephen is more likely for its composition in its present form; the gift must therefore have occurred at some point before the middle of the twelfth century but the authenticity of these grants is not generally doubted.[173] Importantly, the church is unambiguously termed an *ecclesia*, ascribing to it full parochial status, and the same term is used of this church again in a

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[170] *Taxatio*, CL.CH.MW.01; DB Cheshire 18.1 (f.267r).
[171] DB Cheshire 18.1-18.2 (f.267r).
[172] ChANEC, 3, p.6.
[173] ChANEC, 3, pp.8-10.

confirmation by William de Venables, great-grandson of Gilbert, dated 1154-8, and another by Archbishop Richard of Canterbury between 1174 and 1184.[174] Its status as a full parochial church must therefore date to at least the first decades of Norman rule, and the Domesday priest in the area strongly suggests that this was the case earlier into the eleventh century.

Astbury's prosperity prior to 1066 can be adduced from a modest selection of stone sculpture, made up a round shaft or column fragment, and two 'architectural' fragments of pre-Norman date. The shaft fragment Astbury 1 is especially interesting and is decorated with scrolls with spiralling stems, angular shoots and what *CASSS* describes as 'a stripped and inorganic version' of these common foliage-type decorative devices.[175] This is interpreted as a particularly local variation of these motifs, best paralleled at nearby Prestbury, specifically by Prestbury 1, making it an interesting reflection of local tastes.[176] Similarly shaped columns, which quickly taper to the top and use a broad, richly decorated collar, include Leek 2, Leek 6 and Ilam 1 in Staffordshire, and Wincle Grange and Macclesfield in Cheshire, in what appears to be part of a group centred in the uplands of eastern Cheshire and western parts of the Peak District.[177] On the basis of these stylistic parallels, the piece is dated to the late tenth or eleventh century.[178] Astbury 2 and 3 are closely related, and are formed of two adjacent sides of a shaft, richly decorated with an acanthus inspired design; this intricate and classicising motif is good evidence that the original church at Astbury was architecturally impressive and richly decorated, albeit

[174] Tait, *St Werburgh's*, 329, 330, pp.217-8.
[175] CASSS, IX, p.47.
[176] CASSS, IX, pp.47, 95-6.
[177] CASSS, IX, pp.47, 84; CASSS, XIII, pp.288-90, 292, 297.
[178] CASSS, IX, pp.33-4.

without the same didactic Biblical imagery employed on the Sandbach crosses.[179] Once again dated to the eleventh century, on the basis of the use of similar plant motifs in manuscripts of the era, the sculpture from Astbury suggests a substantial investment was made in building a church in stone in the eleventh century, which must have had a particularly wealthy patron. Whether this was the Wulfgeat who held the manors of Astbury and Newbold is speculative, but based on the dating there cannot be more than a generation or two between him and this rebuilding. Whether it was at this point that the focus of ecclesiastical activity moved from Newbold to Astbury is uncertain and it is curious that the priest recorded in Domesday was assigned to the former and not the latter, but given that no church was recorded at either manor, in spite of the strong sculptural evidence, we have a clear sign that Domesday's recording of Cheshire churches was not exhaustive. The general orientation of the sculpture here is also interesting; the parallels are firmly to the east of Astbury, into the Peak, and not towards the typical Cheshire group of Viking Age crosses which prevail in Chester, Wirral and north Wales. Instead, this part of eastern Cheshire seems more strongly tied into other networks of Mercian churches. One final concern might be with the provenance of the pieces, and the possibility that the fragments are not part of an earlier church and were instead taken from another high status structure and recycled by later medieval masons, for Astbury 1 was first discovered prior to 1892 holding up a beam in the north porch of the current church, but given that we know a church was standing here by the time of Gilbert de Venables's grant to St Werburgh's, it seems likely that the Astbury pieces must have been included in that building.[180]

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[179] CASSS, IX, pp.47-8.
[180] CASSS, IX, p.47.

The sole point of difficulty here is that Astbury's ancient parish, including Swettenham and Brereton, creates an exclave of Sandbach parish represented by its chapelries of Church Hulme and Goostrey. These are separated from the main body of Sandbach parish by Brereton township, and also by the easternmost portion of Mildestuic parish to which we will return to shortly. That these two chapelries are closely linked is suggested by the position of the township of Leese, part of Goostrey chapelry but separated from it by Church Hulme. Furthermore, we must consider Earnshaw, a part of the lordship of Rudheath which was assigned to the parish of Sandbach (most of the rest of the township was extra-parochial).[181] This small parcel of land sits northeast of Church Hulme chapelry, making it another exclave directly under Sandbach's jurisdiction, at least in the fourteenth century when the toponym is first attested.[182] This late attestation, first occurring in 1349, may well result from post-Norman changes in landholding, but the other two Sandbach chapelries are more difficult to explain away. Goostrey was only created as a chapelry with its own district in 1350, with Sandbach retaining oblations for funerals; it was however preceded by a chapel at Barnshaw within that same township of Goostrey cum Barnshaw which dates to some point in the mid-thirteenth century.[183] The chapel was likely founded by the monks of St Werburgh's who were granted a moiety of Hugh fitzNorman's share of Goostrey, purportedly confirmed by Earl Richard of Chester in 1119, and again by Ranulf II in 1151 or 1152.[184] Hugh's holdings in Goostrey were assessed at three virgates in Domesday, with a fourth virgate held by William FitzNigel, but no priest is recorded in either entry.[185] The upshot of this is that Goostrey is clearly not an ancient foundation and its association with Sandbach seems very strong, especially

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[181] EPNS Cheshire, II, p.222.

[182] EPNS Cheshire, II, p.278.

[183] Francis Gastrell, *Notitia Cestrensis, or Historical Notices of the Diocese of Chester*, ed. by Francis Robert Raines, Chetham Society Old Series 8 (Chetham Society: Manchester, 1845), p.257

[184] Gastrell, *Notitia Cestrensis*, p.257; ChANEC, 8 and 28, pp.14, 42.

[185] DB Cheshire, 9.27, 11.4, f.266r-266v.

the way in which Sandbach retained some of the revenues of the chapelry. Church Hulme, now better known as Holmes Chapel, presents rather less evidence because the foundation of the chapel cannot be exactly dated and the township did not gain its ecclesiastical affix until the 1290s.[186] It is therefore difficult to make the same argument as for Goostrey, but the strength of the evidence there seems likely to carry Church Hulme with it as an ancient part of Sandbach parish. From the Astbury side, there is some evidence that Swettenham may have early medieval origins, as it has a circular slab grave marker recorded by CASSS, but dated to the late eleventh or twelfth century, and having a daughter church or chapel at this relatively early date would also support the idea that the church at Astbury has pre-Conquest origins.[187] Brereton meanwhile is thought to have been separated from Astbury in the reign of Richard I, a point which seems to originate with the testimony of the often-reliable George Ormerod, who unusually in this case does not cite a source for this information.[188] The toponymical evidence is also useful here, as Astbury can be straightforwardly interpreted as 'the east manor or stronghold', which stand be in contrast to Wybunbury, another *burh* toponym, but may also have ecclesiastical origins, making in the eastern focus of the holdings of a church somewhere to the west.[189] Geographically, Sandbach is positioned perfectly for this explanation to work, and it is not unreasonable to suggest that Astbury, which was in all likelihood a major mother church in its own right by the eleventh century, was a daughter of Sandbach. This would produce a neat, continuous block of a parish for Sandbach, which based on the sculptural evidence is almost certainly an earlier foundation than Astbury. This would be consistent with the concept that very early church organisation and hundred level units were linked, and Nick

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[186] EPNS Cheshire, II, p.278.
[187] CASSS, IX, p.144.
[188] Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, III, p.54.
[189] EPNS Cheshire, II, p.286.

Higham's assessment of the hundred is cautiously supportive of such a scenario.[190] Furthermore, a church of Sandbach's great wealth would be expected to possess such a large parish. Higham also usefully points out the connection between the dating of the Sandbach sculpture and the elevation of the see of Lichfield to an archbishopric between 787 and 803, which would have brought new sources of wealth and artistic influence to Mercia around this time.[191] Given the dating of the Astbury sculpture, and Sandbach's modest valuation at Domesday, it seems that the church began to decline later in the ninth or in the tenth century, which coincides roughly with Mercia's eclipse by Wessex as the leading power amongst the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and then the depredations of the Great Heathen Army in the 860s and 870s. These challenging times may explain and help to date Sandbach's deterioration and the breakup of its parish.

5.7 Warmingham

Of the remaining later medieval parishes of Mildestuic hundred, the three with the greatest extent are Middlewich, Davenham and Warmingham. Taking them in roughly ascending order of size, Warmingham was later a parish of four townships, positioned to the east of Sandbach and west of Middlewich, forming a neat block on the Domesday hundredal boundary. Of its four townships, namely Warmingham, Elton, Moston and Tetton, only the very last appears in Domesday as a holding of Ranulf Mainwaring, assessed at one hide and a virgate for two ploughlands, with a value of 10s in 1086.[192] There were also woodlands one acre by forty perches in area, which, along with the

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[190] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.166-7.
[191] Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire*, pp.168.
[192] DB Cheshire, 20.12, f.267r.

neighbouring toponym Moston, meaning 'farm at a bog', suggests a somewhat marginal area for agriculture which may explain its underdevelopment in Domesday.[193] Its holder in 1066, a certain Godgyth, also held three small manors in the northern hundred of Tunendune, all later in Ranulph's hands, but she survived as his sub-tenant at Warford.[194] No priest is recorded, nor do we have any stone sculpture or early Norman charters, and so it seems the church at Warmingham is primarily a later development, probably associated with the expoitation of the area by its new Mainwaring lords, and therefore it was presumably considered part of one of the larger neighbouring parishes, as we shall see.

5.8 Middlewich

One candidate for the original mother church of Warmingham would be Sandbach to its east, while the other to the west and north would be Middlewich. This is a somewhat difficult site, for as we have seen Middlewich has origins as a Roman settlement, again associated with the production of salt and lying close to the main north-south route towards the Mersey crossing at Warrington and onward to Brigantian territory (Margery 70a).[195] All these factors would have bolstered its early importance, encouraged settlement and economic development in the vicinity and made the site an attractive choice for the foundation of an early church. When we look for evidence of such a site however, it is in very short supply. In its later boundaries, Middlewich was quite a substantial parish of 14 townships, arranged in a somewhat sinuous shape which narrows

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[193] EPNS Cheshire, II, p.259.
[194] DB Cheshire, 20.5, 20.7, 20.8, 20.12, f.267r.
[195] Margery, *Roman Roads*, p.302.

in the middle around Occleston and extends in a strip which separates Sandbach and Davenham parishes for a distance of around five miles. At the 1291 *Taxatio*, it was the namesake of a deanery and attracted a large assessment of £53 6s 8d, or 80 marks of silver, but otherwise had no chapelries or other signs of mother-parish status.[196] Likewise, the dedication to the church to St Michael is hard to read a date into and could just as easily be post-Norman as pre-Norman.[197] The Domesday record is similarly ambiguous. As alluded above, Middlewich was recorded near the end of the entries for Cheshire as one of the three salt-wiches in the county, demonstrating its economic importance in the area, but this should not be overstated. It was the least lucrative of the three, with revenues to its lord from salt production of only £8, plus another £2 which was the proceeds of the hundred court there.[198] This still made it a valuable holding, especially by Cheshire standards where most manors were small and of comparably little value, but it does suggest that its development somewhat lagged behind its neighbours at Northwich and Nantwich. A further point is that while no priest is recorded at Middlewich at Domesday, there is a one noted at Newton, and the two were later included in the same township of Middlewich and Newton.[199] The relationship between the two sites was presumably very close and the priest at Newton must surely have had responsibility for serving the laity of the district, including its salt-boilers. Whilst it is silent on ecclesiastical matters, this connection can be evidenced at an earlier date in the will of the Mercian thegn Wilfred Spot, dated 1002 to 1004. Amongst the lands he bequeaths are *'Niwantun æt þære wi[c]'*, or 'Newton by the wich', surely referring to Middlewich.[200] The wording here suggests that Middlewich was an important landmark by the beginning of the eleventh century, but

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[196] Taxatio, CL.CH.MW.05.
[197] Taxatio, CL.CH.MW.05.
[198] DB Cheshire, S2, f.268r.
[199] DB Cheshire, 19.1, f.267r.
[200] Whitelock, *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, pp.48-9.

clearly the focus of Wulfric's holdings was not there but somewhere close by. The situation may be analogous to that at Acton, which was the nearest manorial and parochial centre to Nantwich. The name Newton, literally 'the new farm', may therefore have been coined for an early medieval settlement next the old Roman ruins of Middlewich, which was then later revived as an industrial centre.[201] This kind of organisation, where important ecclesiastical, economic and tenurial functions were carried out at a tight cluster of sites, rather than in one unified settlement, is reminiscent of the more dispersed picture described above for Nantwich and Shavington in the post-Roman period, and may reflect a typically early medieval way of organising the landscape.[202] Crucially though, it does not require Middlewich to have acquired its church at an early, say seventh or eighth century date, and this could have been added later.

One way to illuminate the beginnings of Christian activity at Middlewich might be through its archaeology, though so far the evidence is not conclusive. As at Nantwich, most recent investigations have been triggered by proposed property development rather than a sustained programme of research digs, but a rough picture of activity in the Roman period can be outlined and the site has the potential to produce a great deal more Roman material in the future. The numismatic evidence from the town suggests that Roman forces arrived in the area in the late 60s or early 70s AD, around the beginning of the Flavian period, and David Shotter linked this to an upsurge of military activity in 69 AD and the deposition of the northern client-queen Cartimandua of the Brigantes.[203] A fort was built around this time to the north of the present centre, close to where the River

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[201] EPNS Cheshire, II, pp.243-4.

[202] Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, pp.193-200.

[203] David Shotter, 'IV: Middlewich: The Evidence of Coin Loss', *Journal of the Cheshire Archaeological Society*, 75 (1998-9), pp.51-60 (pp.54-5).

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Croco flows into the River Dane. Whilst not extensively excavated, its earthworks still partially survive and the usual playing-card outline has been revealed through geophysical survey in 1993, at which point it was protected as a scheduled monument.[204] The associated *vicus* of the fort has been identified to the south, centred on what is now King Street, in an area subject to a wave of excavations in the 1960s and 1970s and then a period of more sustained activity since the beginning of the 1990s, and these interventions have uncovered evidence for industrial activity in this area from the first century through to the end of the fourth, including salt production. Explicit evidence for the salt industry began to emerge in 1960, when a large rectangular brine pan was discovered, covered with a scatter of briquetage; this was re-excavated and its position confirmed in 2002.[205] The next phase of excavation is difficult to appraise because the associated archive is now lost, though many of the finds still survive, pertaining to ten different sites on or near King Street excavated between 1964 and 1974.[206] Despite the absence of proper excavation reports, it is clear that substantial Roman occupation deposits were frequently encountered, and with them ample evidence for industrial activity, mostly salt production but also leather working and glass making, and over time this evidence has been used to suggest that Middlewich was the same *Salinae* noted in the seventh-century Ravenna Cosmography, not Condate as had been suggested, which is nowadays usually identified as Northwich.[207] A total of ten brine hearths or ovens have been identified across the different excavations, suggesting a substantial level of production, and whilst dating these has proven difficult, some of them have been associated with a nearby building of Antonine date, and more generally, it is though that

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[204] Dan Garner and Malcolm Reid, 'III: Roman Middlewich: Reassessing its Form, Function and Chronology', *Journal of the Cheshire Archaeological Society*, 83 (2009), pp.37-93 (pp.43, 47-8).
[205] Matthew Williams and Malcolm Reid, *Salt: Life and Industry. Excavations at King Street, Middlewich, Cheshire, 2001-2002* British Archaeological Report British Series 456 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2008), pp.4, 14-15.
[206] Garner and Reid, 'III: Roman Middlewich', p.43.
[207] Garner and Reid, 'III: Roman Middlewich', p.43; EPNS, III, pp.195-6, 238; VCH Cheshire, I, p.202.

the settlement remained inhabited until at least the 360s, although salt production seems to have declined from the late second century onwards.[208] A large lead salt-pan, cut up into pieces for disposal in a very similar manner to the Shavington lead pans discussed previously was also discovered during one excavation, bearing the inscription LVTAMI or possibly CLVTAMI, marking it as the property of a certain Lutamus or Clutamus.[209] On the basis of the association of other similar pans with the church, this may have similarly late date in the fourth century, and may even post-date Roman rule in the area entirely, though this cannot be confirmed. Evidence for Roman activity in Middlewich seems to end around the middle of the fourth century, with the latest finds consisting of a coin dated to the Constantinian period (306-41).[210] What followed, as with Nantwich, is highly unclear and some of the Roman remains at Middlewich were sealed with a 0.5m thick layer soil layer interpreted as a sign of agricultural activity and a loss of the settlement's industrial and urban character in the following centuries.[211] This need not preclude the persistence of any ecclesiastical activity which may have occurred in Middlewich, but will not have encouraged it either. Disappointingly, evidence for religious activity of any kind, be it Christian or pagan, is almost entirely absent and consists of a few objects deposited near some of the brine hearths which might represent offerings to spirits or deities associated with the springs.[212] For Christian activity, we have nothing in the archaeological record.

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[208] Garner and Reid, 'III: Roman Middlewich', p.58.
[209] R.S.O. Tomlin and M.W.C Hassall, 'III: Inscriptions', in *Roman Britain in 2004*, ed. by Barry C. Burnham, F. Hunter, A.P. Fitzpatrick, S. Worrel, M.W.C. Hassall, *Britannia*, 36 (2005), pp.473-97 (p.486).
[210] Garner and Reid, 'III: Roman Middlewich', p.63; David Shotter, 'Coins' in, *Salt, Life and Industry*, ed. by Williams and Reid pp.37-41 (p.38).
[211] Garner and Reid, 'III: Roman Middlewich', p.76.
[212] Garner and Reid, 'III: Roman Middlewich', p.74-5.

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On balance, it seems that the earliest evidence we have for a church at Middlewich is the Domesday priest at Newton, and therefore we cannot confidently date it earlier than the middle of the eleventh century. It therefore has no evidence to match the sculptural assemblage at Sandbach which likely predates the church at Middlewich and might do so substantially. This is striking given that elsewhere in Britain, former Roman sites were often considered especially appropriate for the founding of churches, and seems to be something of a pattern given that none of the Roman settlements in our Cheshire case studies have produced compelling evidence of churches in the seventh or eighth centuries; for whatever reason, and in contrast to other regions, Chester, Nantwich, Middlewich and Northwich held little appeal for early medieval ecclesiastics. In this case, the possibility that Middlewich parish was carved out of a much larger district pertaining to Sandbach, which may once have covered almost the whole hundred, is an attractive one and would explain the dearth of early medieval evidence at what was clearly a substantial Roman settlement.

5.9 Davenham

The final parish to discuss in Midlestuic hundred is that pertaining to St Wilfred's church at Davenham. Located to the northwest of Middlewich, its parish interlocks with the latter's, though other signs of an early connection between the two are mostly absent. Domesday is unequivocal and records both a priest and church at the site, firmly dating its foundation prior to 1086.[213] Its dedication to St Wilfrid is intriguing, and assuming that it refers the Wilfred of the *Vita Wilfredi*, one could speculate that it was the result his

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[213] DB Cheshire, 5.10, f.265r.

activities in Mercia, during one of his periodic phases of marginalisation or exile from Northumbria. It might therefore have an early origin, in the decades shortly after his death. There is however no other evidence to corroborate such an early date; stone sculptural evidence is absent, there is no reason to suspect the presence of any early subordinate chapels or daughter churches at an early date, and in the 1291 *Taxatio* the benefice was valued at an unremarkable £20.[214] The Wilfred link does however gain a little credibility when one considers the local prominence of Sandbach and its impressive stone crosses; the other major cluster of pre-Viking standing crosses in north west England comes from the Lune Valley, which was under Northumbrian control in the early ninth century when the Sandbach sculpture was produced.[215] If the Sandbach sculptors were looking for inspiration for their work, this would have been one obvious place and may reflect a wider exposure to Northumbrian ecclesiastical culture at this time; Wilfrid's cult may have been exported at a similar time. That being said, other centres of production were available and the complexity of some of the Biblical imagery is best paralleled closer to home, in the Peak District.[216] The place-name evidence is not especially enlightening either; Davenham is a straightforwardly topographical place-name, meaning 'the farm on the River Dane', and while there is a traditional view that *-ham* toponyms may be more common amongst older and more important settlements, this is slim and circumstantial evidence on to which to date the first church there.[217] With little else to go off, it is difficult to date the church at Davenham or to ascribe its parish to an earlier mother-church, but given the way it interlocks with Middlewich, which as we have seen is likely

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[214] Taxatio, CL.CH.MW.06.
[215] CASSS, IX, p.20.
[216] Hawkes, *The Sandbach Crosses*, pp.138-40.
[217] EPNS Cheshire, III, p.204.

to have been part of the original parish of Sandbach from a very early date; this may well carry Davenham with it.

5.10 Northwich (Witton)

A final site to consider is Northwich, long identified with some confidence as the *Condate* of the Antonine Itinerary.[218] This site shares several characteristics with Nantwich and Middlewich; all three originate as Roman settlements in some form, all grew around natural brine springs which led to salt becoming the primary economic activity, and all are recorded as 'salt-wiches' in Domesday, governed by a similar set of customs and tolls.[219] *Condate*, a common place-name in Gaul, seems to be a Celtic-Latin hybrid describing a settlement a river confluence, and aptly describes Northwich's location close to the junction of the rivers Dane and Weaver.[220] In terms of the early medieval administrative geography of the area, it lay in the furthest north west corner of Mildestuic hundred, close to the point where the Domesday hundreds of Ruloe and Tunendune meet. Indeed this isolation from the major centres of the hundred is reflected in its ecclesiastical arrangements; when the church St Helen at Witton is first recorded, it is as a chapel of the church of Great Budworth, further north in Tunendune hundred, and so it is of slightly doubtful relevance to a study of Mildestuic hundred.[221] Nevertheless, it is included because most of the area of the chapelry was within that hundred. As a general point, the fact that the established later medieval parochial boundaries do not respect the hundredal boundaries, which were themselves reorganised during the twelfth or thirteenth centuries,

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[218] EPNS Cheshire, II, p.193.
[219] DB Cheshire, S3, f.268r.
[220] EPNS Cheshire, II, pp.195-6.
[221] EPNS Cheshire, II, pp.95, 185.

may reflect that some more marginal or peripheral communities may have had a somewhat ambiguous relationship with their local churches, and that we should not necessarily be looking for solutions on the grounds that they look neat when viewed through the lens of modern cartography.

The archaeological evidence for Roman activity in Northwich is still somewhat limited, because virtually all the digs which have been conducted were rescue excavations rather than the product of prolonged research projects.[222] Nevertheless, when collated, they give a similar picture to Middlewich, albeit slightly less well-attested, of a mid to late-first century AD fortress which soon acquired a *vicus* which functioned as an industrial centre. The town's auxiliary fort is thought to be roughly contemporaneous with Middlewich's, being founded in the 70s or 80s AD, with military use ending around the middle of the second century.[223] Unlike at Middlewich however, the position and nature of the accompanying *vicus* is not particularly well-known. The various digs have together produced a good amount of Roman era pottery, of both Samian and more local types, along with a small number of glass beads and similar objects, whilst the metal finds included a cavalryman's helmet, reinforcing the military nature of the site.[224] The fortress was located south west and across the river from the present town centre, while the later medieval church was on the opposite side of the town; this may reflect the late Roman practice of locating churches close to extramural cemeteries, but as no major Roman burial grounds have been located in Northwich, the significance of this choice remains unclear.

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[222] Reader, R.W., and Michael Nevell, 'Rediscovering Roman Northwich: Phase 1: Assessment of the Archaeological Archive Final Report' (Salford: Centre for Applied Archaeology, 2016), p.87.
[223] Reader and Nevell, 'Rediscovering Roman Northwich', p.89.
[224] Reader Nevell, 'Rediscovering Roman Northwich', p.85.

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The significance of this relative abundance of Roman finds is that just like at Middlewich and Nantwich, there is contrasting lack of early medieval material. This absence of evidence is not unusual, and may simply reflect differential rates of survival for different kinds of material culture, but the consistent way in which all three Cheshire salt-wiches failed to develop or sustain any status as important ecclesiastical sites is striking, and it some ways contradicts what we know about other parts of England, especially in the east, where Roman sites were enthusiastically taken up by the Church from a very date in the seventh century. All three emerge in Domesday Book as valuable and important industrial sites where salt-making was later joined by other trades such as leather tanning, but they frequently had their ecclesiastical foci elsewhere; in Nantwich this persisted until the seventeenth century before which it lay within the parish of Acton, Northwich remained subordinate to Great Budworth and Middlewich was probably a daughter of Sandbach at some point. This therefore points to a relative lack of continuity across the end of the Roman period, and the Nantwich example in particular hints at a reversion to a more dispersed distribution of economic sites where the draw of a central urban or industrial centre was diminished when churches were founded in the early medieval period. Consequently, churches in these Roman settlements cannot be assumed to be especially early; they are certainly not fourth or fifth century and may in fact be quite late, dating to the tenth to twelfth centuries as chapels.

5.11 Regional discussion

These two hundreds of Cheshire were dominated in the early Middle Ages and the Viking Age by a small number of ecclesiastical sites. Chief among these was Sandbach, which

exceeds all the other churches in this study in its wealth, artistic output and, in all likelihood, the size of its original mother-parish. The stone sculpture from the site incorporates a diverse range of cultural influences from across western Europe, Britain and Ireland, and as we have seen, besides Sandbach only two other sites in Cheshire have produced clearly early medieval stone sculpture which predates the Scandinavian settlement. These are Overchurch and Over; only the former has strong evidence for pre-Viking ecclesiastical activity based on the typical context for memorial inscriptions of this time and its potential link to the *lann* at Landican must also be recalled here.[225] However, it is also apparent that many of those influences also appear in neighbouring parts of Cheshire and the Peak District, and it is highly likely that Sandbach inspired many local sculptors and their work, which embeds it firmly in a northern Mercian milieu and suggests links primarily to other churches to the south and east. However, informative though these stylistic preferences are, the broader pattern of church organisation, such as the early primacy of just a handful of churches whose parishes broke down very gradually, is still apparent. To compare it to some of our other case studies, Tegeingl introduces further ambiguity because of its frontier position and the manner in which Mercian and then English power waxed and waned there over the centuries. Once again however, the degree of cultural interaction between Tegeingl and the rest of Cheshire suggests that there were fundamental compatibilities in the way their churches were structured. If there were differences, these were most apparent in the size and wealth of churches; the density of churches and priests recorded in Domesday is notably higher in Tegeingl, and it this tendency towards a greater number of smaller, more modest churches which may explain the particular lack of physical or written evidence for churches in this area, on top of consistently low rates of survival of such sources from Wales. By contrast,

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[225] See above, pp.206-9.

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Warmundestrou and Mildestuic, which between them had only three or perhaps four very early churches (Sandbach, Wybunbury, Acton and possibly Barthomley), have a particularly clear pattern of early mother-churches, but the processes which acted upon them were similar to Tegeingl and Wirral, only without the decentralising effects of the Mercian incursions in Tegeingl or the Scandinavian migration in Wirral.

Returning to the case study under consideration here, it is clear that this part of southeastern Cheshire broadly follows the model of a small number of ancient mother-parishes whose sphere of jurisdiction was gradually divided and eroded by the establishment of newer churches over the early medieval and Viking Age period. In contrast to the Wirral case study, the political upheavals of the ninth and early-tenth centuries, such as the arrival of the Great Army and the Scandinavian settlement, seem not to have affected southeastern Cheshire to any great extent and evidence of direct Scandinavian settlement is, so far, limited. On the basis of the large chapelries which still lay under their purview in the thirteenth century, the churches of Acton and Wybunbury are strong candidates and between them once covered almost the entirety of hundred of Warmundestrou. The main exception to this is the part of that hundred under the jurisdiction of Barthomley, which as we have seen straddled the hundredal boundary between Warmundestrou and Mildestuic, perhaps suggesting that an older administrative or tenurial unit was divided when the hundred system was refined at some point in the tenth century. Barthomley was most likely a parochial church by 1086 when a priest resided there according to Domesday, but whether its history can be pushed back further depends on its dedication to St Bertoline and whether that figure was one and the same with either St Bertram of Stafford or St Bertelin of Ilam. This would place it at least as far back as the re-establishment of Mercian control in the early tenth century when several

Mercian *burhs* saw a resurgence of certain saints' cults, usually where these had a strong connection to Mercian royalty; Bertram, or more properly, Beorhthelm, would certainly fit the bill. However, it should be recalled that these cults were rarely built up from nothing and building on a pre-existing tradition would have been more effective and more easily embraced by the local population. On balance an early origin for Barthomley is therefore credible, but conclusive evidence remains elusive. These three churches seem to have enjoyed a great deal of success in protecting their parochial rights into the central Middle Ages; Acton in particular retained its status as the parochial church over the chapel of Nantwich into the seventeenth century even as the town grew into an important market town and production site for salt and, later, leather. Wybunbury can also be associated with the bishops of Lichfield at Domesday and its dedication to St Chad, whilst not definitive, inspires confidence that this link dates back into the seventh or eighth centuries.

The situation in Mildestuic is at once clearer, and more complicated. Sandbach's ancient status seems assured on the basis of its remarkable collection of stone sculpture from the early ninth century. In particular, the resources invested in these artworks and the complexity of the intellectual and religious imagery they employ is of an extremely high standard and speaks to an exceptional level of both ecclesiastical wealth and religious learning. It is primarily for this reason that it is almost universally accepted as a major minster church of early date and this study has revealed no reason to contradict this consensus. There are however a few of the usual package of characteristics associated with such minsters which are missing in this case. In particular the dedication of the church to St Mary is difficult to interpret because of its sheer ubiquity; such universal dedications have at times been taken as evidence of a Norman-era process of erasing the

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cults of earlier local saints whose significance to the new incoming elite was not apparent, but this is a sweeping generalisation and there is usually no reliable way of distinguishing a pre-Norman dedication to Mary from a later one. The other point is the size of Sandbach's parish, which in the central Middle Ages was relatively modest and composed of six townships. The bulk of the hundred lay in the parish of Astbury. This was evidently a wealthy church based on the 1291 *Taxatio*, as one would expect from the extent of its parish, and a priest was present in the parish at Newbold according to Domesday. Nevertheless, no church in the rest of the hundred can compete with visual splendour, wealth or level of Biblical learning on display at Sandbach in the form of its sculptural collection, and certainly not at a date as early as the ninth century. In this situation, where the neighbouring parishes are relatively lacking in early evidence, there is a case to ascribe the parishes of Astbury, Middlewich and Davenham to Sandbach, making it a mother church to almost the entire hundred and strongly implying a link between the extent of parishes and the extent of hundreds. That the boundaries do not align exactly is a sign that this relationship was not necessarily maintained in later centuries.

A further point regarding the siting of Cheshire's earliest churches is the relative lack of favour shown to the Roman settlements at Nantwich, Middlewich and Northwich. None of these grew into major early medieval ecclesiastical sites, and this supports the idea that the founders of early medieval sites were guided by their own set of economic, cultural and political factors, one which favoured alternate settlements at places like Acton, Wybunbury and Sandbach. The potential for a link between the Church and the salt-making industry is a tantalising one, best demonstrated by the salt pans from Shavington and Nantwich, and may have formed part of the Church's revenues in this region, but clearly such settlements were not thought suitable for a church and may even have been

actively avoided. The other question here is date; by the time of Domesday there is little or no evidence that ecclesiastics held any of the revenues of the salt-wiches, and so this might be a late or sub-Roman practice which had died out by the time that Mercian power was firmly established in Cheshire. A final point is that the major churches of these two hundreds do not seem to have been substantially effected by the cultural changes of the Viking Age; sitting right on the periphery of the Irish Sea region, there is little evidence either in the sculpture or the place-names to suggest Scandinavian settlement, and any disruption appears to have been temporary given that the three mother-churches for which there is the most evidence (Sandbach, Acton and Wybunbury) seem to have shed their daughter-parishes only gradually. Sandbach may be an exception, in that Astbury and its substantial parish may have become independent by the tenth century when stone sculpture was being erected there, but it should be remembered that if Sandbach's parish encompassed almost the entire hundred, then it will have had more to lose.

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6 Conclusion

It should now be clear that our three case studies all present distinctive and varied histories of their own. But equally, that certain similarities bind them all together and allow us to make some broader arguments about the nature of Church organisation and foundation around the period 800 to 1100. Likewise, even within each case study, the important sites from each case study all have their own biography which must be considered and this individual variation is just as important as more consistent patterns within each region, and between regions. Nevertheless, a few consistent themes present themselves. The first is that even the grandest and most impressive churches from these three study areas tend not to be as well attested as those from parts of Britain to the east and south, and that the evidence for them tends to be somewhat later.

To take an example, Sandbach was clearly a church of substantial wealth and intellectual vitality in the early ninth century to judge by the fineness of the stone sculpture found there, but it cannot compete in size, wealth or renown with the greatest religious houses to be found elsewhere in Britain, for example those at Lindisfarne and Wearmouth-Jarrow, which appear to predate it and have produced even larger quantities of sculpture and a rich legacy in terms of the written texts they produced. Impressive as it is, no church in the three study areas considered here can rival the huge cultural legacy of the largest and earliest minsters. Two principal reasons suggest themselves here; one is that the wealth and prosperity of our examples lay was obscured because of the lack of written sources and chronicles to balance those from authors elsewhere in Britain, for example

Bede and Stephen of Ripon, both based in Northumbria, or the annalist responsible for the *Annales Cambriae*, placed during this period as St Davids. Whether this is due to a lack or production, or a lack of preservation, remains an open question and making too strong an inference from this silence is not to be encouraged. The second reason is that it appears from narratives like Bede's and from other prose history and chronicle sources that the adoption of Christianity in Kent, Northumbria and Wessex was in a many ways a top-down affair, in which the crucial decisions lay with the king and it was his patronage which secured the economic basis of the Church in his kingdom and with it the ability to found and maintain a strong network of churches. The link between royal patronage and earlier churches is exemplified by Northumbria, and the granting of *villa regia* to the Church was a key step in the foundation of the earliest, most important and wealthiest churches in the kingdom.

Based on these observations, one of the important factors in all three case studies which seems to have conditioned the development of their churches is their relative distance from royal power, on the peripheries of their respective kingdoms. Tegeingl, lying probably in the northernmost reaches of Powys in the ninth century, became even further removed from the king's person after the annexation of the kingdom by Gwynedd's Rhodri Mawr around 855, and it had a long history even before this of Mercian invasion and incursion which seems unlikely to have helped a distant ruler in controlling the territory. The Old English component to the place-names of the region seem to suggest a longer-term trend of Mercian settlement and this cultural mixing reinforced the district's character as border region, where polities vied for control but neither held the territory with a firm grip. In such an insecure situation, it is little wonder that kings and the upper nobility were reluctant to invest in founding a church, as their equivalents in large parts of western Europe did throughout the early Middle Ages, because there was no guarantee they would enjoy the longer-term benefits in terms that came with owning or patronising a major ecclesiastical centre. The fate of *Bancornaberg* in the early seventh century, whilst predating the focus of this study and lying outside Tegeingl proper, is a striking example of the possibility that major monastic sites might be destroyed in war.

In these circumstances, many great churches would not have survived the early Middle Ages, or simply were not founded in such forms, because the only viable basis for a church was one supported primarily by local interests, in all likelihood more modest local nobles or free men whose resources could not rival those available to kings. This factor could in itself explain the absence of written sources originating in this region; in an age where monastic authors provide our key historical accounts, an area with a lack of monastic or paramonastic churches was much less likely to have its local interests reflected in a work of history. Likewise, a region with few or no major monasteries is unlikely to have developed the kind of ecclesiastical structures seen in Ireland, where the substantial resources and subordinate churches under the control of the largest monasteries made them a rival to the power of any bishop and gave Irish churches a different economic basis at the top of the scale, albeit whilst still leaving room for bishops and the secular clergy to conduct their usual roles. A history of warfare, a direct consequence of a precarious position on the frontiers of a kingdom, also seems likely to have created a cycle, in which the limited economic surplus available for patronising churches remained modest because of a relative lack of economic development. When considering the Domesday returns for Tegeingl in particular, but also Warmunstrou and Mildestuic and to a lesser extent, Wirral, they are dominated by a succession of small manors, often assessed at just one or two hides and rendering only a small income to their holders. When one reads this text, the impression is of a relatively sparsely inhabited landscape, not abandoned, backwards or entirely forested by any means, but certainly not intensively exploited. Wirral bucks the trend slightly as the most economically productive hundred of Cheshire in 1086, but this is a modest claim compared to other parts of England. Wirral of course could experience periods of insecurity, and the Viking incursion in the tenth century must have created at least some temporary dislocation.

We have in some respects a rough continuum across the case studies under consideration; Sandbach in the far east of the study area has most of the classic characteristics of a minster church, and its sculpture clearly displays its wealth and influence in the local area. Contrasted to this, the surviving records for Tegeingl make its churches appear oddly flat in the early medieval period; some can be assumed to have been earlier and more important on the basis of their larger parishes or the hagiographical material associated with them and their patron saints, but it is difficult to point out those sites which stand out

for their wealth or power in a real tangible way. Wirral occupies somewhat of an intermediate position, in that evidence for pre-Viking activity is sparse, but there is more to work from, and again the size of some of the sculptural collections and the religiosity of their decoration, particularly at Neston, suggests a greater level of resources available to local ecclesiastical patrons. In many ways, this reflects a fundamentally similar mode of organisation, that of the minster church, or of more modest local churches with only a single priest or which saw their priest only occasionally, but adapted in each case to the prevailing economic and demographic circumstances. To suggest that Tegeingl was economically backward is not necessarily helpful, but in a situation where it was less densely populated and exploited than neighbouring areas, a more modest level of church-building activity would seem perfectly reasonable. Indeed, it has been noted that this flexibility to adapting to the societies which they encountered was a key part of the success of the early medieval Church in enmeshing itself into the lives of the laity and securing its privileged economic and political position. Similarly, the arrival of Scandinavian settlers in the tenth century, most apparent in Wirral but known also in Tegeingl, undoubtedly introduced certain cultural features from Ireland, as it apparent in the increased popularity of standing crosses in regions where they were previously uncommon, the spread of decorative motifs with their origins in Scandinavia and the spread of the Norse language which is apparent in both toponyms and personal names at this time.

This does not however seem to have led to a substantial reorganisation of churches in either England or Wales; Welsh and English clerics may have had greater opportunities to encounter the practices of their Irish counterparts, but there is no evidence to suggest a move towards Irish models of monastic federations, the abundance of several grades of bishops, the co-holding of bishoprics and abbacies by the same figure or the presence of a separate lay guardian or *airchinnech* to administer the revenues of a church. In light of current thinking on the development of the Irish Church in the early medieval period, this seems consistent with the idea that the very earliest Patrician phases of Church organisation in fifth-century Ireland were based on a fundamentally familiar episcopal hierarchy as was known in Britain where the missionary effort to the Irish originated. Once that early phase was completed, it was through accommodation with Irish political and kinship practices that the Irish Church acquired its strongly monastic character, which

was already apparent in the sixth and seventh centuries, though the powers of bishops to administer churches and clerics within their jurisdiction remained considerable. In this way the Irish Church successfully fulfilled early medieval expectations for governance and hierarchy, but it a way which built on and was thoroughly integrated with the practices of Irish kingship and the ties of kinship. That is obviously not to say that the ecclesiastical history of Ireland is entirely divorced from that of Britain, as that would ignore the explicit role given to Irish churchmen in the conversion of Northumbria and their missionary efforts elsewhere in Europe, or the flourishing intellectual contacts that characterised this relationship in the seventh century. Deeper similarities can be found, for example in the practice of venerating monastic or ecclesiastical founders which occurs strongly in both Ireland and Wales, and to an extent in England, and the conception that different communities joined in dedication to particular saint did share in a common *familia* under that saint's patronage and protection. On this latter point however, it was in Ireland where this idea was most strongly elaborated into a system of ecclesiastical lordship under the leadership of powerful churches such as Armagh or Kildare. From a common wellspring, the two systems developed in separate directions in unique political and material circumstances, and whilst later exchanges of saints' cults or artistic practices are important and worthy subjects of study in their own right, the essential character of the early medieval Church in each of these places had already come into being long before the Viking Age.

Overall, the general outline of the three studies provided lead us to a broader conclusion about the validity of the models of Church organisation which historians have developed to explain the development of local churches in Britain across the early Middle Ages and the Viking Age. This unifying concept, the 'minster thesis', holds that by examining the characteristics of churches in the later Middle Ages and even later, and the relationship between them, historians can identify the mother-churches of large regions and the sequence in which a small number of mother-parishes was divided due to the pressures of population growth, the whims of a competitive aristocracy and the growing importance of serving the spiritual needs of the laity. Of the three case studies, this is most successful in Warmundestrou and Mildestuic, where even with relatively little evidence, the early importance of Sandbach, Acton and Wybunbury seems clear. Dating their foundation precisely however stretches too little information too far; Sandbach has a firm *terminus*

post quem in the early ninth century because of its sculptural collection, but neither Acton or Wybunbury provide such evidence. In this regard, it seems likely that only direct archaeological intervention would allow us to confidently date the earliest phases of church activity at many sites, with all the difficulty that brings in disturbing standing historic churches and cemeteries which themselves may have many centuries of history. Also interesting is where churches were not found; the Cheshire salt-wiches of Nantwich, Middlewich and Northwich have all produced evidence for Roman-era settlement and salt production, and they were clearly productive again in Domesday. However, neither Nantwich or Northwich had pre-Conquest churches of their own, which in Domesday were instead located a short distance away at Acton and Witton respectively. Middlewich has little firm evidence for a pre-Norman church either, and whilst it is not possible to be specific, it may once have lay within the parish of either Davenham or Sandbach (and indeed the former may also be a daughter of the latter). This suggests something about the nature of settlement in this places, and that instead of a single, multipurpose settlement like a more modern town or city, early medieval centres may have been slightly more spread out, using a cluster of sites for specific purposes. Clearly it was felt more important to serve manorial centres, where presumably more people actually lived, than the small populations of these specialised industrial settlements. This should all be caveated with the knowledge that early medieval archaeological evidence from the wiches is so sparse as to be almost non-existent, but the ecclesiastical arrangements in these places seem fair enough.

Clearly then, any identified patterns can have their exceptions and the early medieval organisation of churches in Tegeingl is no exception, but it should be highlighted that the minster thesis has proven a useful and usable framework for structuring such evidence as survives. In Wirral, Warmundestrou and Mildestuic it is possible to identify a small number of early mother churches, and the pattern is especially strong in the latter two where three churches likely predominated at an early point. Wirral is not quite so clear-cut; higher levels of economic development and the enthusiasm with which the Scandinavian migrants adopted and adapted the habit of raising monuments in stone has left us with a larger number of sites, including some like Overchurch and Landican where pre-ninth-century activity should be assumed and other sites like Neston and West Kirby where this may also have been the case. Tegeingl sits least comfortably in this frame,

which might be expected given that the lens of the minster model was developed explicitly with reference to England, and the greater density of churches on more modest Domesday vills does suggest a slightly different system, but crucially the basic principles of mother-parish fragmentation can be identified and used to project back into the past, so long as it is acknowledged that the original starting point far back in the earliest Christian centuries may be different.

 Looking forward, it remains true that these three regions remain poorly attested overall, but the body of archaeological evidence has continued to grow in recent years and the way forward likely lies in processing and understanding the body of grey literature which is accreting through developer-funded studies, and Tegeingl probably stands to gain the most from this process. Likewise, the approach followed here has embraced a wide range of different specialisms and sub-disciplines, without being expert in all of them and further work in specific areas is likely to prove fruitful; in particular the evidence used in this thesis often has a spatial quality, and a more tightly focused, landscape archaeological approach may be one way to refine the picture of these regions, especially over the *longue dureé*. It is through this process, of taking specialist breakthroughs and then re-synthesising these with existing and knowledge acquired through other methods which seems to me to be the most promising way forward to deepening our understanding of the religious life of these little-recorded but rewarding regions.

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