

CHESHIRE IN THE DARK AGES
A MAP STUDY OF CELTIC AND ANGLIAN
SETTLEMENT

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IN the search for settlement origins in the Border counties, the strength of the Celtic sub-structure becomes increasingly evident under the superficially convincing overlay of Anglo-Saxon place-names, as patterns of nucleation and dispersal, arable field systems and agrarian practice, and social and cultural arrangements emerge which show affinities with those across the Welsh Border.

Despite the long duration of the Dark Ages, archaeological and historical evidence is still all too scanty, and an approach to many problems associated with this period must be made from other angles. In the Borderland, the opportunities for studying the reaction of Welsh and English and for investigating the earlier interrelationships of Celt and Angle are unique, for here—from Cheshire down to Herefordshire and the lower Wye valley—Celtic rule was maintained for almost two hundred years longer than in south-eastern England, and when the tide of Anglo-Saxon colonisation finally reached the area in the early seventh century, there is every reason to suppose that the Anglian immigration movement was relatively sparse. The geographical displacement of the earlier Celtic population may be assumed to have been correspondingly slight.

The archaeology and written history of the period are fragmentary. By contrast place-name evidence, though it too offers tantalising gaps, has the merit of ubiquity. Yet the use to which it has been put in this part of the country has been limited principally to tracing the settlement areas of Angles and Scandinavians. The present paper is built round two maps which have been made on the basis of place-name evidence.

I WOODLAND RECESSION AND SETTLEMENT PHASES

The first map (Fig. 1) was constructed on the assumption that the advancing front of settlement is associated with a

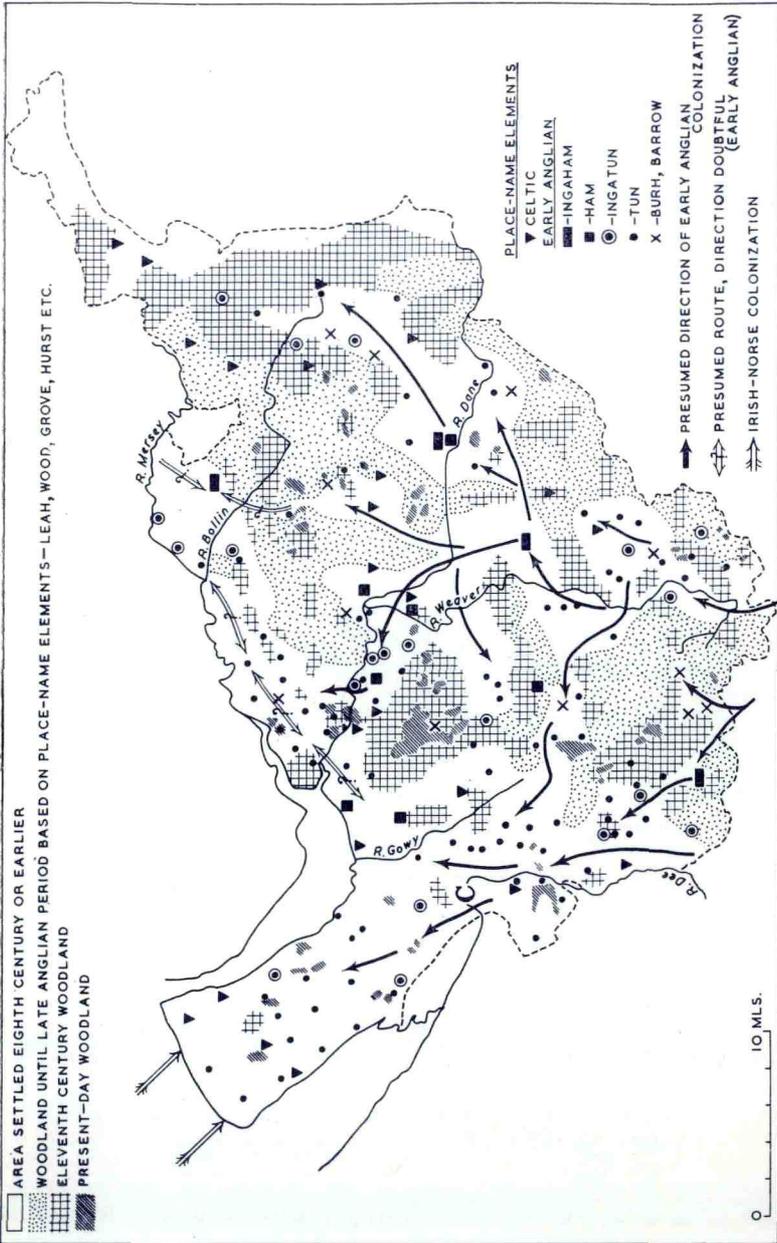


Figure 1.
 WOODLAND AND SETTLEMENT IN CHESHIRE.

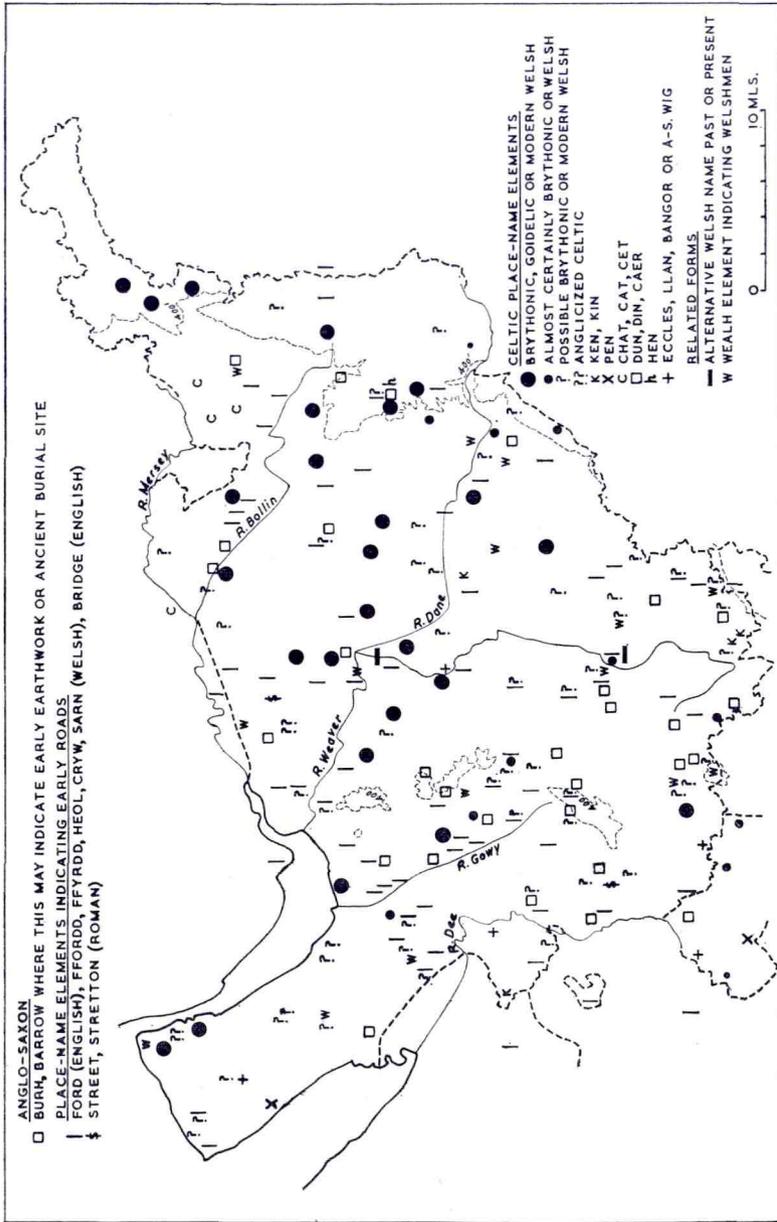


Figure 2.
 CELTIC AND OTHER PLACE-NAME ELEMENTS IN CHESHIRE.
 For details of place-names see Appendix, page 20

corresponding destruction of woodlands which, though not the universal vegetation of the Border lowlands, were nevertheless very widely distributed. Woodland recession plotted on a combination of physico-historical evidence and place-names is mapped to show a corresponding series of settlement phases. The method was first tried for Shropshire with the aim of tracing lines of Mercian ingress. It proved revealing and even exciting, and it has now been applied to Cheshire and Herefordshire also. Unfortunately this cannot be done for the Welsh side of the border as the place-names are almost entirely Welsh, and Domesday Survey covers only a relatively limited belt in parts of the east of these Welsh counties. The plot was made over a quarter-inch base. It began with a tracing of present-day woodlands which in the greater number of cases in the Borderland are the remnant cores of ancient woodlands of much greater extent. The Domesday woodland evidence was superimposed by using the direct measurements and related data given in Domesday Book together with a series of physical base maps showing relief, solid and drift geology and, where available, soils, to give some shape to the Norman woodland areas.⁽¹⁾ If the place-name evidence was worth anything it followed that the previous stage of late Old English clearing and settlement should be indicated by place-name elements of the late phase such as *leah*, *wood*, *hurst*, and that these late Anglian settlement areas should adjoin or surround those of 1086. These were accordingly plotted and they did in fact occur in a belt around or adjacent to the Domesday woodlands. The area of the late Anglian settlement was then stippled, leaving the remaining (unshaded) portions of the map to represent those parts which were already settled in the earlier Dark Ages. These last correspond with the distribution of *-ingaham*, *-ham*, *-ingatun*, *-tun*, and a number of *-burh* elements. This was logically to be expected, but what was less clearly foreseeable was the geographical detail and significance of the pattern which emerged.

The Domesday evidence showed clearly that while central and eastern Cheshire was heavily wooded in 1086, western Cheshire was practically bare. Domesday offers no answer to the question of when Wirral, the Gowy and lower Dee valleys and, in central and eastern Cheshire, the narrower strip of the Weaver valley were cleared, while for Macclesfield Forest the information for that ravaged and depopulated countryside is so generalised as to give little more than an overall picture. But

⁽¹⁾ Ed. Dorothy Sylvester and Geoffrey Nulty, *The Historical Atlas of Cheshire* (1958), p. 19.

the place-name evidence plotted as in Figure 1 takes the story back over a further four and a half centuries to the first Anglian colonisation of the Borderland. According to this, a considerable stretch of country not only immediately along the Weaver, but in its tributary valleys was an Anglian settlement area by the eighth century, and in the east of the county a considerable clearing had taken place by the same date in the middle Dane below Congleton, and along a south-west to north-east axis from Sandbach to beyond Prestbury, that is, in the foothill belt under the shadow of the Pennines.

In each of these two areas there is an *-ingham* name—Warmingham in the first, Kermincham in the second—and the initial entry for both settlement areas may well have been from north Shropshire up the Roden valley from Atcham (an original *-ingham* name), or less probably from the south-east *via* the Midland gap from Staffordshire. The Dane valley settlements might have been established by immigrants coming in *via* the Peak District, but the character of both the Anglo-Saxons and of the terrain makes this on the whole the less likely entry.

This map also throws light on the problem of the third of the four Cheshire *-ingahams*, Altrincham, and on the question of whether the mid-Mersey valley was settled first by Northumbrians or Mercians. Geographical probability as revealed by Figure 1, undoubtedly favours the former, for the whole middle Mersey was practically cleared, whereas between it and the Peovers lay a deep belt of wooded country. Moreover, on the route which would lead from Warmingham to Altrincham, there occur only two *-tun* suffixes and one *-burh*. If the problem is seen in the light of the Lancashire evidence, both historical and etymological, the assumption that Altrincham was a Northumbrian settlement originating from parent groups in what is now south Lancashire becomes stronger.⁽²⁾

The fourth Cheshire *-ingham*, Tushingham, appears to have budded off a Mercian group in the neighbourhood of Whitchurch, and the open route *via* Tushingham in the early seventh century linked up with another settlement belt following the lower Dee, and a third line crossing the Beeston Gap. The numerous *-tuns* resulted in a relatively strong but later Anglian colonising movement into the Dee plains above Chester, and in this neighbourhood where Northumbrians were pressing south from the Mersey and Mercians advancing north, Northumbrians engaged Mercians in about A.D. 613. The

⁽²⁾ J. J. Bagley, *A History of Lancashire* (1956), pp. 8-9.

Northumbrians followed the Dee up to Bangor where they ravaged and burnt the Celtic monastery having reputedly slain most of the monastic community. There must clearly have been an appreciable Celtic population here, and the plains of the lower Dee were evidently open and formed a well established route before the battle of Chester was fought. Was the population in the early seventh century purely Celtic or mixed Anglian and Celtic? If the latter, how early was the Anglian settlement of this part of the Borderland, and was it Northumbrian or Mercian?

The most striking feature of Figure 1, however, is that the lower Dee was only a comparatively small part of a wide stretch of open country in the seventh century: of a settlement province which also embraced Wirral and all west Cheshire to the western edge of the central ridge. The whole of this territory is devoid of *-leah* names or of others indicating late Anglian clearings, and in 1086 only one Wirral manor was recorded as having woodland. By contrast, places are numerous with the suffix *-tun*. But there is no *-ingaham* and there are only two *-hams*, both on the north-eastern margin of the area. To the south of them on the fringe of ridge and woodland is Tarvin, a name widely believed to be derived from the Welsh *terfyn*, a boundary. Also within these deforested districts are several well established Celtic place-names or names indicating Welsh colonists—Landican, Liscard, Noctorum, Ince, Eccleston, and Wallasey. On the open coast of north Wirral lies the important prehistoric and Dark Ages settlement of Meols. To the east, just within the woodland boundary as it was in the seventh and eighth centuries, lies the central Cheshire Ridge with its seven Iron Age camps, including the major hill forts of Eddisbury and Helsby among the northern six and solitary Maiden Castle in the south, all linked by a well-authenticated ridge road.

There is sufficient evidence of one kind and another to support the suggestion that west Cheshire was probably extensively settled by Celtic people before the battle of Chester and that, because of their strength in this area, the Northumbrian victory proved only evanescent. This in turn may also account for the absence of *-inga* or *-ingaham* settlements in the western part of the county. Unlike Stenton and Ekwall, Jackson believes that the *-inga* and *-ingaham* settlements represent not a positive but a relative method of dating Anglo-Saxon settlements and that they indicate the entrance phase in any district at whatever date it occurred.⁽³⁾ The distribution of early Anglo-Saxon

⁽³⁾ K. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953), pp. 215-7.

place-names in Cheshire suggests that central and east Cheshire were occupied appreciably in advance of the west where *-tun* names are widespread but where the only early Anglo-Saxon elements occur in two *-ham* names on its north-eastern margin. The battle of Chester almost certainly preceded any Anglian settlement of the western plains.

What exactly then did the Angles find in this *Ultima Thule* of west Cheshire? Can the work of clearing the land which was open by the early eighth century at latest be attributed mainly to the Anglians or to the Cornovii? Chester and Holt, Eccleston and Bangor-on-Dee bear witness not only to the *occupation* of this area in the Roman and sub-Roman period but to its importance and nodality. At Chester it would seem, five Roman roads converged and for some three and a half centuries the great legionary fortress had given enhanced significance to the northern end of what, for the first time in history, was a true border zone. In the sub-Roman period, the choice of Bangor-on-Dee as the site of one of the most renowned of the early Celtic monasteries arose from a different series of regional factors but none the less lent the lower Dee valley distinction. The problem of how far east the Celtic Church extended its influence is difficult to solve on account of the many Celtic dedications which must have been lost, but it is reasonable to suppose that Bangor-on-Dee occupied a nodal rather than a marginal position in this respect, and the area was well removed from the most westerly of the Anglo-Saxon pagan cemeteries. Place-names such as Eccleston and Landican (*Llan ?Tegan*), and Celtic dedications at West Kirby and Chester (both St. Bridget), Heswall (St. Patrick), and Wallasey (St. Hilary) are the fragments of local evidence which lend support to this assumption.

If there had, in fact, been a close Celtic settlement of west Cheshire prior to 613, then it would be reasonable to assume that a phase of lowland occupation succeeded the earlier upland settlement either before or during the Roman occupation. This would give time for many Brythonic place-names to become established, yet relatively few have been acknowledged as such.⁽⁴⁾ In view of the dubiety of a numerically strong Anglian infiltration, and the remarkably large numbers of hamletted and dispersed townships in Cheshire, did the Angles merely establish their dominance as lords, a thin stream of conquerors, overlords among a far more numerous Celtic peasantry? The distinctive short, dark, ruddy Cheshire type is still found in large numbers in the county. Nucleated villages

⁽⁴⁾ Simeon Potter, *TRANSACTIONS*, Vol. 106 (1954).

are relatively few and field systems are irregular. Cheshire dialects include many words of Celtic origin.⁽⁵⁾

II THE CELTIC ELEMENT IN CHESHIRE

It is an accepted fact that Anglo-Saxon place-names widely replaced the earlier Brythonic names in the English lowlands, but only comparatively recently has opinion swung more strongly in favour of a belief that the Anglo-Saxons as they approached the Highland Zone, were a numerically weak band of colonists moving into areas where the British were superior in numbers, where their tongue continued to be spoken for a considerable time, and where many Brythonic or Celtic place-names were anglicised rather than replaced. J. B. Johnston in 1915⁽⁶⁾ listed numerous Celtic place-names in England, and Max Förster in 1921⁽⁶⁾ took the argument much further postulating Celtic roots for a number of place-names which had long been accepted as English, for instance Crossmere in Shropshire in which, he argued, the *cross* element could well be derived from the Welsh *croes*.

So many more place-name etymologists are Teutonists than Celticists that we have for years been dazzled by the Teutonic interpretation. Scholars such as Max Förster and Kenneth Jackson have done a great service in helping to turn this tide of Teutonism. Jackson distinguished three areas in the English Plain, the second and the third each having more surviving Celtic river-names than the area to the east of it.⁽⁷⁾ Area I includes all that part of England lying south-east of a line joining the Vale of Pickering and Southampton Water, and here, where Anglo-Saxon settlement was early, he maintains that Brythonic names are rare. Area II, from western Hampshire to Northumberland, has more British river-names than I, but Area III has the greatest number and includes the three north-western counties, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, western Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, and the lower Dee valley. The rest of Cheshire as well as south Lancashire is included in area II. But as regards place-names, an intimate knowledge of Cheshire and south-east Lancashire from this angle reveals not only fairly numerous Celtic elements but numerous examples of place-names or place-name elements which may be anglicised Celtic.

⁽⁵⁾ John Davies, "The Celtic Elements in the Dialects of the Counties adjoining Lancashire", *Arch. Camb.*, 5th series, Vol. 1 (1884).

⁽⁶⁾ J. B. Johnston, *The Place-Names of England and Wales* (1915) and M. Förster, "Keltisches Wortgut im Englischen" in *Texte und Forschungen zur Englischen Kulturgeschichte festgabe für Felix Liebermann* (Halle, 1921), esp. p. 31.

⁽⁷⁾ *Op. cit.*, pp. 220-23.

With the growing conviction that Celtic names might survive in disguised forms in considerable numbers, a map was made first for Shropshire⁽⁸⁾ showing not only accepted Celtic elements, but others which might equally well be Celtic as Anglo-Saxon—names, for example, including the elements *pen*, *kin*, *hen*, and *tre*. The conviction that this was a useful plot was further strengthened by Allen Mawer's opinion expressed in his foreword to E. W. Bowcock's *Shropshire Place-Names* (1923). His words were:

"There are few counties whose place-names offer as many problems as does Shropshire. . . . Its place-names abound in Celtic elements and there is no doubt that here, as in many other of the border counties, there has been an anglicising of Celtic names and a celticising of Anglian names. Linguistic knowledge of the most acute and varied kind is needed for solving the various problems and many of them can only be dealt with in the light of knowledge of the comparative evidence for other Welsh and English counties."

In his introduction to this volume the author himself admitted that "some of our apparently genuine descendants from Old English may really contain a germ of Celtic".

Both these statements might, as Mawer said, apply to other border counties, and distributions on this basis have now been plotted for all three of the Welsh Border counties in England—Cheshire, Shropshire, and Herefordshire. The method in each case has been the same: to select names which included elements related to Welsh or older Brythonic elements and, where the name-pedigree was known and included no contrary evidence, to plot it on the map using the symbol scale shown in Figure 2. In each county the lists were made first, the plot second, and only then was the map of Celtic place-name elements superimposed over that showing woodland recession and related settlement phases. No immunity from error or omission is claimed, but in each of the three counties, the results are to some extent comparable: the distribution of Celtic, possible Celtic, and anglicised-Celtic names is made appreciably denser, and also these names occur almost entirely, though not exclusively, in areas of early Anglo-Saxon names (Fig. 1), that is in the lowlands which were cleared in or before the seventh and early eighth centuries and for which it has been customary to give the main credit to the Angles. The exceptions in Shropshire include some hill settlement names, while in Cheshire a few in the north-east of the county are within, or on the fringe of areas which were recorded as wooded in 1086. In the latter case, it seems highly probable that, because of the Conqueror's extensive

⁽⁸⁾ For the annual public lecture delivered by the writer to the Shropshire Archaeological Society, June 1962.

wasting of eastern Cheshire, the records themselves may be inaccurate or that the names were those of small isolated old Celtic communities either temporarily fled or occupying naturally open land in an otherwise extensive woodland belt.

The positive correspondence of the area of (extended) Celtic names with areas of early Anglo-Saxon names is far more impressive, and is of greater interest to the settlement historian. If even a proportion of the suggested places are acceptable as having names of Celtic origin or influence, then the case for assuming a wide and comparatively close Celtic settlement of the plains and valleys of the Borderland long before the battle of Chester is a strong one. Settlement in the Borderland during the Celtic and Anglian periods may well have passed through the following phases:

1. the occupation of hill forts and nearby lowland sites in the pre-Roman Iron Age, but with hill settlement still predominant especially in heavily wooded country;
2. the pacification of the countryside during the Roman occupation, the provision of paved roads dotted with occasional forts and trading posts between the main Roman towns, and the consequent encouragement of lowland settlement with improved farming;⁽⁹⁾
3. the sub-Roman Celtic renaissance, and the associated expansion of the Celtic kingdoms, the growth in population, the rise of new settlements, the spread of Christianity as a result of the travels of Celtic missionaries, and the eventual desertion of the hill forts in favour of lowland sites;⁽¹⁰⁾
4. the arrival in the seventh century of Anglian settlers in the Welsh Borderland, their establishment as overlords in a number of central or key communities (such as the *burhs* which in Cheshire are so often ancient parochial centres and in *-ingham*, *-ham*, *-ingatun* and *-tun* settlements), but in sufficiently small numbers to have left largely undisturbed the lesser or subsidiary Celtic settlements which⁽¹¹⁾ remained and still remain as hamlets or dispersed townships;
5. the Anglian expansion of the later eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries into the primeval woodlands and the establishment of new settlements in clearings which are indicated by the *-leah*, *wood*, and similar late Anglian name-elements.

III THE PROGRESS OF SETTLEMENT IN CHESHIRE IN THE CELTIC AND ANGLIAN PERIODS

Hill forts are, for self-evident reasons, few in Cheshire and the first phase postulated above must have been largely limited to the Pennine Edge and the Central Ridge where a number of hill forts are known and recognised, and where prehistoric roads, some as old as the Bronze Age, are well authenticated.

⁽⁹⁾ A. L. F. Rivet, *Town and Country in Roman Britain* (1958).

⁽¹⁰⁾ This view was put forward by W. F. Grimes in "A Hundred Years of Welsh Archaeology", *Camb. Arch. Assoc.* (1946), pp. 72-77.

⁽¹¹⁾ Jackson, *op. cit.*, map pp. 208-9. Dorothy Sylvester, "Rural Settlement in Cheshire", *TRANSACTIONS*, Vol. 101 (1949), pp. 31 and 36-7.

But other hill sites occupied either in the pre-Roman or Roman Iron Age by the Cornovii may have been obscured by later villages, and candidates for this type of settlement history clearly include places such as Dunham-on-the-Hill, Great Barrow, Little Barrow, and Ince as a marsh-island site. Bunbury and Burwardsley occupy points which could have been original or secondary Celtic hill settlements, and the configuration of places grouped round elevated churches such as Astbury, Barthomley, Over, and Audlem strongly suggest that an ancient and Celtic tradition inspired their choice. There is a certain amount of evidence that the Celtic church extended its influence in Cheshire and although this part of the story belongs to phase three, the known predilection of the Church for ancient and often pagan places of worship as the sites of Christian churches also offers a backward pointer. The Anglo-Saxons named as *burhs* not only their own fortified places but many older ones, and it is for this reason that a number of these, whose physical site or archaeological character justifies it, have been plotted on Figure 2, for they may give further clues leading to the elucidation of the Celtic phase.

The Roman opening up of the Cheshire Plain was undoubtedly influential on Celtic settlement. That is an accepted truism. The question of how influential the pre-Roman Celtic settlement was on the geography of the Roman occupation is a less familiar one, but must surely offer itself for consideration. Did the Romans establish some of their roads or stretches of some roads along existing tradeways and link roads between the Celtic settlements? More acceptably perhaps, did they follow, in some cases, the general direction of Celtic routes but cut a straighter road avoiding the actual Celtic hamlets?

One of the major difficulties in relation to this subject is that only the Romans built and paved their roads thus creating a causeway of some permanence. Another difficulty is that roads cannot always be specifically dated, and persist or go out of use with a fine disregard for accepted historical phases. What roads or trackways were used by the Cornovii when they came down to the lowlands from the Central Ridge and the Pennine Edge? There can be little doubt that as and when it proved convenient both the Celtic and the Anglian people made use of Roman roads as did their successors in and after the Middle Ages. With the movement of the British down to the plains, the old prehistoric trackways would lose much of their usefulness, and new tracks must have been trodden between the new lowland settlements. Trackways of such antiquity are more difficult to trace on the ground, however, in flat country than on hills.

Some are no doubt incorporated in existing inter-parochial roads. Some are traceable as lanes and pathways. But it may also be possible to use place-names for this purpose as supplementary if not as final evidence. Of place-name elements indicating roads, the three most significant in this connection are *strata* (Latin), *ford* (English), and *heol* (Welsh). There is a difficulty about the element *ford* which is interesting and may be significant. Deriving from Old and Middle English, comparable with the Old High German *furt* and cognate with the Latin *portus*, it has generally retained its meaning of an entrance or passage, thus a crossing place. The Welsh *ffordd* is, according to T. H. Parry-Williams⁽¹²⁾ derived from the Old English *ford*. But *ffordd* has come to mean a road, and *ford* as a place-name element has been widely assumed to indicate a position on a Roman road in addition to its more usual English meaning of a fording place on a river. The case of the Longford, still so named, in north-east Shropshire is an example of this confusion and of its use with the Welsh meaning rather than the English, but if there is in fact Welsh influence in Cheshire and Shropshire in the use of *ford* to indicate a road, it cannot pre-date the Anglian settlement phase if Parry-Williams' derivation is to stand. It may well, however, be an index of the strength of Welsh influence and an example of mutual influence during the Anglian period. For these reasons it has been shown as a significant place-name element on Figure 2, and may be regarded as particularly interesting where it occurs away from a river crossing.

In plotting Cheshire names which incorporate possible anglicisations of *heol*, the same principle has been adopted as in the case of other place-names in Figure 2, that is, if there is no contrary evidence in the name-pedigree the place has been shown on the map. The net has admittedly been cast wide for the sake of experiment. One interesting case is Blakenhall. Like a few other *hall* elements it was included with considerable hesitation, but the form in Domesday Book was *Blachenhale*. This was reminiscent of the medieval Blake Street in Wirral and *blake* or *black* is as common in English place-names as *coch* in Welsh.⁽¹³⁾ Further, Blakenhall is also in rough alignment with what Graham Webster shows in the *Historical Atlas of Cheshire* as a probable Roman road diverging south of Middlewich from the probable road to Chesterton and in line with King Street. A long series of *ford* and possible *heol* derivatives also extends from Halton to Hoole; the more

⁽¹²⁾ *The English Element in Welsh* (1923), p. 34.

⁽¹³⁾ O. E. *blac* means black, but O.E. *blac* means white.

southerly of these are on or near the probable Roman road from Wilderspool to Chester. If this line is extended behind Chester it leads to Blacon which in *Domesday Book* was *Blachehol*. Blacon in Roman times lay on the estuarine coast of the Dee where a crossing could be made to the Flintshire shore and in line with it are Bretton, whose name indicates a settlement of British or Welsh surviving into Anglian times, and *Pen-y-ffordd*. Opposite Halton is Hale in Lancashire. Did a British road originally follow this route from Chester to Halton and cross the Mersey there, and if so, did the Roman road follow it in part to make the crossing at Wilderspool? Or were the (presumed) *heol* names given in the sub-Roman period to Roman roads?

But *ford* and possible *heol* names suggest other alignments which may have been Celtic and from which the Roman line diverged or to which it ran roughly parallel. The road from Chester to Nantwich, which a number of writers such as William Harrison⁽¹⁴⁾ considered Roman and which the Ordnance Survey are now looking at with the same idea in mind, is known to have changed course in several stretches from time to time. The present A51 avoids the larger villages such as Christleton, which was on the packhorse and coaching route to Chester, the Stapleforths, and Bunbury, but the old road went under Beeston crag and names like *Hockenhull*, the *Stapleforths*, and *Bunbury* may perhaps mark the line of an older loop still than the packhorse road, though the Roman road, if such it was, took the shorter line from Holme Street *via* Duddon and Tarporley.⁽¹⁵⁾

Between Nantwich and Hale lie another series of *ford* and possible *heol* names—*Old Hoolgrave*, *Cledford*, *Allostock*, and *Knutsford*. The southern part of this line corresponds with the line of a Roman road which crosses and re-crosses the A530, and the stretch north of Middlewich with a road which Margary takes to Bradshaw House in Lower *Peover*⁽¹⁶⁾ (a Celtic place-name) and which K. E. Jermy tells me he is trying to trace from there northwards. Was this the line of a Roman road which made for Manchester? If so, Mr. Jermy has privately raised the point that it was very near the Watling Street re-curving from Northwich to Manchester. Only the spade can perhaps finalise the argument, but the existence of *Knutsford* on

⁽¹⁴⁾ *Lancs. & Ches. Ant. Soc. T.*, Vol. 9 (1891), p. 114.

⁽¹⁵⁾ In *Pennant's Tours* (1780) the "horse road" is described as going from Chester *via* Christleton and across Brown Heath to Hockenhull and Tarvin. For a summary of the evidence see the article by the present writer in the *Chester Chronicle* of 17 November 1962.

⁽¹⁶⁾ I. D. Margary, *Roman Roads in Britain*, Vol. II (1957), p. 37.

the direct line, and the fact that such a road would cross at *Crosstown* (?*croes*) a striking line of possible Celtic road and place-names leading east to *Saltersford* beyond *Prestbury*, suggests at least the possibility of this having been a Celtic route perhaps adopted and later abandoned by the Romans.

A broadly similar position has been summarised by M. St. J. Way with regard to two possible loops between Aldford and Wroxeter as alternatives to the Roman route from Chester *via* Aldford and Whitchurch to Wroxeter. The first loop, suggested by Graham Webster has, as yet, not been confirmed. The more easterly loop postulated by S. O'Dwyer *via* Churton has been confirmed by excavation between Aldford and Churton.⁽¹⁷⁾

Further possible routes used by the Cornovii, and not so far appearing on any map of Roman roads, are suggested by the striking lines of Celtic and possibly-Celtic place-names diverging east of Northwich near Holford, itself a significant combination probably of *heol* and *ford*. From here a line exists through *Knutsford*, *Crosstown*, *Warford*, *Mottram*, and *Prestbury* to *Saltersford*. This looks remarkably like a saltway but is not included as such by W. B. Crump.⁽¹⁸⁾ The southerly divergent line from Holford includes the *Peovers*, *Chelford*, and *Henbury* whence *via* Macclesfield it continues to Eddisbury Hall in a direct line for Buxton. Harrison talks of this as a road used by Leland and mainly Roman, but if so, it lacks confirmation by modern archaeologists. These are not the only significant alignments of *ford*, *heol*, and Celtic and possibly-Celtic names on Figure 2, but the map itself, it is hoped, may serve as a quarry for future work.

Before leaving the subject of roads in the late Celtic period, reference must be made to a Shropshire road long known as *Yr Hen Ffordd*. This is in part the ridgeway across the Kerry Hills, and in 1954 was referred to by Miss L. F. Chitty as a portion of a Bronze Age tradeway from Evesham cutting out the long curve of the Severn by using a watershed route across Wyre Forest to Farlow, over the Titterstone Clew and thence by Bromfield, Onibury, Clungunford, and Clun to the Kerry Hills, Central Wales, and Cardigan Bay.⁽¹⁹⁾ In 1960 A. W. J. Houghton⁽²⁰⁾ linked *Yr Hen Ffordd* with a Roman road which

⁽¹⁷⁾ See M. St. J. Way in *Journ. Chester and N. Wales Arch. Soc.*, N.S. 48 (1961), pp. 15-23; G. Webster in *Cheshire Historian*, No. 3 (1953), pp. 15-19, and S. O'Dwyer, *Roman Roads of Cheshire* (1935).

⁽¹⁸⁾ *Lancs. & Ches. Ant. Soc. T.*, Vol. 29 (1939).

⁽¹⁹⁾ *Arch. Camb.*, Vol. 104, pp. 193-5.

⁽²⁰⁾ "The Roman Road from Greensforge through the Central Welsh March", *Shrops. Arch. Soc. T.*, Vol. 56 (1960). The italics used in summarizing it are mine.

he has traced from Greensforge (and Droitwich) through the Welsh March passing through or near Bridgnorth, Aston Eyre (*i.e.* north of Brown Clee), through Corvedale and across the southern gap beyond the Wenlock Edge to Halford (*Heol ffordd?*), by Edgton north of Clun Forest and thence diverging to *Forden* and *Caersws* in the west and *Kerry* to the south-west. Houghton notes particularly that the road passes close to a number of British hill forts (the Ditches, Norton Walls, Wart Hill, and *Caer Din*) and avers that this cannot have been accidental. He also believes that the road was deliberately blocked by Offa's Dyke and pre-Offian earthworks which suggests its use in the sub-Roman period by Celtic folk. The significance of these routes, both incorporating and long known in part as *Yr Hen Ffordd*, in connection with the argument offered above is self-evident.

The direct and presumptive evidence for the extent of late Celtic settlement in Cheshire is considerable, and it would certainly seem that an important phase of predominantly lowland settlement (with, no doubt, some hill sites surviving in or near to the lowlands) succeeded the hill fort phase and lasted for at least two hundred years after the withdrawal of the Romans and perhaps began during the Roman occupation. From the Pennine Edge the British appear to have moved down to the foothill zone where there is a line of ancient parochial centres—*Mottram* in *Longdendale*, *Prestbury*, *Astbury*, *Barthomley*, *Wybunbury*—with Celtic or *-burh* place-names whose original occupation could well be pre-Anglian. East and central Cheshire were fairly liberally scattered with Celtic communities if we can trust the evidence of the second map and the parallel evidence of settlement patterns. But the great woods of mid-Cheshire seem to have provided a border zone between the sporadically cleared plain to the east and the almost completely open lowlands west of the Central Cheshire Ridge at the time of the first Anglian incursions. The hill forts of this Ridge may have been the source, in part at least, of the Celtic population of the west of the county, but no doubt the Welsh Hills to the west contributed a larger quota. Whether these two areas were all part of the territory of the tribal group known as *Cornovii* or whether they were, in the Roman period or later, politically separate is a question suggested by the sharp contrast between the two parts of the county and by the apparent function of the Central Ridge as a boundary. The name of *Tarvin* (Welsh *terfyn*, a boundary) just to the west of it is equally suggestive. A point of further interest is that the large cleared lowland of West Cheshire had no counterpart in the rest of the Border-

land at that time, which in turn suggests the focal importance of the lower Dee in the sub-Roman period (see above, p. 7).

Dating, absolute or relative, is more difficult, and historians are still trying to unravel the story of Anglian movements west of the Pennines and in the Borderland of Wales to the south. Æthelfrith of Northumbria died in 616 and before his death defeated the British at Chester when, as the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Bede both recorded, he slew at the same time hundreds of monks from Bangor-on-Dee. The victory was ephemeral. The British regained control, and the political link between the communities of the whole of the lower Dee valley is implicit. In c. 633 the British and the Mercians under Cadwallon and Penda combined forces to defeat Edwin of Northumbria, but the place of battle is believed to have been on the Northumbrian border. It implies a close and even friendly connection between the Mercians and the British and may mean that Anglian settlement in the northern Borderland was permitted rather than enforced. The main early expansion period of the Mercians in the Border country is likely to have been in the reign of Penda, who died in 655, or at latest under his son Wulfhere, who died in 675. The layout of Figure 1 may indicate that the Mercians first infiltrated as settlers *east* of the Central Ridge where, it seems, Celtic settlement was much thinner than in the west, and that later they established political ascendancy over the western lowland. Only then, in the *-ingatun* and *-tun* phase, did they become actual settlers in the Celtic province of the lower Dee and Gowy valleys and nearby Wirral. At what date this was achieved it is even more difficult to say, but it would at least seem probable that it was not much before the middle of the seventh century.⁽²¹⁾

Cutting across the Mercian story, however, there is the important return south of the Northumbrians, who fought the Mercians at the battle of Maserfield (generally accepted as Oswestry) in 642. Also two Northumbrian inroads into Cheshire serve to remind us that the middle Mersey and the lower Mersey crossings offer entrance points into the west Cheshire lowland, and that there may or may not have been any link between Altrincham and the three southern *-ingaham* settlements of Cheshire.

⁽²¹⁾ Of the twenty *-ingatun* and four *-ingaham* settlements in Cheshire it is significant that only three, Warmingham, Bebington and Coddington, became early parochial centres. Of Coddington, Samuel Lewis in his *Topographical Dictionary of England* (1830) wrote, "This is thought to have been a habitation of the Britons, which seems probable from the artificial embankments and tumuli discernible in the vicinity." It is also significant that Altrincham until the modern period was in the parish of Bowdon.

Despite the comparative wealth of Anglo-Saxon place-names, the unravelling of the Anglian part of the early settlement story is fraught with difficulties. The numerical weakness of the occupation has been assumed, but it must have been at least sufficiently strong administratively to have resulted in the re-naming of a high proportion of the villages and hamlets or in the anglicising of their names. Except in the larger villages, however, the pattern of habitation and the field systems remain remarkably un-English. Everywhere in Cheshire, as in the rest of the Borderland there is an underlying and basic dispersal or semi-dispersal of dwellings, and few of the larger nucleations in either Cheshire or north Shropshire can be dissociated from growth at the centre of an early parish.⁽²²⁾

Soon after the mid-seventh century, practically all Britain was Christian at least in name. Hence when the Angles actually settled in Cheshire they must have been either practising Christianity or on the verge of accepting it. As it lay well to the west of the pagan cemeteries, the entire Borderland may be assumed to have been within the missionary field of the Celtic church for a century or a century and a half before the coming of the Angles to this part of the country, but unfortunately there are few positive proofs that there were early Celtic churches here apart from the few Celtic dedications already mentioned (see above, p. 7). Many dedications may have been lost, especially in the east of the county, but the existence of ancient churches on elevated sites and in places with the *burh* or *dun* element in their names is at least suggestive of a persistent Celtic tradition and of the continuity of such sites as places of worship through the period of Anglian occupation and later. Examples include Dunham-on-the-Hill, Great Barrow, Bunbury, Frodsham (the parish church being on the hill in the old village of Overton), Great Budworth, Wrenbury, Marbury, Wybunbury, Audlem, Barthomley, Astbury, and Prestbury.

Cheshire's adjacency to St. Asaph and Bangor-on-Dee make it probable that it came within their missionary field prior to the Mercian conquest, but by the late seventh century the Celtic hold was broken politically, and the see of Lichfield had been created to serve northern Mercia. It would seem, therefore, that at about this time Cheshire would pass into the Mercian province ecclesiastically as well as for purposes of civil administration. In view of the thinness of settlement which persisted in central and east Cheshire until the later Middle Ages, however, both the fewness of the populace and the poverty of the

⁽²²⁾ Sylvester, TRANSACTIONS, Vols. 101 (1949) and 108 (1956).

countryside must have militated against the establishment of more than a few churches. Such villages as developed under the Mercian régime may be assumed to have arisen as centres of large, spreading parishes each consisting of a group of pre-Anglian and Anglian townships, in none of which can there have been any settlement larger than a small hamlet, while most consisted only of scattered homesteads. Even the parochial villages probably grew slowly and a number are believed to have expanded (to any appreciable extent) only in the modern period.

In the later phases of Anglian occupation, slow but steady expansion is evidenced from the *-ingaham*, *-ham*, and *-ingatun* settlements of the first infiltration to the *-tun* settlements of the middle phase. Eventually, when the areas already cleared and occupied in moderate or sparse density by the British had been taken over and some expansion had taken place in these districts, the task began of pressing further into the woodlands which had once formed the boundaries of the British occupancy. This phase, which lasted until the Norman conquest, was marked by new and, it would seem, small and often scattered townships which joined the satellite groups attached to the main parochial centres. Their identity is, of course, traceable by the *-leah* element and by similar wood and tree names, and the extensive areas cleared in this phase are shown on Figure 1 by stipple.

Such is the thin picture which can be drawn of Cheshire settlement in the Dark Ages except for the Scandinavian additions which are not the concern of this paper except in so far as they overlaid or pressed back the Anglian and earlier Celtic communities in Wirral. Scandinavian influence in Chester was considerable but there is little in the rural picture to suggest that the effect on the countryside was anything but occasional or sporadic beyond mid-Wirral. In the same way, we can probably discount Northumbrian influence except in the earliest phase, and then largely along the Mersey.

These two groups apart, Cheshire in the Dark Ages, and especially in the critical seventh century, appears to have been settled by two peoples—the British and the Mercians. This is accepted and breaks no new ground. But the division of Cheshire into two well marked provinces, those of West Cheshire and of Cheshire east of the Central Ridge, presents Cheshire no longer as a single but as a dual area. The contrasts between the two divisions are clear, the relationship of the two and the reasons for their existence are obscure.

Figure 1 shows West Cheshire as having been cleared and settled on a wide scale while Cheshire east of the ridge remained

largely under woodland except along some river valleys and in the Pennine foothill zone. West Cheshire was a province of considerable importance in the Celtic world as is evinced by sites such as Meols, Bangor-on-Dee, Landican, and Eccleston, and the existence of a number of other places with Celtic names, and it lay on the great corridor of western Britain which led direct from Strathclyde and Rheged by the Welsh Border to Devon and Cornwall—a corridor of which the importance was enhanced as the main land communication line in the Celtic West while the Anglo-Saxons pressed further and further across country towards the Highland Zone. It was probably an integral part of early medieval Powys and within the sphere of influence of both St. Asaph and Bangor-on-Dee, and both by sea and by land its space relations were significant and in some periods vital to the Celtic world. Wirral, in particular, could be approached from all sides, and its distinctiveness as a settlement region (not only compared with the rest of Cheshire but in the Borderland as a whole) is certainly a reflection of its extraordinary geographical accessibility. The Romans were not slow to discover and develop this factor in West Cheshire and made their own contribution to its nodality and accessibility. Roman roads and the existence of Chester for over three centuries as the great port and gateway of the country which even then was emerging as the northern Marches, must have promoted Celtic settlement in its countryside both during and after the Roman period. Its population density, its more numerous settlements, and its better developed agriculture persisted long after the period with which this paper is mainly concerned, and are just as clear in 1086 as in the seventh century.⁽²³⁾ It has also been shown that the woodland line divided the area to the east, with the principal *-ingaham* and *-ham* settlements, from the western area in which the earliest Anglian names were two *-hams* (Frodsham and Dunham-on-the-Hill, the latter clearly a Celtic takeover) and three *-ingatuns* (Bebington, Puddington, and Mollington). There is strong presumptive evidence that the Mercians had filtered into east and central Cheshire while West Cheshire remained a stronghold of Celticism.

If the map of ancient parishes be consulted⁽²⁴⁾ it will quickly emerge that the woodland line dividing the two parts of the county in the Dark Ages, is reflected in the contrast between the much smaller parishes to the west of it and the large parishes which begin immediately to the east. Indeed, the two lines are

⁽²³⁾ *Historical Atlas of Cheshire*, maps on pp. 19, 21, and 23.

⁽²⁴⁾ *Ibid.*, map on p. 37.

almost identical. When nucleations, though based on early nineteenth-century maps, are plotted the same contrast appears, and again Wirral and the adjoining lowlands stand out from the rest of the Borderland.

In later centuries, the contrasted settlement landscapes of these two provinces continued to influence agriculture, population, parochial and manorial history,⁽²⁵⁾ and numerous other aspects of Cheshire life. As the Irish-Norse occupied only a restricted portion of West Cheshire, and the occupation of the area by Northumbrians is at best unconfirmed, the contrast and existence of these two major divisions of the county can only be referred to the settlement history of the Celtic and Anglian peoples.

APPENDIX

CELTIC AND POSSIBLE-CELTIC PLACE-NAMES IN FIGURE 2

[For elements and their meaning see the end of this list]

Arrowe	Congleton
Allostock	Crewe
Audlem	Crewe by Farndon
	Crewood
Blacon (D. B. Blachehol)	Coddington
Blakenhall	Crowden
Bostock	Crowley, Antrobus
Bowdon	Crosstown, Knutsford
Bradwall	Crowton
Broomhall	Cuerdon, Beeston
Bollington	Combermere
Bryn, near Cuddington	Comberbach
Carden	Davenham
Carrbrook, Stalybridge	Davenport, Brereton
Carrgreen	Davenport, Hazel Grove
Carrhouses	Davenport Green, Hale
Carrwood, Wilmslow	Davenport Green, Wilmslow
Catsclough, Winsford	Duddon
Caughall, Chester	Dunham Massey
Chadkirk	Dunham Woodhouses
Cheadle	Dunham-on-the-Hill
Cheadle Hulme	Dunkirk, Capenhurst
Cheetham Fold, Hyde	Dunkirk, Hyde
Cheetham Hill, Marple	Dunsdale, Frodsham
Clatterbridge	
Claverton	
Cleulow Cross, Wincle	Ebna, Malpas
Cloudside, Congleton	Eccleston

⁽²⁵⁾ Dorothy Sylvester, "The Manor and the Cheshire Landscape", *Lancs. & Ches. Ant. Soc. T.*, Vol. 70 (1960).

Farndon	Newhall, Nantwich
Gallantry Bank, Bickerton	Newhall, Lach Dennis
Gavel Green, Winsford	Overpool
Gawsworth	
Goostrey	Pensby
Grappenhall	Peover Superior
Gorsty	Pettypool, Winsford
	Pexhall
Hale	Poole
Hale Barns	Poulton cum Spital
Hale Bank	Poulton, Chester
Hale Top	
Halewood	Quoisley
Helsby	Queastybirch
Henhull	
Heswall	Radnor
Higher Carden	Rhuddall Heath
Holford	Rudheath
Holford Street, Lr. Tabley	Ruelow
Hockenhull	
Hoole	Salterswall
Hoylake	Sarn, Thrapwood
Hulme Walfield	Saughall
	Saughall Massie
Iddinshall	
Ince	Tarporley
	Tarvin
Kelsall	Tattenhall
Kinderton	Tidnock, Gawsworth
Kinnerton	Tilstone Fearnall
Kinsey Heath	Tilston
Kynsal	Tintwistle
Landican	Walton
Leese	Walgherton
Liscard	Wallasey
Lostock Gralam	Wallbank, Hazel Grove
Lower Carden	Walerscote
Lyme	Walley's Green, Minshull Vernon
Lymm	Wall Hill, Newbold Astbury
	Wallhill, Smallwood
Macefen	Welshmen's Green, Henhull
Maw Green	Werneth
Mellor	Wervin
Meols	Wettenhall
Minn End	Wheel Green
Mollington	Wheelock
Mottram in Longendale	Wigland
Mottram St. Andrew	Willaston, Wirral
Mow Cop	Willaston, Nantwich
Mowpen Brow, High Legh	Willey Moor, Bickley
	Willington, Tarvin
Nether Peover	Wirswall
Netherpool, Ellesmere Port	

WELSH AND EARLIER ELEMENTS TO WHICH SOME OF
THE ABOVE MAY BE RELATED

(Modern Welsh form unless otherwise stated)

<i>bryn</i> , hill	<i>llan</i> , enclosure, church-place
<i>caer</i> , fort, camp	<i>llys</i> , palace, royal residence
<i>cat</i> , <i>chat</i> , Cadwgan, Chad (other possible meanings)	<i>maes</i> , open field, plain
<i>caled dwfr</i> (<i>cletwr</i>), hard water	<i>mawr</i> , big, great
<i>coed</i> , trees, woodland	<i>mynydd</i> , <i>min</i> (O.W.), mountain
<i>congl</i> , nook, corner	<i>moel</i> , bald or bare hill
<i>croes</i> , cross, crossroad	<i>pen</i> , head, end, top
<i>cryw</i> , ford	<i>pwll</i> , pool, pit
<i>cwm</i> , valley	<i>rhiw</i> , hill, steep slope
<i>dinas</i> , <i>din</i> (O.W.), <i>duno</i> (? early Brit.), hill fort, camp	<i>rhudd</i> , red, ruddy
<i>eglwys</i> , church	<i>sarn</i> , causeway
<i>gafael</i> , land held by a <i>gwely</i>	<i>terfyn</i> , boundary
<i>hen</i> , old	<i>twr</i> , <i>torr</i> (O.W.), pile, rounded hill
<i>heol</i> , <i>hewl</i> , road	<i>tref</i> , township, hamlet
<i>kin</i> (Goidelic), a head	<i>ty</i> , house, homestead
	O.E. <i>walh</i> , gen.pl. <i>weala</i> , Welshman, serf
	<i>ynys</i> , island

OTHER PLACE-NAMES IN FIGURE 2

(burh, barrow, strata, ford, bridge)

Aldford	Hartford
Astbury	Henbury
Backford	Holford
Barrow	Knutsford
Basford	Latchford
Barbridge	Norbury, Lach Dennis
Bridgemere	Norbury, South Cheshire
Bruen Stapleford	Norbury Booths
Buerton, near Aldford	Peckforton
Buerton, near Audlem	Prestbury
Bunbury	Pulford
Burford, near Acton	Saltersford, Winsford
Burleydam	Saltersford, Holmes Chapel
Burton, Neston	Saltersford, Rainow
Burton, Tarvin	Somerford Radnor
Burwardsley	Somerford Booths
Chelford	Stowford
Cledford	Stretton, Runcorn
Cuttleford, near Moreton Old Hall	Stretton, Tarvin
Daleford, Northwich	Stretton, South-west Cheshire
Daresbury	Tiverton (originally Twyford)
Dobford, Gawsorth	Trafford Bridge
Eddisbury	Wimbolds Trafford
Eddisbury Hall, East Cheshire	Winsford
Great Warford	Woodford
Handforth	Wrenbury
Hapsford	Wybunbury