‘For the Protection of all the People’: Æthelflæd and her Burhs in Northwest Mercia

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The fortifications, or burhs, constructed between 910 and 915 by Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, across much of the western Midlands have often been understood as part of a broader programme initiated by her brother Edward, king of the Anglo-Saxons, as part of the conquest of the Danish parts of the province of Mercia. This study seeks to understand them on their own terms, attempting to characterise their nature as built elements in the early medieval landscape, and placing them within the context of textual sources directly associated with Æthelflæd and her husband Æthelred. It is concluded that, whilst Æthelflæd’s burhs undoubtedly shared features with those constructed by her brother and their father, Alfred the Great, they also formed a particular corpus of their own with shared characteristics, and were conceived with several purposes, political, social and ecclesiastical as well as military, intended to answer problems specific to Æthelflæd’s Mercia.

Keywords: Æthelflæd, burhs, Mercia, landscape, Vikings, peace, defence, protection

# Introduction

The year 2018 marks 1100 years since the death of Lady Æthelflæd of the Mercians, a female ruler whose military campaigns in the years leading up to her death gained her much renown, and whose network of fortified settlements did much to shape the political landscape of western Mercia. The broad significance of such defended places to the rulers of Wessex and Mercia in the later ninth and earlier tenth centuries is widely accepted by scholars of the period, who usually call them ‘burhs’.[[1]](#footnote-1) Two groups of such burhs are commonly distinguished: the thirty-one burhs listed in the so-called Burghal Hidage document, distributed across an area south of the Thames and a small portion north of it, usually associated with King Alfred’s efforts against Viking attacks in the last two decades of the ninth century; and two sets of burhs established across the English Midlands during the second decade of the tenth century by Alfred’s children, King Edward (d. 924) and Lady Æthelflæd, whose roles in their construction are recorded in various versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The topography of these places has formed the subject of much scholarship, and specific features are often enrolled to support arguments about the motivations and strategies of their builders. In a seminal paper Martin Biddle and David Hill explored the implications of the rectilinear street layouts found in some of the Burghal Hidage burhs, and several scholars have since explored, refined and disputed their conclusions.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, most of these authors are largely silent on the burhs built by Æthelflæd, and the present study takes this relatively neglected part of the corpus as its subject. We seek to identify common topographical features among Æthelflæd’s burhs, and then to explore whether we can talk of a distinctive Æthelflædan approach to burhs and their use in the northwest Midlands.

Whilst the analysis of burhs has a long history, this study represents part of a recent trend to view such places as components within wider landscapes, a perspective associated in particular with work undertaken by Andrew Reynolds, John Baker and Stuart Brookes.[[3]](#footnote-3) This approach offers many new insights, although as is only to be expected, it is also informed by earlier historiographical trends. In particular, burhs still tend to be viewed through two dominant lenses only partially reconciled to one another: the military and the economic. The work of Baker and Brookes focused on military concerns, which often prompt interpretations founded on strategic considerations, or what they have called ‘systems’ thinking; indeed, their understanding of the burhs as part of a system of ‘defence-in-depth’ is inspired by a study of the Roman empire’s ‘grand strategy’ by a twentieth-century military consultant.[[4]](#footnote-4) They have suggested that the later ninth century witnessed a transformation in Anglo-Saxon military strategy in response to Viking incursions. The fielding of small local forces, ‘shire militias’, was replaced by the creation of a large field army, which required permanently-garrisoned burhs to protect its supply depots from seizure by enemy forces. Crucially, defensible ‘strongholds’ (their favoured translation of Old English *burh*) had previously acted largely as irregularly occupied refuges:

The garrisoning of a series of strategically-sited strongholds across the kingdom and close to important route-ways, was *the* key military innovation of the new system; shifting strongholds from being static defendable places (offering protection to English and Vikings alike) to mutually-supporting, yet self-contained tactical elements able to concentrate the defensive response.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This, they argue, characterised Alfred’s activities in the last two decades of the ninth century. It also informed the subsequent activities of Edward and Æthelflæd, who added large ‘frontier’ strongholds to the system: ‘These sites … were not the defended and garrisoned bunkers of Alfred’s system, but highly-efficient advanced platforms from which to launch offensives aimed at the subjugation of the Danelaw.’[[6]](#footnote-6)

Baker and Brookes do not neglect the economic aspect of burh analysis, but they are far less concerned with it. Often in these discussions the economic considerations owe their interest to the fact that many burhs emerged as important market towns later in the medieval period.[[7]](#footnote-7) Consequently a long-standing question concerns whether commercial functions were intended to form an important part of a burh’s *raison d’etre* from its inception, as Biddle and Hill suggested for some of the Wessex burhs, or whether they emerged more organically at a later date, as Richard Holt has argued.[[8]](#footnote-8) Coins were certainly minted almost exclusively in burhs throughout the tenth century, and the legislation of Edward and his son and successor, Æthelstan, attempted to confine trade in goods over a certain value to burhs, where it could be witnessed by a reeve who would then be able to vouch that the traded goods were not stolen.[[9]](#footnote-9) These restrictions probably proved too difficult to enforce, as Æthelstan later rescinded them, but they do testify to an intention to make burhs commercial central places from at least Edward’s reign. Nevertheless, recent scholarship has tended to focus on the *de facto* economic development of burhs, rather than the possibility of initial economic intentions; notably, Grenville Astill has concluded from a review of archaeological evidence across several burhs (mostly south of the Thames) that they did not become important urban locations for local and regional trade before the later tenth century.[[10]](#footnote-10) In particular, he suggests that ‘the archaeological evidence for most of the ninth-century burhs… indicates a clear military purpose, with pretensions to urban status which may not have been met for nearly another century.’[[11]](#footnote-11) It is, perhaps, unhelpful to conceive of tenth-century burhs as ‘urban’ (or even ‘proto-urban’) places, because the word anachronistically implies the kind and scale of economic activity that took place in later medieval towns, but this need not rule out an initial commercial role of some kind.

Some scholars have attempted to reconcile ideas about the burhs’ military and commercial roles by seeking broader definitions of their functions. In his argument against the idea of burhs as commercial central places *ab initio*, Richard Holt laid greater emphasis on their importance as centres of royal administration.[[12]](#footnote-12) More recently, Gareth Williams has proposed that burhs be understood as places in which many non-military expressions of royal authority were focused. These included the minting of coins, the exercise of justice (at burghal assemblies), the maintenance of peace (in particular by catching and prosecuting thieves), and the promotion of Christian virtue (in burghal churches).[[13]](#footnote-13) These elements were mutually reinforcing in the sense ‘that obedience to the king’s law is also obedience to God’s law, and that obedience to God’s law is the only way to ensure His favour to the nation.’[[14]](#footnote-14) Williams supports the notion of a primarily military role for burhs at their initial establishment by Alfred, but also suggests that ‘both he and Edward quite deliberately exploited the military crisis as an opportunity to introduce lasting extensions of royal authority, which might have been more difficult to impose in times of peace and without the physical focus provided by the new burghal foundations.’[[15]](#footnote-15) Jeremy Haslam has also explored the reinforcement of royal authority in the creation of burhs, renewing F. W. Maitland’s ‘garrison theory’ to propose that connections between rural manors and burghal properties revealed in later sources such as Domesday Book can be used to demonstrate how obligations towards maintaining and defending burhs were tied to the landholders of their hinterlands, their ‘burghal territories’, at the times of their foundation.[[16]](#footnote-16) Meanwhile, Richard Holt has emphasised the aristocratic nature of burghal communities during the tenth century, which is implied by the focus of royal service and patronage therein.[[17]](#footnote-17) There is thus some movement away from the predominantly military interpretation of burhs, and an acknowledgment of multivalency in their initial purposes and development.

# Æthelflæd’s Burhs

The scholarship briefly reviewed above tends to focus on the southern burhs. Those founded by Æthelflæd are often viewed as a sub-set within the larger burghal project undertaken by kings of the West Saxon dynasty, and rarely if ever form the heart of the analysis, although a notable exception here is the work of Steven Bassett, which will be discussed further below.[[18]](#footnote-18) First it is necessary to discuss the nature of our knowledge of Æthelflæd’s burhs: specifically, the foundation of ten, each explicitly called a *burh* (at *Bremesburh*, *Scergeat*, *Bricge*, Tamworth, Stafford, Eddisbury, Warwick, Chirbury, *Weardburh*, and Runcorn; see Figure 1), is described in a set of annals from 902 to 924 (or perhaps 926) found in the ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘D’ versions of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and commonly called the Mercian Register or the Annals of Æthelflæd. Pauline Stafford has suggested that these annals ‘should be seen as a continuation of the Alfredian Chronicle, produced at or near the Mercian court in the early tenth century and paralleling those produced in contemporary Wessex.’[[19]](#footnote-19) She proposes that the writer was deliberately responding to annals in the ‘A’ version of the Chronicle, which describe Edward’s military activity (including burh-building) north of the Thames from 912 onwards. According to Stafford, both sets of annals were politically motivated, staking different claims to legitimacy over the rule of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ that Alfred had formed from the old kingdoms of Wessex and Mercia. In the case of the Mercian Register, the beneficiary of such claims is not immediately clear, although the annals finish with Æthelstan’s succession to the kingdom, apparently ‘chosen as king by the Mercians’, perhaps in contradiction to the wishes of many in Wessex.[[20]](#footnote-20) Æthelflæd’s burhs were therefore plausibly part of a narrative about political legitimacy in Mercia in the early tenth century, their construction across the northwest Midlands literally ‘staking’ a claim. It may be that their significance was more apparent to the annalist in hindsight, when they were considered alongside Edward’s activities, but it is perhaps more likely that these burhs were also of primary significance to Æthelflæd and her supporters when they were built; studying them as a distinct group, which is presented to us as such by a contemporary, or near contemporary, source can only shed further light on this moment.

**[Figure 1 near here]**

Nevertheless, it would be remiss to ignore the fact that recent scholarship has commonly identified more than the ten settlements in the Mercian Register as Æthelflædan burhs, adding to their number the remaining shire towns of the West Midlands (Chester, Shrewsbury, Worcester, Hereford, Winchcombe and Gloucester).[[21]](#footnote-21) All these places appear to have been important centres by *c*. 900, and Æthelred and Æthelflæd can be explicitly associated with some of them: they issued charters at Worcester in 884x899 and at Shrewsbury in 901, ‘restored’ Chester in 907, and Æthelflæd was buried at Gloucester in 918, probably at a minster she and her husband had founded.[[22]](#footnote-22) Of these, only at Worcester is the place explicitly associated with the word *burh*, specifically the construction of a *burh* at a pre-existing cathedral settlement. This is important, because it suggests that the burh might have been understood to comprise only a part of the settlement at Worcester, probably the enclosure added to the north of the cathedral compound, the latter a reoccupied Roman fortification.[[23]](#footnote-23) Steven Bassett has highlighted archaeological evidence for defences at Hereford, Winchcombe and Worcester that might date to the late-ninth and/or early-tenth centuries, but it is important here to differentiate between the presence of defences at a settlement and its explicit recognition as a *burh* at this time; one does not necessarily imply the other. A distinction can therefore be made between the places constructed by Æthelflæd in the 910s, each of which was recorded in the Mercian Register as a *burh*, and the remaining shire towns, none of which can be demonstrated to have been described simply or solely as a *burh* in the early tenth century.

The issue here is one of definitions: historians are accustomed uncritically to refer to all these places as ‘burhs’, using a modernised form of the Old English word used in the Mercian Register, but in doing so they may elide crucial differences in role and function within the range of early tenth-century Mercian settlements. This is supported by the annal for 914 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which records that a Viking raiding army travelling up the Severn was met by ‘the men from Hereford and from Gloucester and from the nearest *burhs*’; whilst this indicates that men were based at Hereford and Gloucester, it also opens a distinction between these places and an undifferentiated group of places understood as ‘burhs’.[[24]](#footnote-24) It remains possible that contemporaries would have recognised some element within the morphology of Gloucester and Hereford as a ‘burh’, but that other elements were considered more important and thus neither settlement was *defined* by its ‘burh’. We therefore suggest that the meaning given to the word *burh* by the writer of the Mercian Register, and shared by the milieu to which s/he belonged, was narrower than historians currently allow.

Whilst insisting on this new distinction between places explicitly called *burhs* and other important (possibly fortified) places, we do not mean to suggest that historians have previously assumed all such places to lack any differentiation, but any distinctions that are made often act within the group of burhs, rather than between them and other places. For example, Steven Bassett’s wide-ranging analysis of early tenth-century Mercian fortified settlements (all of which he calls ‘burhs’) initially divides them into three groups: first, those whose locations are known because the place-names survive into the modern era, and because their later existence as medieval boroughs provides a convincing indication of their positions, sometimes supported by archaeological evidence (Chester, Gloucester, Hereford, Winchcombe, Shrewsbury, Worcester, Tamworth, Stafford, and Warwick), or because, in the case of Eddisbury, there is convincing archaeological evidence for the enclosure; second, those whose names survive but whose enclosures have not been located archaeologically, and for which there is some kind of dispute over the significance of the settlement morphology of their putative later medieval successors (Chirbury, Runcorn, *Bricge*, and the Edwardian burhs at Thelwall and *Cledemuth*); and third, those whose place-names have not survived and whose locations are therefore unknown (namely *Bremesburh*, *Weardburh* and *Scergeat*).[[25]](#footnote-25) Hereafter these three groups will be labelled respectively the ‘known’, ‘disputed’ and ‘unknown’ burh locations. Bassett then places each of these groups into one of two categories. He suggests that most of the fortified places in the group of known locations were major centres before the late ninth century, including Tamworth and, more tentatively, Stafford and Warwick;[[26]](#footnote-26) those places in this category not included in the Mercian Register corpus were, he suggests, (re-)fortified by Æthelred and Æthelflæd before 900. The other burhs of the Mercian Register, in both the disputed and unknown locations, were most likely ‘insignificant’ places before they were fortified, and even then were ‘utilised only for the duration of a brief campaign rather than serving as a centre for the long-term defence and military organisation of a region’, being established ‘on sites specifically chosen for their strategic importance’, some of them perhaps entirely unoccupied beforehand.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Bassett is not unique in proposing this categorisation; as Astill notes, such a bi-part distinction ‘is commonly made between burghal forts and towns’.[[28]](#footnote-28) Indeed, it mirrors the distinction identified above in recent scholarship, between burhs understood solely in military terms, and those understood in terms not only of defence but also of economic centrality and the extension of royal authority. However, whilst the development of burhs into different kinds of settlement from the later-tenth century onwards is an important phenomenon in its own right, the crucial point here is that such developments do not necessarily tell us anything about the initial intentions of those who fortified a settlement or founded a burh. We seriously question the common assumption that promotes a direct link between the later medieval history of a fortified place and the original intentions of its founders.[[29]](#footnote-29) There is a fundamental circularity in the idea that those places not destined to thrive in the later medieval period were deficient in the attributes of a ‘major centre’ from the very beginning, and it is not clear that the distinction between burhs with military functions, and burhs with additional roles related to royal authority and trade, was one made at the time of their foundation; as argued above, contemporary sources appear instead to differentiate between burhs on the one hand and important settlements like Gloucester and Hereford on the other. It is notable that the latter, and other places which we know to have been important centres by the late-ninth century, continued to play important roles in the settlement hierarchy, most obviously as shire towns from the late-tenth century. But the fact that they were joined by only some of the Mercian Register burhs tells us only that others offered less attractive sites to the founders and planners of later medieval towns; this need not necessarily imply anything about either their pre-Æthelflædan history or their status when founded in the 910s. Indeed, Bassett himself notes that the presence of a tenth-century mint at *Weardburh* and the issue of a charter there indicate that it was a place of some importance for some time after its fortification in 915. This study therefore takes as its corpus the ten burhs of the Mercian Register (see Figure 1), all explicitly described as *burhs*, and declines to assume that the term was applied to all important fortified settlements in the region, aiming instead to elucidate what a ‘burh’ was considered to be by the rulers of early tenth-century Mercia.[[30]](#footnote-30)

# Burh Place-names

We begin with an analysis of the names of Æthelflæd’s burhs. The potential usefulness of place-name analysis when studying early medieval fortified centres has long been recognised, as have the interpretive problems it brings with it. In their recent study, John Baker and Stuart Brookes suggest that three key terms were used to describe a fortification of some sort: OE *burh* with several meanings but generally giving ‘fortified enclosure’ and ‘town’, and OE *fæsten* and OE (*ge*)*weorc*, both giving a meaning of a ‘stronghold’, the latter possibly referring to ‘constructed works’.[[31]](#footnote-31) It is, however, the identification of the element *burh* that has attracted most attention, as it is by far the most commonly surviving place-name element of the three, and its semantic range across the early medieval period is far broader than the specific meaning targeted by this study.[[32]](#footnote-32) Margaret Gelling offered a range of meanings for the word – ‘town’, ‘defended place’, ‘manor house’, ‘hillfort’ and ‘fortification’ – but her primary intention was to offer guidance to ‘the field archaeologist’, and so her focus was ‘the most impressive prehistoric monuments which the Anglo-Saxons saw in this country’.[[33]](#footnote-33) John Blair has added another meaning, proposing that ‘before the mid eighth century it had a distinct and (in terms of elite settlements) perhaps even dominant sense of ‘minster’.’[[34]](#footnote-34) Simon Draper, in examining the topography of enclosures at places in Wiltshire with names containing *burh*,supported two phases for the usage of the element, one for ‘Middle Saxon royal and ecclesiastical centres’, the other a ‘Late Saxon and post-Conquest phenomenon, confined to the “village moment” of *c.* 850–1200’, indicating the ‘elite zones’ of manorial settlements.[[35]](#footnote-35)

This complex picture reflects the usage of the term across several centuries, and makes clear that not all places called *burh* were large fortified settlements of the late-ninth and tenth centuries. Indeed, Draper proposes that in essence the element indicated an enclosure, but does ‘not believe that most enclosures … signified by *burh* were intended primarily as fortifications’.[[36]](#footnote-36) Baker and Brookes agree that a significant number of such *burhs* were ‘non-military sites’;[[37]](#footnote-37) however, they emphasise that even when enclosures were not used for purely military purposes, this does not ‘rule out the possibility that some places were called *burh* because of their defensibility’.[[38]](#footnote-38) In essence:

‘any place that existed in or was characterised by a *defensible* enclosure might be thought of as a *burh*, regardless of whether strategic planning (as opposed to say jurisdictional, ideological or procedural demarcation) played a significant role in design of that enclosure, or whether military defence (as opposed to administrative, commercial or religious activities) was the principal role of the site’.[[39]](#footnote-39)

In this sense, whilst *burhs* might be characterised by a variety of functions and intentions (some of which have been identified above), the word appears always to have been applied to specific forms of enclosure that can be defined topographically and archaeologically.

If the place-name element *burh* might be applied to enclosures with diverse functions, it is perhaps equally striking that not all places possessing apparently defensive fortifications have place-names formed with *burh*, or any other element referring to those fortifications.[[40]](#footnote-40) Of the ten Æthelflædan burhs, all described as *burhs* in the contemporary Mercian Register, and all created over a relatively short period of time, only four have place-names featuring this element. Of these, *Bremesbyrig* and *Eadesbyrig* contain personal names (Old English *Breme* and *Ead*);[[41]](#footnote-41) *Cyricbyrig* gives‘church fortification’ (Old English *cirice*);[[42]](#footnote-42)and *Weardbyrig* indicates ‘a watch or look out fortification’.[[43]](#footnote-43) It is possible that the *burh* element of these place-names was given at the time of their founding as burhs by Æthelflæd. However, if this was the case, we must ask why this naming practice was adopted for only four of the ten burhs, and why the specific of each name should vary between indicating two personal names, an on-site structure and a function. The alternative is that the burhs were founded at pre-existing named places. This can be positively demonstrated at some of the ten burhs: Tamworth appears in charters from the eighth century, and the settlement might be represented by the *Tomtun* of a seventh-century charter.[[44]](#footnote-44) At Stafford, archaeological evidence clearly shows development of the site from the late-eighth or early-ninth century, including the establishment of a sophisticated pottery industry producing ‘Stafford ware’, decades prior to the first appearance of the place-name in the Mercian Register;[[45]](#footnote-45) it seems likely that the place-name relates to this earlier period, although this cannot be decisively proven.

It might be suggested that the burhs with *burh* place-names represent a sub-set that were founded *de novo* by Æthelflæd. This possibility is rendered less likely by a number of considerations. Firstly, scholarly consensus has identified the burh at *Eadesbyrig* with Castle Ditch, Eddisbury, a large bivallate hillfort on the Mid-Cheshire Ridge excavated in the 1930s, of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date, which also features evidence for Roman dismantling and later re-fortification in the medieval period.[[46]](#footnote-46) The earthwork at Castle Ditch predates the early medieval period and represents Cheshire’s largest hillfort, and it therefore appears improbable that its Old English name was coined as late as the tenth century. Secondly, *Cyricbyrig* is widely accepted to refer to Chirbury in western Shropshire, although the specific location of the burh itself within the township is currently disputed; as noted above, the first element of the name is OE *cirice*, ‘church’, giving ‘church *burh*’.[[47]](#footnote-47) This may well indicate that *burh* was here being used in the sense explored by John Blair, to refer to the enclosure of an earlier minster. It seems unlikely to have been coined by Æthelflæd or her agents as she is widely credited with establishing churches in several of her burhs (explored further below); the name would not therefore act to distinguish the burh in any way, and is better understood as a pre-existing name referring to an earlier enclosure with a church. Finally, the text of the Mercian Register might also indicate the earlier existence of the *burh* place-names. For example, in 910 ‘Æthelflæd getimbrede þa burh æt Bremesbyrig’; that is, she ‘built’ a burh at a *burh*. This slightly cumbersome phrasing may simply be exactly that, but we might alternatively deduce that the writer of the chronicle understood Æthelflæd’s ‘getimbrede’ burh to be something different to whatever meaning was implied by the *burh* element in the place-name. This difference might have been in structure and/or function; another possibility is that the *burh* element in the place-name had to some extent lost its meaning, had in some sense become ‘mute’, its meaning if not silenced then quietened. This supports our contention that *burh* had a more specific meaning for Æthelflæd and her circle in the early tenth century.

Turning now to the names of those burhs within the corpus that do not contain the element *burh*, it is notable that most reference access to or across water. Warwick, ‘the dwellings by the weir’ (Old English w*æring* + *wic*), is self-explanatory.[[48]](#footnote-48) Stafford gives ‘ford or causeway by a *stæþ*’;[[49]](#footnote-49) Old English s*tæþ* may indicate a ‘landing-place’, but might more usefully be given the general meaning ‘land bordering on water’, giving ‘the causeway bordered by water or very wet ground’.[[50]](#footnote-50) Tamworth contains Old English *worthig* giving ‘enclosure or homestead on the river Tame’.[[51]](#footnote-51) Runcorn, *Rūm cofan*, gives ‘the roomy cove’, which, in the words of John Dodgson, ‘would aptly describe the part of the Mersey estuary above the Runcorn gap where the constriction of the channel by the promontories of Widnes and Castle Rock caused the river and tide to form a wide lagoon’.[[52]](#footnote-52) *Bricge*, from OE *brycg*,usually gives a meaning of ‘bridge’ but can also be used to indicate a ‘causeway’ over marshy ground.[[53]](#footnote-53) Only the unlocated *Scergeat* does not explicitly reference water, although its generic, Old English *geat*, ‘a gate, a gap, a pass’, may imply that the name did similar work to the other five non-*burh* burh names: namely, to indicate a way through or, in the case of the majority that reference water, across.[[54]](#footnote-54) The names containing the elements *ford* and *bricge* readily support this, but even those that appear simply to indicate a place by, in or on a river might well have become significant, even before Æthelflæd’s time, precisely because those places were crossing points and/or landing places. It follows that the burhs she built there were in part intended to control these routes, not only in a military and strategic sense, but quite probably for other advantages as well, such as the movement of goods.

Of the non-*burh* place-names, there is consensus over the locations of the burhs at Tamworth, Stafford and Warwick, largely based on their continued existence as important medieval boroughs, but also confirmed, or at least supported, by archaeological excavation. Like Chirbury, the specific location of the burh at Runcorn is disputed, but it is assumed to lie somewhere within the township of that name. *Bricge* presents more of a problem, because although scholars are happy to localise the place-name to an area on the River Severn near Bridgnorth (simply ‘Bridge’ before the thirteenth century), there is debate over its precise location. Gelling has set out the parameters of the problem, which concerns a connection with the nearby place-name Quatt, and this is not the place to explore the issue in any detail.[[55]](#footnote-55) Suffice it to note that, whilst some commentators have proposed to locate *Bricge* at Quatford (about 3km downstream from Bridgnorth), equating *Bricge* with Bridgnorth requires fewer assumptions.[[56]](#footnote-56)

# Burh Topography

We turn now to a detailed analysis of the morphology of Æthelflæd’s burhs. The analysis of medieval settlements according to their plan-form has a long pedigree, famously formalised in the work of M. R. G. Conzen.[[57]](#footnote-57) It is usually dependent on the identification of distinctive ‘plan units’, defined by a coherent constellation of morphological elements – streets, burgage plots, market places, churchyards, etc. – which are usually understood to represent discrete phases in the planning, laying out and development of a settlement. Jeremy Haslam, building on earlier work by David Hill and Martin Biddle, has recently proposed that the West Saxon fortified settlements of the Burghal Hidage can nearly all be classified as of either ‘rectilinear’ or ‘linear’ plan-form. The former was equated by Biddle with large burhs such as Winchester, and Haslam’s contribution comprises an elucidation of the characteristics of the latter, which he also calls the ‘High Street’ type, and which he suggests can also be found amongst the burhs of Edward and Æthelflæd north of the Thames, although he does not explicitly feature any of Æthelflæd’s burhs in his analysis. The ‘High street’ type represents those:

in which the main topographical features are arranged around a long high street which runs between and connects two gates at opposite ends of a circuit of defences, along which burgages, or individual land holdings within the town, are arranged at more or less right angles to its length. These burhs generally occupy distinct and distinctive topographical situations on spurs or promontories, generally placed at, and by inference guarding, river crossings and/or causeways.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Haslam’s approach has been criticised for the rather cavalier attitude he adopts to reconstructing the course of defences, and one of the more controversial aspects of his work is the suggestion that many of the plan units comprising these settlements were laid out at their foundation, rather than representing later developments within the inter-mural space.[[59]](#footnote-59) Nevertheless (or perhaps for this reason), it is useful to consider Haslam’s approach alongside our own.

Haslam distils a number of characteristics displayed by his ‘High Street’ burhs, characterising the group so defined as ‘polythetic’: any given burh in the group may display several of these characteristics, but need not display all of them, an approach that allows him to draw in rather more characteristics than is perhaps warranted.[[60]](#footnote-60) In contrast, we have sought to identify topographical common denominators displayed by *all* Æthelflæd’s burhs, which we have characterised as ‘symptoms’. Our symptoms overlap with Haslam’s characteristics in some respects, as discussed further below, but suffice it to note here that most of Haslam’s characteristics have been explicitly excluded from this analysis. First, Haslam includes archaeological evidence for defences or for tenth-century occupation;[[61]](#footnote-61) although of obvious relevance, this is too partial a category of evidence to be compared across burghal locations, relying as it does on the occurrence of excavation. Second, and more contentiously, Haslam invokes various topographical relationships related to the boundaries of burgage plots and other elements of burh plan-forms, seeking to demonstrate an original regular pattern within the burghal space and to locate the lines of defences where these are not known archaeologically.[[62]](#footnote-62) It is our view that arguments concerning the lines of defences are circular until proved or disproved by excavation, as they assume a rationale for such lines that needs first to be demonstrated; moreover the regular patterning of burgage plots, although indicative of episodes of planning, does not necessarily relate to the initial establishment of the burh. The latter concern is important, as it is also appropriate for other characteristics identified by Haslam, such as a nearby ‘Portfield’ (or similar) place-name, the presence of a nearby mill, and a market area associated with the town, perhaps outside one of the gates;[[63]](#footnote-63) it is not clear that these elements distinguish burhs from the later medieval market towns with which many burhs evolved in tandem from the eleventh century onwards, and none of the elements need necessarily relate to the original establishment of a burh (although we would not wish to rule this out). Finally, the presence of what Haslam calls ‘heterogeneous tenure’ will be discussed later in this study.

We propose to concentrate on two major topographical symptoms of burhs: the physical forms of their sites, and the locations of churches within them. We believe both to be intimately related to the initial form of Æthelflæd’s burhs, rather than their subsequent development. Of course, this is easier to accept in the case of physical positioning, as once constructed a burh could not simply be moved. Central in our understanding of burhs is that whatever else they might have been, they were greatly concerned with the control of space and movement, and are therefore always found in positions that controlled movement. We have seen already that this is to some extent reflected in the place-name evidence. Specifically, the burhs at known locations almost all sit at river crossings.[[64]](#footnote-64) Stafford sits on the river Sow, which although itself narrow, flows through a broad area historically comprising a wet landscape of marsh and bog, enclosing the island or peninsula on which Stafford sits . Tamworth is situated to the north of the confluence of the rivers Tame and Anker whose broad flood plains flank the settlement to east and west. The burh at Warwick was founded north of the river Avon, associated with a large flood plain to the south of the burh. Only Eddisbury is not defined in any way by watery landscapes, but its hill-top location is equally striking, and to the south the main road between Chester and Northwich, based ultimately on a Roman forebear, testifies to an intention for this burh also to control movement.

These factors resonate with some of the defining characteristics of Haslam’s ‘High Street’ burhs, specifically his observation that such burhs often occupy a ‘topographically distinct spur of land’ and display a ‘close topographical association with a causeway and/or bridge.’[[65]](#footnote-65) However, it is possible to go further. At each of Æthelflæd’s burhs at known locations, the area defined by these topographical elements takes the form of a broad plateau (see Figure 2). These plateaux are not necessarily perfectly level; Stafford and Eddisbury come closest, whilst the plateaux at Warwick and Tamworth slope gradually upwards away from the rivers that define their southern edges. The plateaux are not necessarily entirely flat either; each features some degree of variation (crucially never very dramatic), resulting in the presence of a ‘highest point’, located fairly centrally within some plateaux (at Stafford and Tamworth), and towards the edge within others (at Eddisbury and Warwick). Where the courses of later medieval wall circuits are known, and are suspected to follow the earlier tenth century defences fairly closely (at Tamworth and Warwick), these maintain a fairly close association with the edges of the plateaux. Such edges are often not overly distinctive (although there are some fairly dramatic river cliffs at Tamworth and Warwick, and Eddisbury speaks for itself), but they can be positively defined by a definite increase in the gradient of the slopes falling away from the plateaux. Sometimes the plateaux continue beyond the area probably occupied by the burh, but usually only on one side (for example, on the north side of Tamworth and along the neck of land on the northern side of the Stafford ‘peninsula’).

**[Figures 2a, 2b, 2c and 2d near here]**

In the cases of the burhs at disputed locations within the townships named after them, progress can be made by seeking these topographical symptoms within the historic centres of later medieval settlement. Runcorn is on the south bank of the river Mersey, where earlier river crossings to the north bank were situated; a ferry crossing is marked on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. Bridgnorth sits above a crossing of the river Severn, on which several roads through the wider region converge. Chirbury is slightly different, as the medieval settlement is located next to a stream rather than a river. Nevertheless, it is the focus of several roads in its region, and notably one of these crosses the stream to head west towards Wales, leading to Montgomery and the Severn valley. Broad plateaux can also be observed at all three sites. The plateau at Chirbury is defined most notably on its western side by a pronounced bank (almost a river cliff) above the stream; to the east the plateau is edged not by a declining slope but by a steeper incline up to higher ground. These two bounds approach each other to the south of the settlement, whilst the plateau continues beyond its northern confines. At Bridgnorth, previous commentators have hypothesised that the burh was located on the site of the later castle, a striking promontory edged by cliffs on three sides, but we suggest that a more likely site is provided by the plateau north of the castle occupied by the later High Town; this is edged by a dramatic cliff above the Severn to the east, and by considerable slopes to the south west, and continues at a steady level beyond the bounds of the medieval settlement to the north. It is worth noting here that the alternative site for *Bricge* at Quatford does not feature a broad plateau, but is instead dominated by a finger of the uplands to the east, which extends towards the floodplain of the Severn and ends at the site of the later castle motte next to the river; this adds a topographical element to the argument against the burh’s location there.

Finally, most scholars have considered the burh at Runcorn lost, ‘obliterated in the nineteenth century … [as] it occupied a rocky promontory jutting out into the deep water channel of the Mersey’.[[66]](#footnote-66) This promontory, named Castle Rock, was largely removed by the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal and the two bridges over the river Mersey.[[67]](#footnote-67) However, if Æthelflæd’s burh was sited on this feature, it would have looked unlike any of those from the corpus we have so far identified. There is, in fact, no evidence for the burh ever having been on the rock; the name itself suggests a fortification but it is certainly not a name that has survived from the early medieval period, and may have been attached to the promontory in the relatively modern era, perhaps in reference to the vestiges of older earthworks that apparently existed upon it.[[68]](#footnote-68) In contrast, the medieval settlement at Runcorn was sited on a plateau much like those described above, which slopes gently downwards towards the river: it is edged to the east by the hollow of what was probably a small stream over which the aptly-named Bridge Street passed, and to the west by the falling away of the land towards the Mersey, which turns to flow southwards here. To the south the plateau is bounded by a steeper incline, as at Chirbury, although the slope is more gradual than that at the latter burh, and therefore contrasts less dramatically with the plateau. In the light of the other burhs in the corpus, this site appears far more likely to have attracted Æthelflæd’s surveyors, and we therefore propose that the burh of Runcorn has in fact not been obliterated, but rather overlooked.

In summary, all seven of Æthelflæd’s burhs for which the name has survived into the modern period were associated with a broad plateau edged on at least two sides by distinctive natural features, most commonly by watery landscapes of varying kinds, from the high river cliff at Bridgnorth to the wide wetlands around Stafford; only Eddisbury lacks an adjacent watercourse, but the distinctive hill slopes around the Castle Ditch earthwork obviously perform the same role. In most cases there is one side (occasionally two) of the burh site that is not so obviously edged, where the ground either maintains its level or even rises; it is therefore possible to suggest that the burhs ‘face’ in certain directions, or at least that they ‘sit back’ against parts of the wider landscape. This has implications when considering travel along the various roads that converge or pass close to the burhs, and the ways in which they would have appeared to those approaching them. For example, Chirbury is most striking when approached from Wales to the west, and Bridgnorth has its greatest effect when approached from the south along the Severn. From a traditionally strategic point of view, some part of both these approach routes are known to have been used by armed forces attacking Mercian territories that were recorded in early medieval chronicles – a Welsh army under Gruffydd ap Llewelyn, who entered England through the Vale of Montgomery in 1039 and defeated an English army, and the Viking army that travelled up the Severn in 895 – and these events could no doubt stand for many more unrecorded that might have prompted the use of these specific sites.[[69]](#footnote-69) However, there is more to be understood here than solely defensive qualities, and it must be remembered that such routes were used for movement with many different kinds of aims and motivation, as is discussed later.

Our second topographical symptom concerns the churches within these burhs. Ӕthelred and Ӕthelflæd appear to have paid close attention to spiritual matters throughout the period, including the building of churches and the promotion of relics, such as the remains of St Oswald which they moved from Bardney (Lincolnshire) into a newly-built church in Gloucester in 909. Alan Thacker long ago summarised the evidence for Æthelflæd’s wider engagement with the cults of Mercian saints, including the dedications of churches in some of her burhs.[[70]](#footnote-70) In later medieval Stafford there was a church dedicated to St Bertelin (Beorhthelm) sited immediately west of the collegiate church of St Mary, and similarly at Runcorn the Augustinian priory established in 1115 was founded in a church dedicated to St Mary and St Bertelin.[[71]](#footnote-71) Thacker proposed that a church dedicated to St Beorhthelm existed first at each place, with the dedications to St Mary added later.[[72]](#footnote-72) Neither church is attested in documentary evidence before the Conquest, although both evidently existed by the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries, and it is likely that both originated in the pre-Conquest period. At Tamworth we find the church of St Editha (St Eadgyth), which again is not directly attested before the Conquest, but is likely to predate it. Thacker was happy to see Æthelflæd’s direction in the coincidence of St Beorhthelm dedications at Stafford and Runcorn, and only declined to assign Tamworth’s St Eadgyth dedication to her because he believed this saint to be a later West Saxon princess; recent work has assigned St Eadgyth an earlier Mercian origin, thus Æthelflæd’s agency can be invoked in Tamworth’s dedication as well.[[73]](#footnote-73)

Whether or not it features a dedication to a local saint, in all six of Æthelflæd’s burhs known to have developed into a later medieval settlement there is a church of certain or probable pre-Conquest origin located at a topographically distinctive point on its burghal plateau. The main parish churches at Stafford, Tamworth, and Chirbury, together with St Leonard’s at Bridgnorth and St Mary’s at Warwick, are located on, or just shy of, the highest point. At Runcorn, the plateau rises gently towards the higher ground at its ‘back’, and the church instead occupies the river frontage, a position most distinctive when viewed from the river ‘in front’ of the burh; it is interesting to note that the ancient ferry crossing that preceded the later Mersey bridges heads straight for the churchyard. All these churches were the primary parochial providers of their later medieval towns, indicating their continuing significance when parochial responsibilities were negotiated and established in the tenth and eleventh centuries.[[74]](#footnote-74)

As argued earlier, later high status does not necessarily indicate such status when the burhs were founded in the early-tenth century, but it is worth noting that five of the six (excluding St Leonard’s at Bridgnorth) emerge with some element of superior status later in the medieval period; some featured attributes that John Blair has described as ‘superior’ when recorded in Domesday Book, such as ‘multiple priests, [and] distinct landholdings and values’, and all five possess evidence for collegiate or portionary communities in or after the eleventh century.[[75]](#footnote-75) There were other churches at Stafford, Warwick and Bridgnorth, but none had significantly sized parishes if they possessed them at all. The collegiate chapel of St Mary Magdalen at Bridgnorth appears initially to have confined its ministrations to the castle there, and was provided with only a small parish on the east side of the Severn at the petition of the townspeople *c*.1330.[[76]](#footnote-76) At Warwick, of the churches within the later town walls, only All Saints appears to have had a parish alongside St Mary’s, although the two were amalgamated in the early twelfth century. From the existing evidence, it is possible that All Saints had the larger parish, encompassing that of St Mary’s which may have been confined within the walls; All Saints sits on a bluff above the river Avon, the kind of site often occupied by earlier minster churches, and it has been suggested that it represents an earlier minster to which the burh was later added.[[77]](#footnote-77) The church of St Chad in Stafford, probably an episcopal foundation, had a tiny parish that may have served the bishop’s tenants within the town.

In summary, we suggest that all of Æthelflæd’s identified burhs display a specific morphological form: a broad plateau was defined by distinct topographical edges, and a church was located at the most distinctive topographical position on that plateau. We would agree with Haslam that ‘plan-forms with common characteristics are indicative of similar functions’; [[78]](#footnote-78) the similarities shared by Æthelflæd’s burhs therefore indicate a ‘standard model’ in the minds of her surveyors when seeking out sites and laying out burhs on the ground. The meaning of such a model requires further discussion, and will no doubt continue to be debated. The importance of churches within this model is, we suggest, a particularly significant element. The provisioning of burhs with religious resources in this way does seem to have been a response particular to Æthelflæd, as both Alfred and Edward the Elder ‘excluded all foundations except nunneries (saving Winchester) [from burhs], and none of the new early tenth-century bishoprics in Wessex had their seats in burhs’.[[79]](#footnote-79)

# Æthelflæd and her Burhs

Interpretation of this standard topographical model is aided by consideration of the only other context associated with Æthelred and Æthelflæd in which the word burh is explicitly used. A surviving Old English charter (S 223), dated 884x899, predates the establishment of the burhs recorded in the Mercian Register, but shows the Mercian rulers creating something explicitly called a burh (*burh*) at Worcester (*æt Weogernaceastre*).[[80]](#footnote-80) The text is worth reproducing in full:

To Almighty God, the True Unity and the Holy Trinity in heaven, be praise and honour and thanksgiving for all the benefits which he has granted us. For whose love in the first place, and for that of St Peter and of the church at Worcester, and also at the request of Bishop Wærferth their friend, Ealdorman Æthelred and Æthelflæd ordered the *burh* at Worcester to be built for the protection of all the people, and also to exalt the praise of God therein. And they now make known, with the witness of God, in this charter, that they will grant to God and St Peter and to the lord of that church half of all the rights [*gerihta*] which belong to their lordship [*hlaforddome*], whether in the marketplace [*ceapstowe*] or in the street [*stræte*], both within the *burh* and outside; that things may be more honourably maintained in that foundation and also that they may more easily help the community to some extent; and that their memory may be the more firmly observed in that place for ever, as long as obedience to God shall continue in that minster.

And Bishop Wærferth and the community have appointed these divine offices before that which is done daily, both during their life and after their death; i.e. at every matins and at every vespers and at every tierce, the psalm *De profundis* as long as they live, and after their death *Laudate Dominum;* and every Saturday in St Peter’s church thirty psalms and a mass for them, both for them living and also departed.

And moreover Æthelred and Æthelflæd make known that they will grant this to God and St Peter with willing heart in the witness of King Alfred and of all the councillors who are in the land of the Mercians; except that the wagon-shilling [*wægnscilling*] and the load-penny [*seampending*]go to the king as they have always done at Droitwich. But otherwise, land-payment [*landfeoh*], the fine for fighting [*fihtewite*], or theft [*stale*], or dishonest trading [*wohceapung*], and damages to the burh-wall [*burhwealles sceapinge*], and all the [fines for] offences which admit of compensation [*æra wonessa ∂e to ænigre bote gebyrie*], are to belong half to the lord of the church, for the sake of God and St Peter, exactly as it has been laid down as regards the marketplace and the streets. And outside the marketplace, the bishop is to be entitled to his land [*lands*] and all his rights [*gerihta*], just as our predecessors established and privileged it.

And Æthelred and Æthelflæd did this in the witness of King Alfred and of all the councillors of the Mercians whose names are written hereafter. And they implore all their successors in the name of Almighty God that no one may diminish this charitable gift which they have given to that church for the love of God and St Peter’.[[81]](#footnote-81)

This burh was added to a pre-existing episcopal centre, which had been founded in the late seventh century and appears in charters from the eighth century onwards.[[82]](#footnote-82) Archaeological work has indicated that the enclosure constructed by Æthelred and Æthelflæd was sited north of the cathedral precinct, its southern part perhaps imposed over the slighted northern line of a Roman enclosure in which the cathedral had been founded.[[83]](#footnote-83) It is worth noting that this new burh, so defined, fits the ‘standard model’ proposed here, with the parish church of St Helen sited atop a distinctive plateau edged by a dramatic river cliff to the west and more gradual down-slopes to the south and east.[[84]](#footnote-84)

There has been some dispute as to how this charter should be placed within the chronology and process of development at Worcester. Richard Holt has suggested that the document is essentially the foundation charter for the burh at Worcester; however, he argues that the half-share of their lordship granted to the church and bishop by Æthelred and Æthelflæd should not actually be understood as a gift, but as a usurpation of half the pre-existing rights that had belonged to the episcopal see.[[85]](#footnote-85) A significant portion of these rights concern dues emerging from trading activities (discussed further below), and Holt’s suggestion that these were originally associated with an eighth-century trading shore by the Severn, evidenced by *sceatta* find spots, enables him to downplay any intent on the part of Æthelred and Æthelflæd to establish a new trading site in the burh. This underwrites Holt’s conformity to Astill’s position on the late-tenth-century context of urban expansion.[[86]](#footnote-86)

More recently, Jeremy Haslam has challenged Holt’s argument, disputing his reading of the gift of rights in the charter as an appropriation of those rights, and minimizing the significance of the eighth-century trading shore or later tenth-century economic expansion to the early tenth-century context in order to emphasise the role of Æthelred and Æthelflæd in establishing new conditions within the burh.[[87]](#footnote-87) . However, Haslam himself overlooks the explicit reference in the charter to the building of the burh to propose that the charter represents a secondary renovation by the Lord and Lady of the Mercians of a burh originally built by Alfred *c*.880.[[88]](#footnote-88) But this conclusion rests on a chain of inferences ultimately rooted in a wider model of the chronology and political context of burghal development that Haslam has developed outside any consideration of the context of the Worcester charter.[[89]](#footnote-89) Haslam claims that his proposal makes sense of ‘puzzling’ features in the charter, largely related to the apparently royal nature of the rights granted by Æthelred and Æthelflæd, who were only Lord and Lady of the Mercians, not King and Queen, but the idea that this should puzzle us assumes rather more than we can securely know about the division of powers between King Alfred and his daughter and son-in-law.

The rights granted by the charter require some comment. We have no guarantee that the rights explicitly listed comprise the totality of the lordship (*hlaforddome*) granted by Æthelred and Æthelflæd, but it does at least appear to be intended as a fairly complete list, as it is placed in contradiction to rights that were not conveyed and remained with King Alfred. The ‘fine for fighting’ (*fihtewite*) is a rather obscure penalty that makes its earliest appearance in Ine’s seventh-century lawcode; by the early tenth century the right to receive it, along with the fines or *wites* for what the charter styles as ‘all the offences which admit of compensation’, such as theft (*stale* in the charter), was increasingly being granted to royal favourites, creating ‘a class of lords who were *wites wyrðe* or *weres wyrðe* (literally, ‘fine-worthy’ or ‘wergild-worthy’) and thus entitled to the *wite* and wergild forfeitures of their men.’[[90]](#footnote-90) These men lived both within their lords’ households and as dependent householders on their own lands, and the express grant of such rights in charters and writs had been formalised in the legal jingle ‘sake and soke’ by the eleventh century.

The wagon-shilling and the load-penny reserved by King Alfred in the charter were probably fairly typical of a range of payments later expressed by the word *toll* in eleventh-century writs and other grants, encompassing trade in a market place and the carrying of traded goods; it is notable that the charter does not explicitly mention market tolls, which we might otherwise have expected given the prominence of the market-place in the text. The rights from ‘dishonest trading’ (*wohceapung*) in the charter can be fruitfully compared with *team*, a right often granted with *toll* in later centuries through the legal jingle ‘*toll* and *team*’. *Team* conveyed the profits of the procedure of ‘vouching to warranty’: ‘someone charged with possessing stolen goods could clear himself of liability by swearing that he bought them in good faith from someone else, a process known to legal historians as ‘vouching’ this third party ‘to warranty’.’[[91]](#footnote-91) Finally, ‘land-payment’ (*landfeoh*) probably occupies the same rather broad semantic field as *gafol*, which can be found in tenth- and eleventh century documents describing the dues paid by dependent households to a landholder, but which had a wider meaning of ‘tribute’, especially in royal contexts, and can be compared with the *land-gafol* rendered by burgesses in many later boroughs.[[92]](#footnote-92)

A crucial point here is that none of these dues is necessarily something that a lord would have simply by virtue of holding land; most, quite possibly all, represent profits that, by the tenth century, were depicted as specifically royal dues that might be taken by a lord only upon receipt of a royal grant. Æthelred and Æthelflæd no doubt claimed these rights as wielders of royal power in Mercia, admittedly under the kingship of Alfred who retained some rights, and the charter makes clear that their possession was limited to the market-place (*ceapstowe*) and the street (*stræte*); outside these the bishop was ‘to be entitled to his land (*lands*) and all his rights (*gerihta*), just as our predecessors established and privileged it’, presumably referring to the endowment of the see by previous Mercian kings. Taking the charter at its word, by-passing the contortions of Holt and Haslam, the market-place and street appear to represent the space newly-constructed by Æthelred and Æthelflæd, and the fact of their role in its construction would explain their initial possession of these rights.

Worcester was not the only burh to be characterised by its market-place and streets at this time. An earlier charter (dated 889) from King Alfred and Æthelred, ‘sub-king and father of the Mercians’, gave to the same Wærferth, bishop of Worcester, an enclosure within the burh of London free of all dues, to be used for buying and selling; outside this enclosure, ‘whether in the public street or on the trading shore (*vel in strata publica seu in ripa em[p]torali*)’, the king was to take toll on any mercantile activity.[[93]](#footnote-93) It appears from yet another charter (dated 904) that Wærferth also possessed a similar enclosure in the burh at Worcester, located on the bank of the Severn next to (or encompassing) Holt’s postulated earlier trading shore, as the bishop leased it in that year to Æthelred and Æthelflæd.[[94]](#footnote-94) This enclosure can be plausibly understood as an element of the bishop’s established ‘land and rights‘ referred to in the earlier charter given by the rulers of Mercia, and may well have predated the construction of the burh surrounding it. To summarise the last few paragraphs: the conceptual geography of the kind of burh constructed by Æthelred and Æthelflæd during this period comprised a wall and associated streets and market place (‘both within the burh and outside’), over which those wielding royal power had right to royal dues associated with trade, justice and landholding, sometimes interrupted by exempt areas in which the royal rights had been granted away to another (whether before or after the burh’s construction).

The Worcester charter thus allows us to formulate a model of one way that the space within a burh was conceived by Æthelflæd and her circle. In part, this conception is focused on what the Mercian lord and lady actually constructed: the wall or fortification is an obvious constructed feature, and the street (OE *str­ǣt*, *strēt* ) should be understood in like manner, as the word applied specifically to paved roads;[[95]](#footnote-95) perhaps a market-place was also a paved or metalled area. In part, it is also concerned with the elements in the burh that provided a source of cash or other renders. But it is also a mental geography that can be usefully mapped on to the ‘standard model’ of burh morphology revealed by this study; in particular, the churches in Æthelflæd’s burhs were plausibly located within enclosures set apart from the space defined by street and market-place elsewhere within the burhs, and such enclosures are hinted at by the property boundaries that appear on historical maps, although archaeological intervention would be required before too much can be read into these. As discussed earlier, we consider it difficult to argue that the later plan-forms of streets and burgage plots of medieval towns originated largely *in toto* in the early tenth century, at least without archaeological confirmation, but the spaces within the burhs must have been divided up somehow, and the Worcester charter is striking in its emphasis on the market-place (*ceapstowe*). This must return us at last to the debate over military and commercial readings of burhs.

At the outset, Astill’s impression of a late tenth-century economic take-off must be admitted, but the emphasis should be on an *increase* and *expansion* of commercial activity, which as Astill notes ‘was essentially dependent on an intensification of both agricultural production and trade’;[[96]](#footnote-96) this need not serve to deny the plausibility of earlier commerce in some form, and indeed such commerce might have served to encourage the intensification of agriculture and the trade in its products. The fact that burhs were initially different kinds of places from the medieval market towns does not mean that trade was not part of their remit from the outset. A general appeal to commerce, however, takes us only so far; we need to think about how commerce might have been entangled within early tenth-century society. Astill, again speaking from the archaeological evidence, suggests that ‘the most economically diverse sites in ninth-century England were to be located at aristocratic sites and central places; in other words, the present evidence suggests that proto-urban [that is, burghal] centres satisfied aristocratic needs and had little relevance for the majority of the population, a pattern that some also see in Domesday.’ [[97]](#footnote-97) We might question the idea that burhs were of ‘little relevance for the majority’, given that obligations for their maintenance and defence were distributed across their surrounding territories, but the main task here must be a tighter definition of ‘aristocratic need’.

As outlined earlier, Richard Holt has largely accepted the absence of commercial activity in burhs before the late tenth century, but his discussion of their tenth-century form otherwise presents some interesting possibilities. In particular he notes that, during that century, ‘a significant number of the aristocratic class regarded one or other of the boroughs [burhs] as their principle residence’.[[98]](#footnote-98) Notably, the Mercian Register records that Æthelflæd died at Tamworth in 918 and Ælfweard, son of Edward the Elder, died at Oxford in 924; presumably neither had gone to these places specifically to die, but had died whilst there on other business, and their deaths may hint at the centrality of these burhs in the lives and deaths of the elite class more generally from the early tenth century.[[99]](#footnote-99) Thus, according to Holt, burhs began life as elite centres, housing the most important members of the thegnly class in each region, whose roles were bound up with service to the king or other paramount lord, and in particular military service. These thegns’ households within the burhs were, he suggests, often supported by rural manors that had been assigned to them, and which appear as urban–rural tenurial connections in later documents such as Domesday Book. Holt contrasts this initial burghal pattern with the direction of their development in the eleventh century: ‘the pattern of the tenth century, of rural estates supporting a borough [burh]-based aristocracy, had become by 1066 a phenomenon of urban houses belonging to an aristocracy now based for the most part in the countryside’.[[100]](#footnote-100)

Jeremy Haslam has recently argued that most of the urban–rural tenurial connections were created in the early tenth century when the burhs were built, and whilst his elucidation of burghal administrative territories that pre-date the shire territories of the later-tenth century is largely convincing, his precise chronology of the their formation relies on several chains of inference and assumption.[[101]](#footnote-101) It is certainly plausible to envisage the thegns living in the burhs being provisioned by their rural estates, or those of their lords, but it is also worth highlighting how much we do not know about this kind of organisation and the chronology of its establishment. Indeed, it is here that a role for tenth-century commerce can be proposed, to be understood as complementary to, rather than at odds with, the burhs’ military roles. If, as Baker and Brookes suggest, the late-ninth- and early-tenth-century burhs were innovative because of the permanence of their garrisons, as opposed to the earlier use of temporary strongholds, refuges and camps, then it can be suggested that a useful lens through which to view the burhs is that of a camp for an army on campaign or perhaps its baggage train. As with many aspects of this period, we run up against a lack of explicit evidence, but some tentative suggestions can be made. From Alfred’s day (and in fact long before) warriors had been called out according to the amount of land they held, and thus according to their ability to support themselves as thegns on campaign.[[102]](#footnote-102) Part of that support involved an ability to acquire perishable provisions along the way, and whilst the burhs may well have acted as stockpiles of such provisions, supplied by thegns’ rural estates and distributed according to need, Ryan Lavelle has suggested that warriors and their retinues also purchased provisions.[[103]](#footnote-103) In fact, mechanisms for the allocation and redistribution of provisions between the retinues (or mobile households) of thegns on campaign are not at all well understood, and it is possible that in the *ceapstowa* of the early-tenth-century burhs we see a manifestation of the kind of mobile market in provisions that might have accompanied contemporary armies. If so, this was no mere practicality; logistics were also symbolic, and as Lavelle puts it, ‘it was important to eat and drink *well*’, in order that lordly status and the prestige of the army be maintained.

In this way, the idea of burhs as permanent campaign camps also resonates with the work of scholars who stress their roles as royal power centres, notably because the activities associated with mustering the army and gathering at royal assemblies were significantly elided during this period.[[104]](#footnote-104) The significance of assembly at a burh therefore had far more than simply military significance, and might easily extend into other spheres. Tom Lambert, building on the work of George Molyneaux, has proposed that King Alfred and his heirs ‘experimented’ with burhs as a means of legal administration, focusing on the advantages of the reeves in the burhs over the reeves of local estates that the king had previously relied upon: ‘all free men were meant to have a duty to maintain their local burh, and perhaps even to garrison it when necessary … everyone ought to have had some contact with their burh- or port-reeve, and these men worked for the king, whereas many local rural reeves worked for other lords.’[[105]](#footnote-105) Kings could thus place greater reliance on burh-reeves, who were also more likely to be persons of standing than rural reeves, to guarantee the witnessing of commercial transactions or raise thief-catching posses. Molyneaux and Lambert agree that this experiment was not particularly successful, but that its faults lay in the sparse distribution of burhs and the inability of burh-reeves to mobilise local notables to play their parts in the king’s justice; its augmentation later in the tenth century with the creation of shires and hundreds, which might themselves have owed something to the organisation of the army, proved more affective.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Equally integral to the organisation and function of a burh was the church. The religious aspect to the Æthelflædan burhs is not one that should be underestimated; the power of prayer in defending against and eventually defeating their heathen enemy was clear to the Christian English. In the Worcester charter discussed above, the adjacent episcopal church was an explicit beneficiary of Æthelred and Æthelflæd’s gift, along with St Peter (the dedicatee of the church) and Bishop Wærferth, the church’s lord (*hlaford*). The relationship of Æthelred and Æthelflæd with Wærferth and the church was reciprocal: both partners supported the burh and its security, built (*bewyrcean*) both for the ‘protection’ of the people and ‘to exalt the praise of God’. Moreover, Æthelred and Æthelflæd granted ‘half the rights which belong to their lordship’ in return for psalms and prayers ‘both for them living and also departed’. Prayer, no less than the wall of the burh, was a kind of fortification in itself against the heathen armies, and formed part of a balanced sharing of resources and responsibilities contributed by both parties to ensure the success of the burh. Moreover, these prayers were to be paid for by the fines raised in the market-place and street, and so by the corrective penalties that were imposed to encourage the formation of a more Christian people.

Æthelflæd’s use of relics is also instructive. In translating St Oswald from Bardney to Gloucester in 909, she and her husband were sanctifying a former Roman city that they appear to have made the paramount centre of their realm; a new mint was established there along with a royal complex at Kingsholm and a new high-status minster, St Peter’s (later St Oswald’s), where both were eventually buried.[[107]](#footnote-107) Its continued importance is testified by the fact that Æthelstan, Æthelflæd’s nephew and later king of England, granted land to the minster and later died there.[[108]](#footnote-108) St Oswald’s appeal was wide-ranging, although he was in particular a king who had fought against and been martyred by pagans.[[109]](#footnote-109) It has been suggested that Æthelflæd also be credited with the translation of St Wærburh’s relics from Hanbury (Staffordshire) to Chester, although if so it is odd to find no mention of it in the Mercian Register, which records Oswald’s translation, and it is perhaps unwise to give Æthelflæd a monopoly on the translation of saints in north-west Mercia.[[110]](#footnote-110) Æthelred and Æthelflæd also supported the pre-existing cult of St Milburh at Much Wenlock, to whom they gave a gold chalice, as recorded in a surviving original charter of 901, and this may represent one instance of patronage more widely bestowed across other Mercian churches.[[111]](#footnote-111) The dedication of churches within the corpus of burhs studied here to Mercian saints, and presumably the translation of at least partial relics within them, thus sits within a wider religious strategy, which can be paralleled not only in other parts of Britain but across parts of the Carolingian world at this time.[[112]](#footnote-112) Whether the choice of these particular cults reflected Æthelflæd’s relationship with their parent communities or her revival of then-dormant Mercian intercessors remain subjects for further study. In any case, as Graham Jones has noted, in Mercia ‘political readings were particularly important’ in articulating sainthood and Christianity.[[113]](#footnote-113)

One of the more important conclusions of the present study is that the ‘standard model’ observable in the morphology of all of Æthelflæd’s burhs implies intended roles and functions that were common to all. The preceding discussion has promoted and suggested several different meanings that Æthelflæd might have attached to or intended to establish at her burhs: the organisation of the Mercian elite as an army, the participation of that elite in royal assemblies, and the invocation of heavenly intercession on behalf of that elite, all of which entailed a variety of activities, such as the presence of a market in provisions, the administration of justice at burghal courts, and the installation of relic cults. It is possible to draw these various meanings and roles together by considering a more general concept of protection in early tenth-century society. Tom Lambert has emphasised a general notion concerning the peace (OE *frið*) of the kingdom, prevalent since the seventh century, but which kings used especially in the tenth century to justify their laws, and to which they appealed when trying to encourage communal efforts in its maintenance and improvement:

It seems to have been understood that *frið* could best be improved not only by threatening ever more frightening punishments to deter thieves, but also by imposing tighter communal legal procedures (such as those requiring purchases to be witnessed) which ensured legitimate and illegitimate transfers of property could readily be distinguished.[[114]](#footnote-114)

Lambert’s work is notable for proposing that Anglo-Saxon legal reforms were largely intended to work with (rather than end) the use of violence in contexts of kin-based feud within society at large, and that kings used a variety of means, including the extension of royal protection, in attempts to channel such violence towards the improvement of the kingdom’s peace. Explicit legal statements of specific royal protections are only apparent in and after the reign of King Edmund (r. 939–946), and burhs were never the object of spatial protections (which were applied to houses, churches and roads).[[115]](#footnote-115) Nevertheless, burhs can usefully be understood as elements within a broader notion of protective ambitions developed by King Alfred and his heirs in both Wessex and Mercia, in which Viking armies were only one threat against which they were intended to defend: burhs were literally protected, as spaces surrounded by a wall, and also served as bases for the protective campaigns of the army, but they were also places wherein the practice of legitimate trade was intended to be protected, where the availability of legal redress was intended to create a more law-abiding people, more pleasing to God and thus more likely to benefit from His protection, a divine force also sought through religious patronage and the promotion of prayer, all of which were ultimately conducive to the protection of the kingdom’s peace. In this sense, the desire of Æthelred and Æthelflæd to build the burh at Worcester ‘for the protection of all the people’ takes on many new meanings.

The foregoing has been concerned to connect the evidence of our symptoms-based approach to Æthelflæd’s burhs, and the conclusions it allows regarding a distinct programme of standardised strongholds in north-west Mercia, with possibilities concerning the motivations that might have informed it. In this concluding section we focus on the specific historical contexts of Æthelflæd’s activities. We begin in Gloucester. According to the chronicler Æthelweard, writing about a century later, Gloucester, a former Roman city in the old Mercian province of the Hwicce, had been occupied by the Danish army in 877 when the Mercian king Ceolwulf II agreed to divide his kingdom with them.[[116]](#footnote-116) Two years later, a year after Alfred’s victory at Edington, Ceolwulf was removed from rule, and Æthelred seems to have succeeded him, by 883 at the latest Æthelred had submitted to Alfred and was thereafter styled ‘ealdorman’ or ‘lord’, though he appears to have effectively ruled Mercia like a king;[[117]](#footnote-117) Alfred’s project was a ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’ combining the dominions of Wessex south of the Thames with all of Mercia free of Danish rule.[[118]](#footnote-118) Æthelred’s relationship to Alfred was sealed by his marriage to Alfred’s eldest daughter Æthelflæd by 887 at the latest, when they witnessed a charter together.[[119]](#footnote-119) The two of them then went on to re-invigorate Gloucester as the centre of their new realm: a Mercian council was held at Gloucester in 896 and Æthelred and Æthelflæd founded a new minster there, later to house the relics of St Oswald.[[120]](#footnote-120) By 901 Æthelred and Æthelflæd had also built a burh at the episcopal centre at Worcester and in 907, in the words of the Mercian Register, they ‘restored’ or ‘renewed’ (*ge-edniwod*) Chester. Like Gloucester, these were old Roman settlements, and their activities there can be seen as an ongoing re-vitalisation of pre-existing territorial centres with a venerable pedigree. These activities might have included a renewal of old defences, and the Mercian rulers may well have constructed new burhs at these places (such as that built at Worcester in 899), but if so they formed only one element, and not necessarily a definitive one, in more complex settlement morphologies.

Æthelred died in 911, a year after the Battle of Tettenhall (Staffordshire) in 910, at which an army of the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ kingdom drawn from both its West Saxon and Mercian provinces had defeated a raiding army from Danish Northumbria. The first of the burhs within the corpus studied here, *Bremesburh*,was also built in 910, seemingly whilst Æthelred was alive, although the Mercian Register attributes this action to Æthelflæd alone; perhaps Æthelred was already ailing.[[121]](#footnote-121) In many ways these two years mark an important shift in Æthelflæd’s life, not least in her attitude to burh-building. The burhs that she built in and after 910 may or may not have been built on sites already occupied by settlements of one kind or another, but other than Tamworth (and perhaps Warwick) none of them are known to have been significant centres before this period, the sites of important episcopal or royal minsters or large Roman cities, and thus they contrast distinctly with places like Gloucester, Worcester and Chester. In any event, the ten burhs Æthelflæd built in the six years from 910 to 915 represent a far greater sense of urgency than the restoration of a few ancient power centres that she and her husband accomplished across the previous three decades, and it seems very likely that this period posed new challenges to both Æthelflæd and the Mercian ruling elite.

The years after Æthelred’s death have been characterised by a previous generation of scholars as a time of productive partnership between Æthelflæd and her brother Edward, during which the two ‘reconquered’ the east midlands from the Danes.[[122]](#footnote-122) More recently, however, scholars have begun to question this. For example, it has become apparent that Æthelred and Æthelflæd maintained a rather antagonistic stance towards Alfred and Edward through the ‘proxies’ of Welsh kings within their respective patronages and lordships, the Mercian rulers aiding those in the north of Wales against those in the south-east protected by the West Saxons, and this continued up to Æthelflæd’s death.[[123]](#footnote-123) Likewise, Edward’s removal of Æthelflæd’s heir, Ælfwynn, in 918 after her mother’s death indicates considerable anxiety on Edward’s part about the intentions of the Mercian elite. As Pauline Stafford has noted, the chronicles that record these events take clear and divergent routes to understanding them: Edward is ‘virtually absent’ from the Mercian Register, just as ‘the Achronicle excludes Æthelflæd as systematically as these entries ignore Edward’, noticing her just once, upon her death, as ‘Edward’s sister’; thus ‘to read all this [the campaigns in 917] as a simple ‘partnership’ and division of responsibility between is to lose the historic sense of Mercia which these actions also express’. [[124]](#footnote-124) Æthelflæd and Ælfwynn therefore appear to have embodied ambitions within the Mercian elite that were not aligned with those of the West Saxon establishment to the south. Æthelflæd, as the first-born child of Alfred of Wessex, was not an obvious Mercian; although her mother Ealhswith was a Mercian, the daughter of an ealdorman called Æthelred and his wife, Eadburh, a ‘notable woman’ of the ‘royal stock of the king of the Mercians’ according to Alfred’s biographer Asser and likely to have been a descendant of King Coenwulf, the same ancestry applied equally to Edward. Æthelflæd must therefore have ‘become’ Mercian through her time with Æthelred, so that on his death she was sufficiently supported by the Mercian elite as to make removing her unwise.

Nevertheless, in 911 (or perhaps around 910 if Æthelred’s health declined over time), Æthelflæd and her circle must have appreciated that circumstances had changed, her husband’s relationship with Wessex no longer defining the political space of the ‘kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons’. Her subsequent burh-building programme was concentrated in the northern part of the territory that she nominally ruled, and it is perhaps to its effects on the elite of that region, as much as against any Viking threat, that we should turn. It cannot be denied that several of Æthelflæd’s burhs appear to control access into her kingdom from outside: Runcorn and Eddisbury, when coupled with the city at Chester, cover routes from the Irish Sea and both along and across the Mersey River; Chirbury controls the main route through the Vale of Montgomery from mid Wales. To the east, the burhs at Stafford, Tamworth and Warwick have often been seen as part of a frontier against the Danish armies in the east midlands, but they should perhaps also (or even more so) be recognised as controlling the route between the Thames estuary in the south-east and access to the Irish Sea in the north-west, used by Danish armies in 893 and 895; likewise, Bridgnorth, when coupled with Gloucester and Worcester to the south, controlled the route up the Severn also used by an army in 893.[[125]](#footnote-125) However, according to the analysis presented above, Æthelflæd’s burhs were not performing all their roles unless they also actively maintained the peace of the provinces they were set in.

If the ‘Viking Age’ had one overriding implication for the population of the British Isles, it was not the ethnic hostility of one people against another, nor even the religious hostility of Christian against pagan, but the crumbling of old allegiances and the weakening of sources of political legitimacy caused by decades of armies criss-crossing the land, harrying and expropriating as they went. Political life became more fluid, less securely channelled through the old dynastic pathways. Æthelflæd’s cousin Æthelwold demonstrated the possibilities of using Danish armies to political advantage when he marched against her brother’s rule with East Anglian help in 904.[[126]](#footnote-126) The northern parts of Æthelflæd’s Mercian realm were furthest from her centres of power in the Severn valley, and is seems plausible to propose that the death of Æthelred prompted her to dwell on the hearts and minds of the people nominally within her rulership. Those ‘people’, for whose ‘protection’ the burhs were constructed, were not the mass of the population, but the elite, the thegns whose services Æthelflæd and her circle relied upon; any notion of crisis during this period must be applied to the ruling class, not those farming populations made tributary to them. In launching a burh-building project across northern Mercia, Æthelflæd was effectively attempting to reconstitute a Mercian ‘people’ more tightly bound to her rule as Lady of the Mercians. That she in some way succeeded may be indicated by the entry in the Mercian Register for the year 913 (written around the late 920s), which records rather formally that ‘God helping, Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians, went *with all the Mercians* to Tamworth’, in the former heartland of the Mercian kingdom.[[127]](#footnote-127)

Motivation born of a need to strengthen and consolidate rulership might also be ascribed to Æthelflæd’s brother Edward. : The burhs he built between 912 and 917 were all located in territories already nominally ruled by him, either that of ‘London and Oxford and … all the lands which belonged thereto’ to which he ‘succeeded’ after Æthelred’s death, or Essex, which had been ruled by one of Edward’s ealdormen since at least the mid-890s.[[128]](#footnote-128) Edward might have viewed both areas as less securely within his own rulership, the one having recently been ruled by Mercians, the other on the periphery of the West Saxon dominions and subject to much Danish military activity. Indeed, the agitation amongst the Danish armies in the east midlands, first the raids of those of Northampton and Leicester in 913, then the submission of that of Bedford in 914 and 915, and finally the raids and submissions of those of Northampton, Huntingdon, Cambridge, East Anglia and Essex in 917, might all be understood as the escalation of conflict provoked by the beginning of Edward’s burh-building in 912.[[129]](#footnote-129) Likewise, Æthelflæd’s decision to attack the Danish armies at Derby in 917 and Leicester in 918 might be read as part of the same escalation (perhaps with an eye to her brother’s increasingly militant presence in the Mercian east midlands), with her previous burh-building perhaps also considered provocative by these armies. It is thus possible to read the actions of both Æthelflæd and her brother as initially concerned with (competitive?) consolidation in peripheral parts of their territories, and the campaigns against Danish armies in the east midlands as a contingent effect of this.

If Edward and Æthelflæd were engaged in similar projects, albeit not necessarily as partners, Æthelflæd’s burhs were nevertheless distinctive in her founding of churches within them, and our analysis suggests that at least six of the seven burhs that can be identified within the corpus possessed such a church, which was moreover positioned at a topographically distinctive place within the burghal space.[[130]](#footnote-130) We have no reason to think that Æthelflæd was more pious than her brother, and Edward’s foundation of the New Minster in Winchester in 901 testifies to his interest in spiritual concerns.[[131]](#footnote-131) Æthelflæd’s ecclesiastical foundations must have had some distinctive additional motivation. This was no doubt connected to her promotion of Mercian saints within some of her churches, which Alan Thacker suggests served as a strategy ‘to render West Saxon rule and reorganisation more acceptable’.[[132]](#footnote-132) The foregoing discussion has suggested that ‘West Saxon’ rule was not the primary issue, rather it was Æthelflæd’s ‘Mercian’ rulership as set up to some extent against her brother’s realm.

Finally, reference to episcopal concerns is useful here: the territory covered by Æthelflæd’s burhs was predominantly situated within the diocese of Lichfield, and notably all the burhs certainly situated in that diocese housed churches dedicated to local saints.[[133]](#footnote-133) The bishops of Lichfield during this period are shadowy figures, largely due to lack of explicit evidence, but the last of those who served under Æthelflæd, Ælfwine, emerges into the limelight in the mid-920s during Æthelstan’s reign. His position in episcopal witness lists, third after the two archbishops, appended to a distinctive set of charters drafted by a scribe of probable Mercian origin known to scholars as ‘Æthelstan A’, has prompted suggestions that he played a significant role in Æthelstan’s administration.[[134]](#footnote-134) Crucially, Ælfwine also appears in a charter (surviving only as a later copy) dated to 9th September 915 and drafted at the newly-built burh at *Weardbyrig*.[[135]](#footnote-135) The witness list depicts a Mercian gathering attended by four bishops, two ealdormen, three abbots, and others. Ælfwine’s later significance need not have originated this early, but given that he was one of Æthelflæd’s bishops, listed first before the rest of his episcopal colleagues, at a time when Æthelflæd was founding burhs in his diocese and churches in those burhs, we can plausibly suggest that he had a view on this. To speculate a little, we may envision Æthelflæd working in partnership with Ælfwine, reconstituting a Mercian people not only as a community of thegns in service to the Mercian ruler, but as a Christian community guided by their shepherd at Lichfield, who might, like Æthelflæd, have needed to renew his relationship with his flock during this period. Finally, just as Æthelflæd sought to assemble an extensive retinue across her northern Mercian territories by building burhs for their protection, so Ælfwine perhaps helped her to invoke the help of a new group of intercessors for spiritual protection by reviving the cults of local Mercian saints. And so whilst Æthelflæd’s burh-building across the north-west Midlands played its part in a broader social and political transformation across many parts of Britain, we can see that some elements and motivating factors were borne of a distinctive Æthelflædan approach to a distinctively Mercian set of problems.

We wish to express our gratitude to Dr Nigel Tringham, Dr John Baker, and two anonymous reviewers for reading and commenting on earlier versions of the text.

Word Count: 17,899

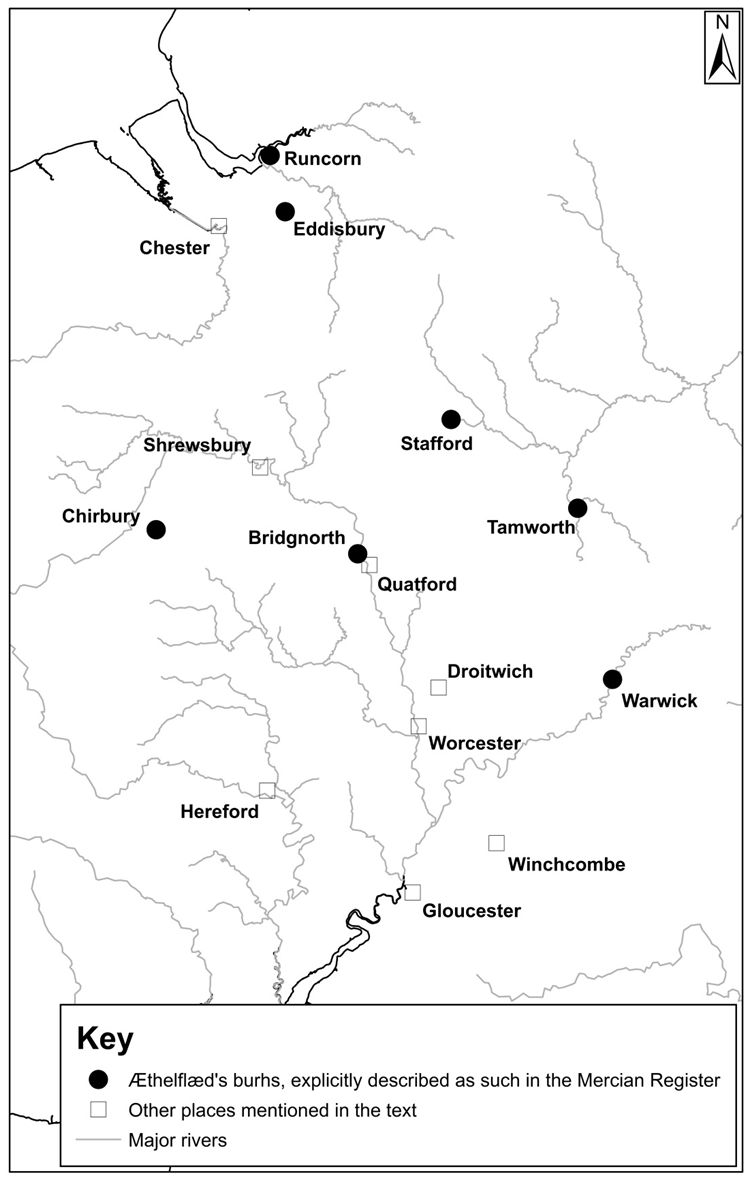
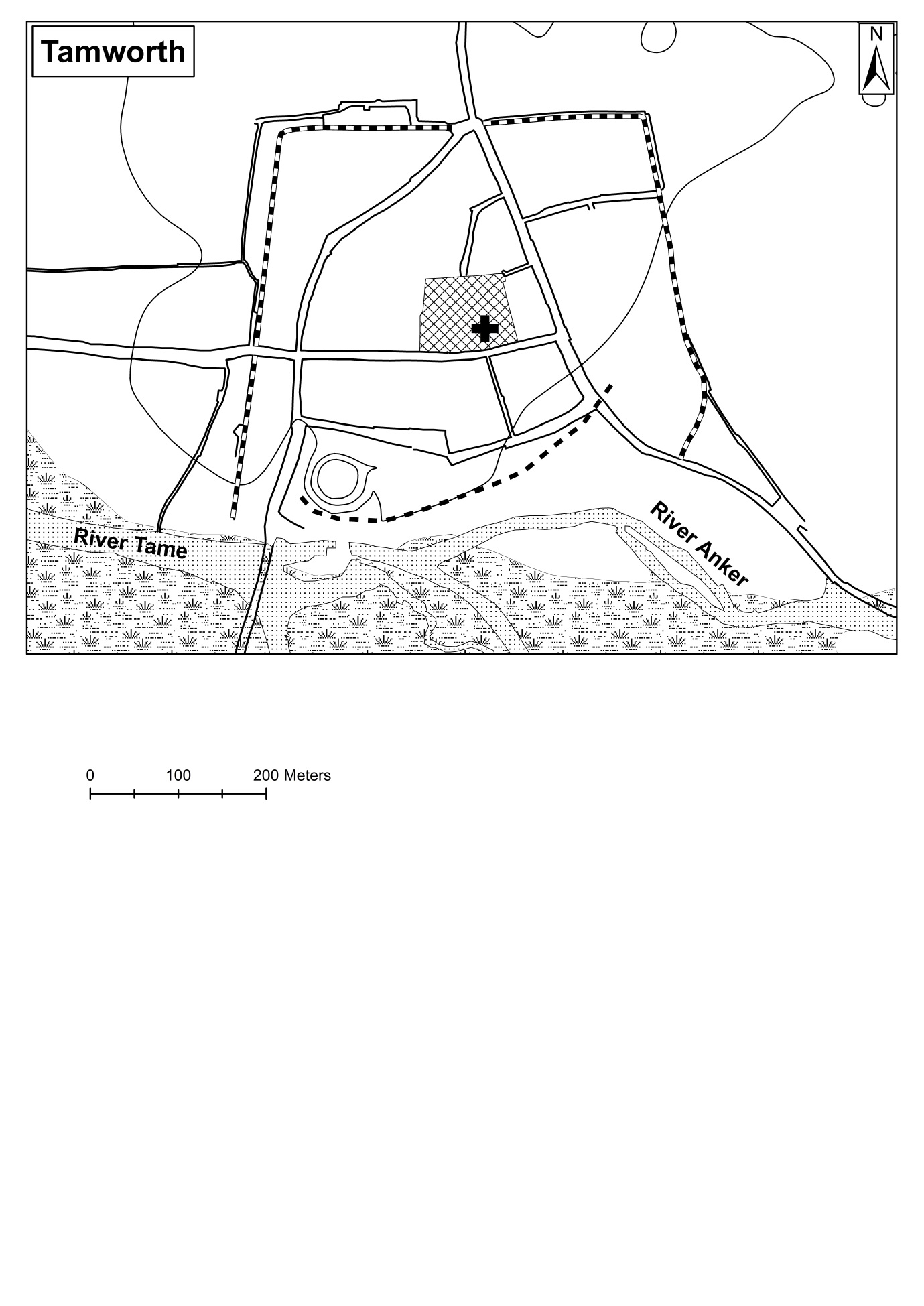


Figure 1: Locations of Æthelflæd’s burhs and other places mentioned in the text



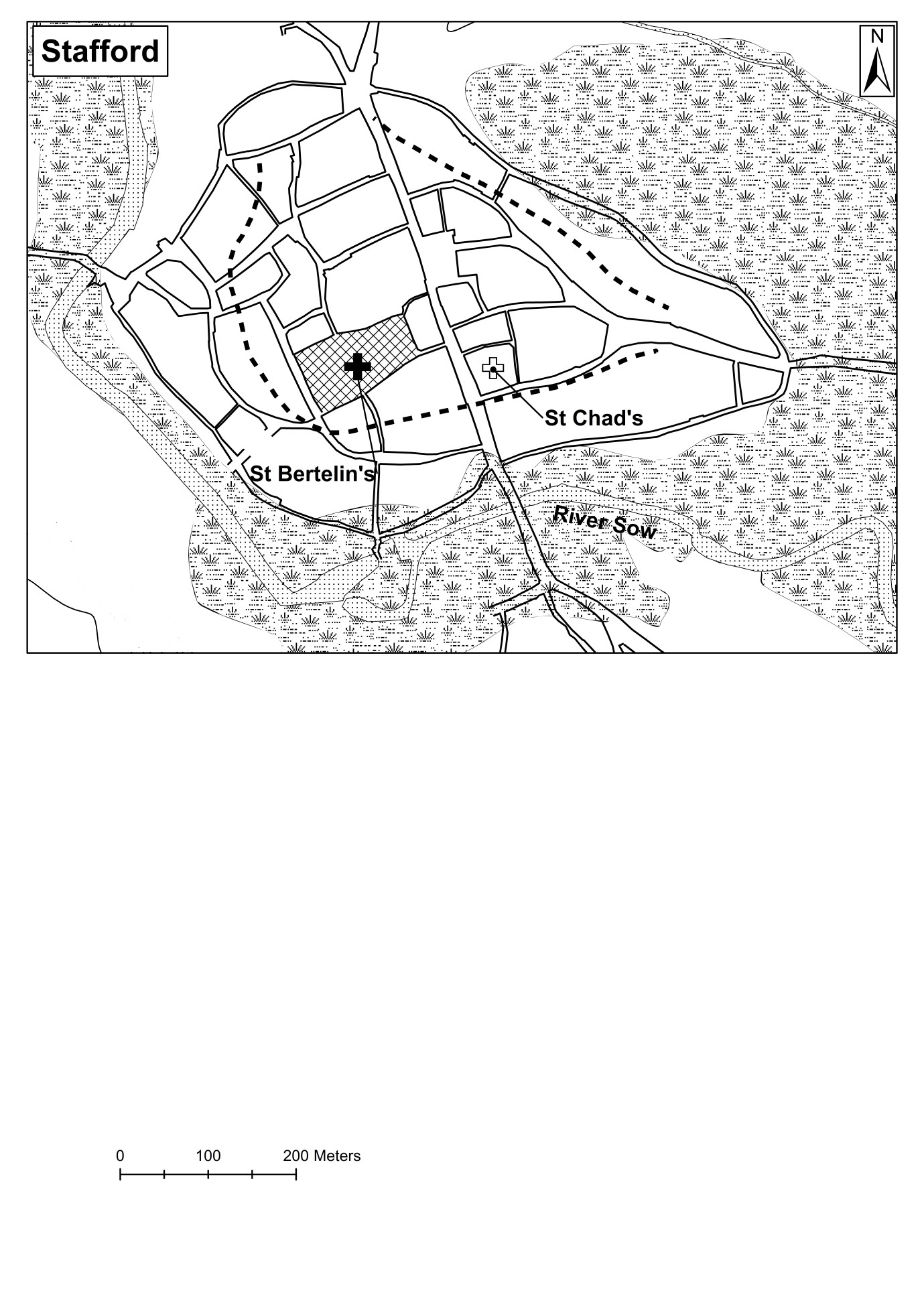
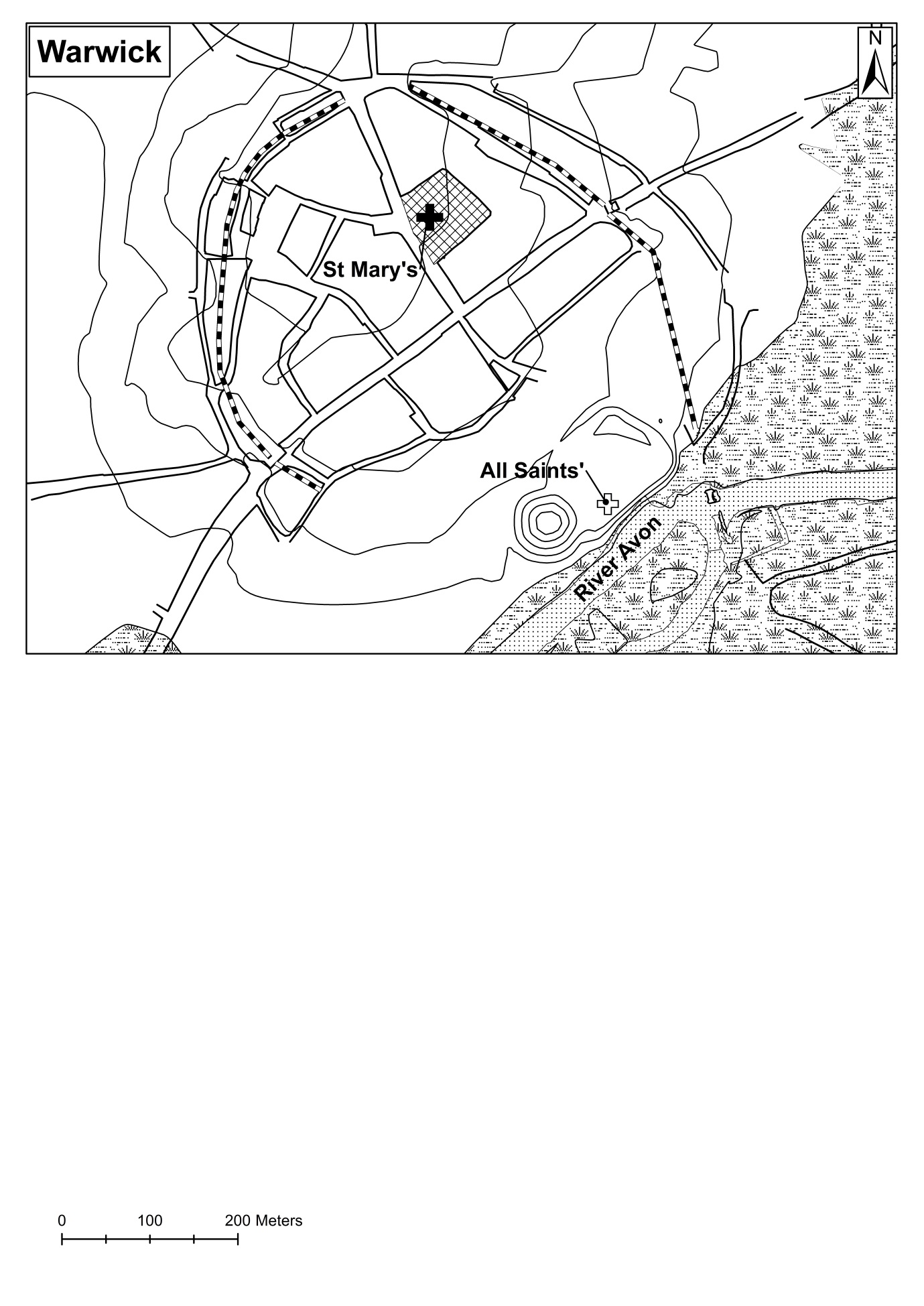


Figure 2a: The burhs at Tamworth and Stafford



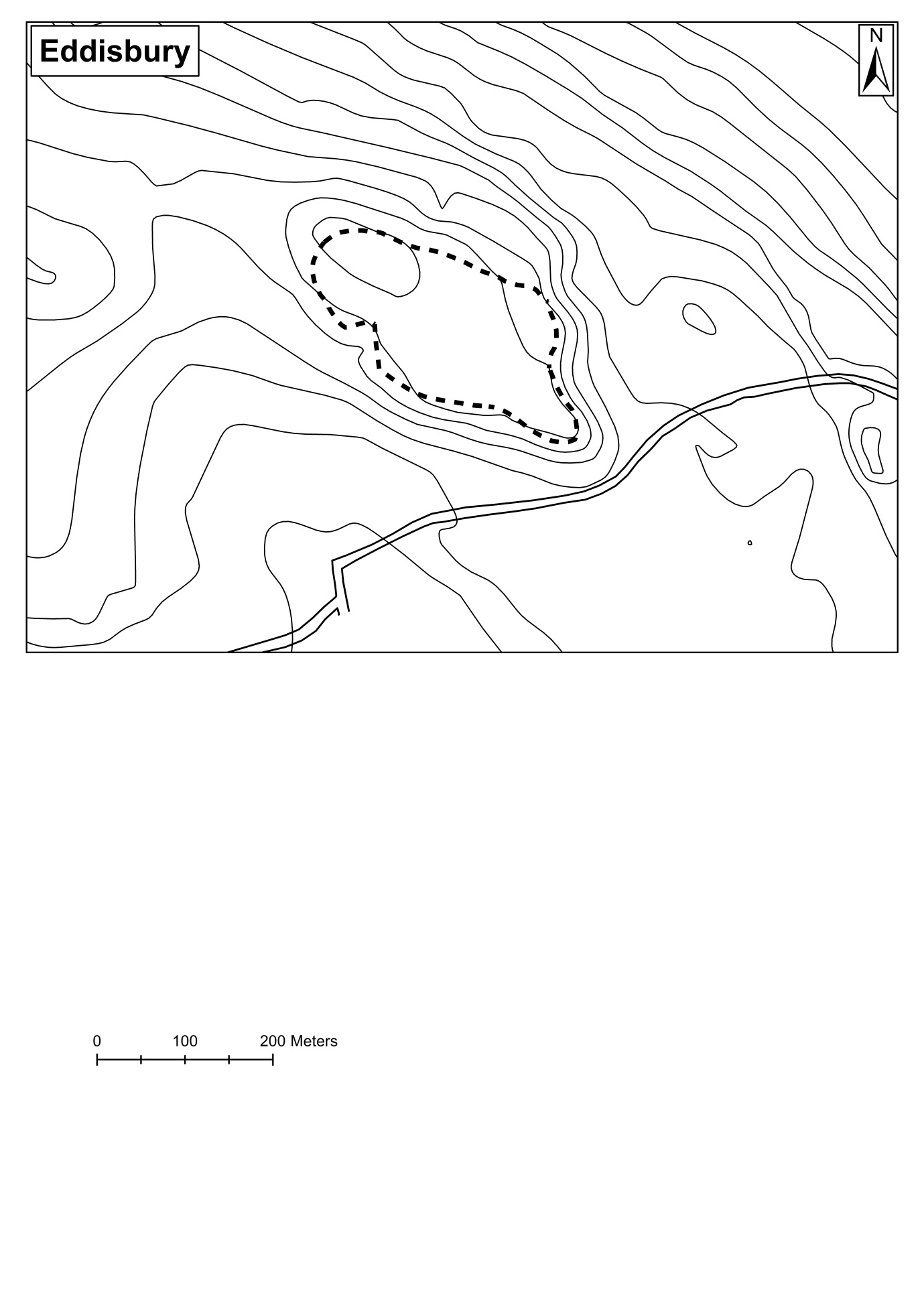
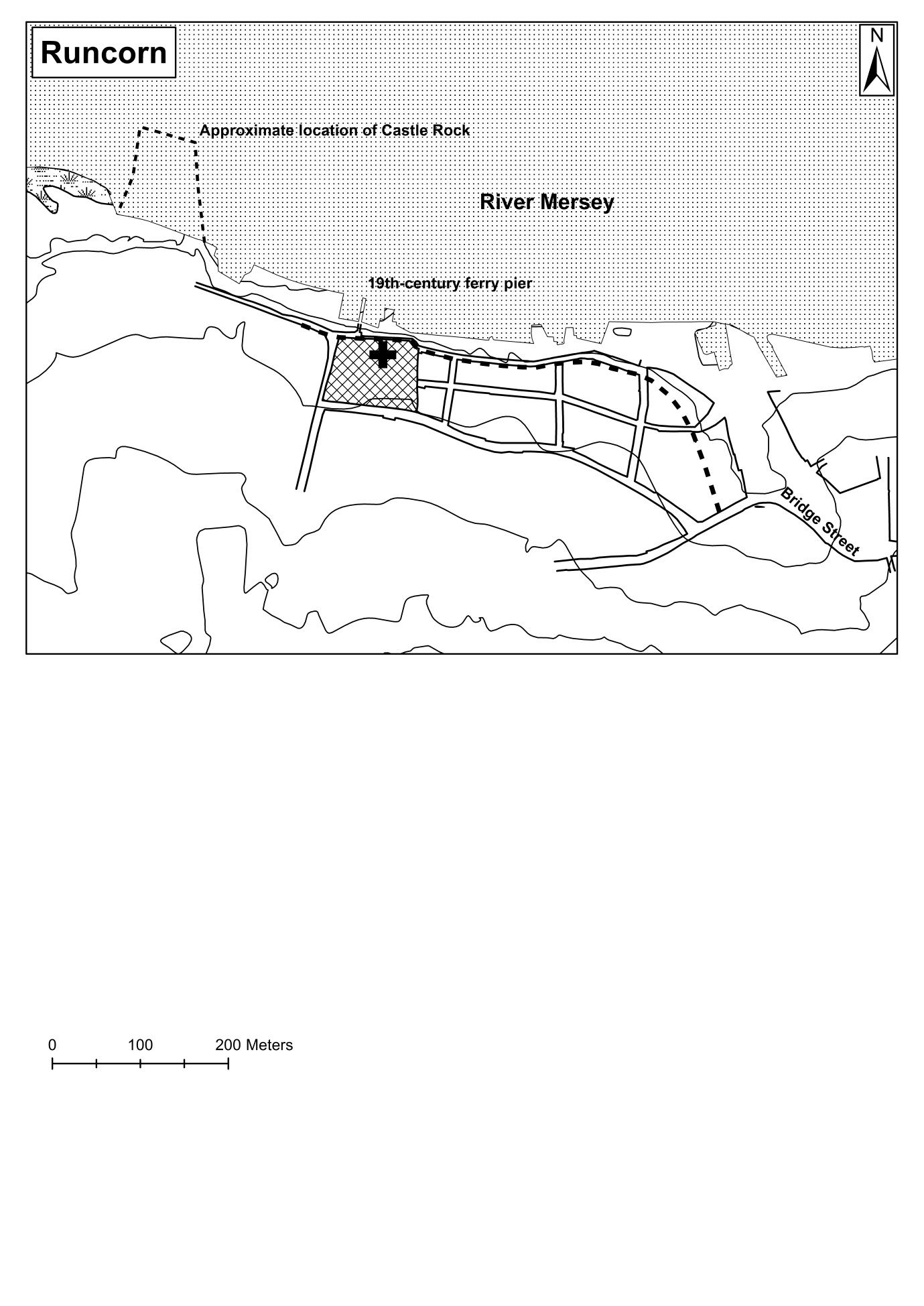


Figure 2b: The burhs at Warwick and Eddisbury



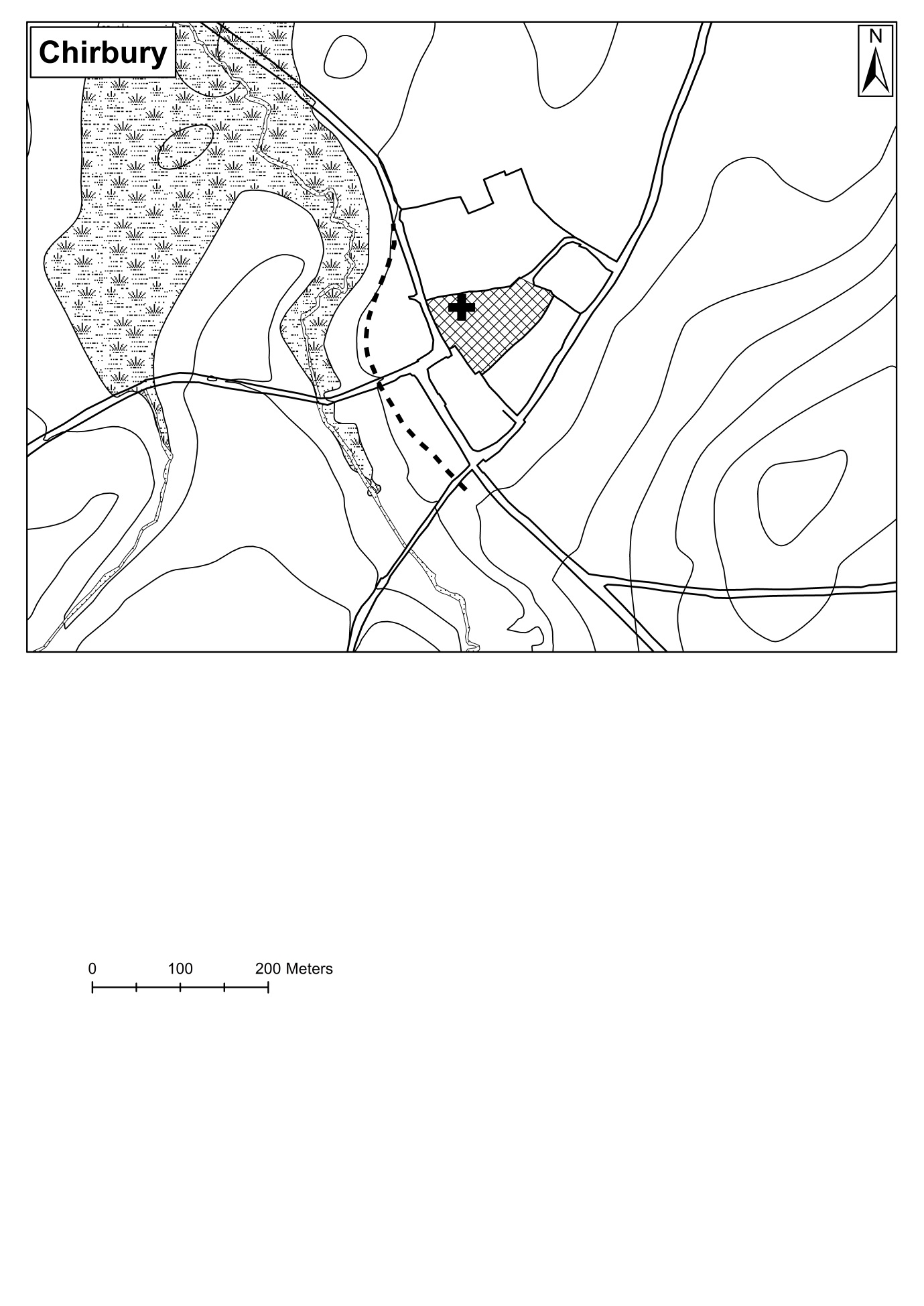


Figure 2c: The burhs at Runcorn and Chirbury

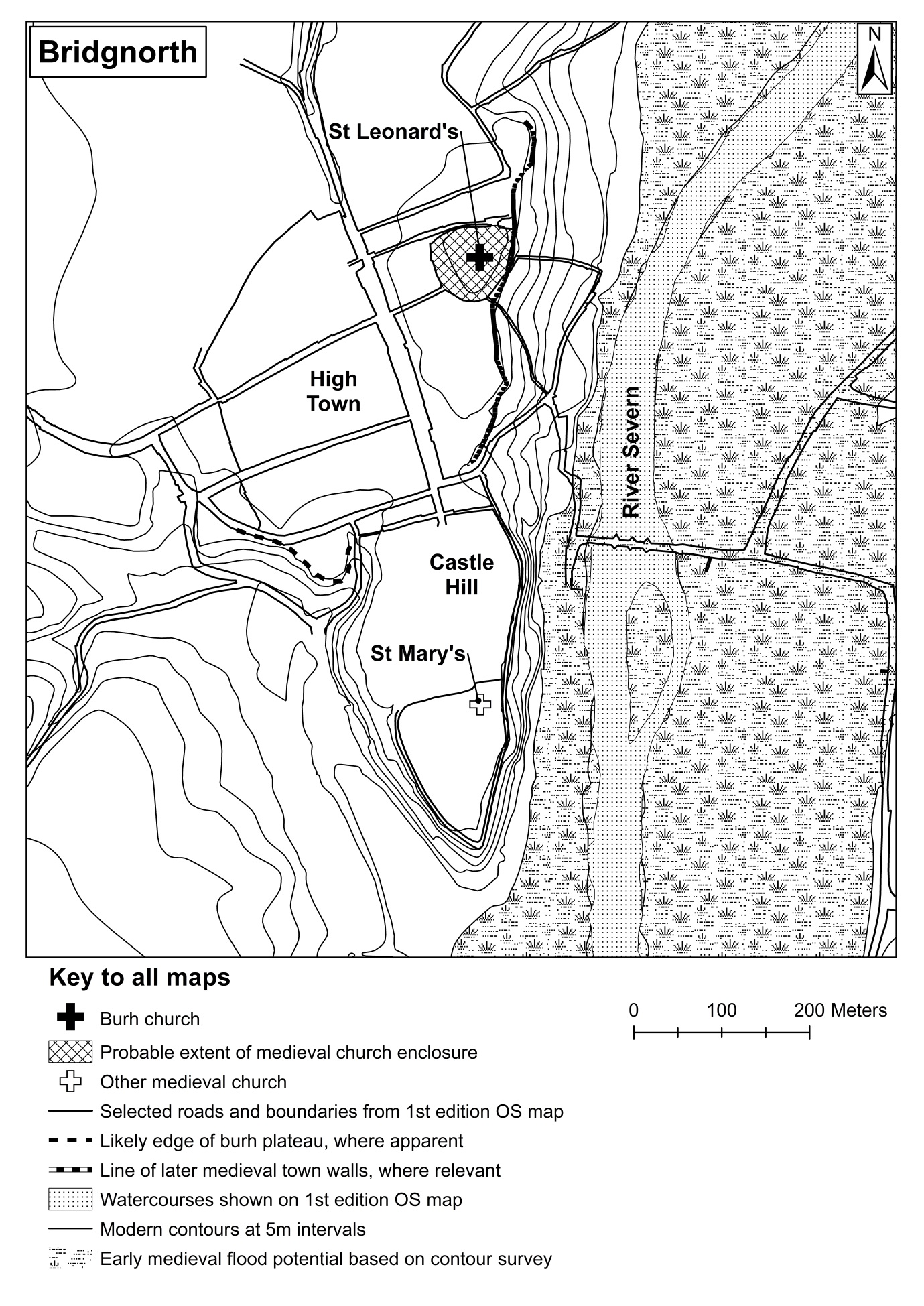


Figure 2d: The burh at Bridgnorth

1. The terminology used to describe these places has formed the subject of debate; John Baker and Stuart Brookes have recently reviewed this, and have recommended the term ‘stronghold’ as an appropriate translation of the Old English *burh*, but that burh be retained as a label for ‘fortified enclosures constructed, refortified or occupied on a more permanent basis during the ninth, tenth, or eleventh centuries’: J. Baker and S. Brookes, *Beyond the Burghal Hidage*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 38–40. This study further narrows the use of the term burh. In what follows *burh* (in italics) is used to refer to the word as used in early medieval texts and place-names. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. M. Biddle and D. Hill, ‘Late Saxon Planned Towns’, *Antiquaries Journal*, 51 (1971), pp. 70–85; J. Haslam, ‘The Landscape of Late Saxon *Burhs* and the Politics of Urban Foundation’, in *The Material Culture of the Built Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World,* ed. by M. Clegg Hyer M. and G. R. Owen-Crocker (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 181–215. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Baker and Brookes*, Burghal Hidage*, and J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds, *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Baker and Brookes, *Burghal Hidage*, 123; E. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Baker and Brookes, *Burghal Hidage*, p. 391 (emphasis original); their characterisation of earlier strongholds here explicitly excludes the group of minster sites with place-names featuring *burh*, a usage that probably refers to the monastic *vallum*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Baker and Brookes, *Burghal Hidage*, p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. For a useful overview see D. M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume 1: 600–1540* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), *passim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. R. Holt, ‘The Urban Transformation in England, 900–1100’, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 32 (2010), pp. 57–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 106–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. G. Astill, ‘General Survey 600–1300’ in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. by D. M. Palliser, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 27–49, especially pp. 34–38. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Astill, ‘General Survey’, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. G. Williams, ‘Military and non-military functions of the Anglo-Saxon burh, *c*.878–978’, in *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe,* ed. by J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 129–163, at pp. 135–145. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Williams, ‘Military and non-military functions’, p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Williams, ‘Military and non-military functions’, pp. 157–8. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. J. Haslam, *Urban-Rural Connections in Domesday Book and Late Anglo-Saxon Royal Administration* (Oxford: BAR British Series 571, 2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, pp. 70–71. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Martin Carver discusses the Mercian burhs in his study of the burh at Stafford, although he too places greater emphasis on their place within a larger group including the Wessex burhs: M. Carver, *The Birth of a Borough: An Archaeological Study of Anglo-Saxon Stafford* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), pp. 127–145. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. P. Stafford, ‘‘The Annals of Æthelflæd’: Annals, History and Politics in Early Tenth century England’, in *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters; Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks*, ed. by J. Barrow and A. Wareham (Aldershot: Routledge, 2008), pp. 101–116, at p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Stafford, ‘Annals of Æthelflæd’, pp. 115–116. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See D. H. Hill, ‘The Shiring of Mercia – Again’, in *Edward the Elder 899–924*, ed. by N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 144–159, and the burghal studies undertaken by Steven Bassett, represented in particular by two recent articles: S. Bassett, ‘The Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon Defences of Western Mercian Towns’, in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, ed. by S. Crawford and H. Hamerow (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2008), pp. 180–239, and S. Bassett, ‘Anglo-Saxon Fortifications in Western Mercia’, *Midland History*, 36:1 (2011), pp. 1–23. Bassett also adds the Edwardian burhs at Thelwall and *Cledemuth* to his study group. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Worcester: S 223; Shrewsbury: S 221; Chester: *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C)* s.a. 907 (see M. Swanton, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 94); Gloucester: *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C)* s.a. 918 (see Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 105). It is worth noting that Æthelred also issued a charter at ‘Saltwich’ (probably Droitwich) in 884 (S 219). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, pp. 61–65 and references therein. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A)*, s.a. 918 (*recte* 914; see Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 98). Bassett, ‘Fortifications’, p. 11, suggests that this passage implies that Hereford and Gloucester were also ‘burhs’, but this is a rather forced reading directly at odds with what the sentence actually says. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bassett, ‘Fortifications’, pp. 1–23. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Bassett does not explicitly place Stafford and Warwick in this schema, but notes that their later existence as medieval boroughs would group them with Tamworth: ‘Anglo-Saxon Fortifications’, 2011, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bassett, ‘Fortifications’, pp. 18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Astill, ‘General Survey’, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Bassett’s contribution is notable for applying this assumption not only to Æthelred’s and Æthelflæd’s activities in the early-tenth century, but also back into eighth and early ninth centuries. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. This argument has implications for the meaning ascribed to the variations in value assigned to Alfred’s southern burhs in the Burghal Hidage; these implications cannot be explored here, but will be pursued by Sargent elsewhere. Thanks are due to an anonymous reviewer for highlighting these implications. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Baker and Brookes, *Burghal Hidage*, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. D. N. Parsons and T. Styles, *The Vocabulary of English Place-Names (BRACE–CÆSTER)* (Nottingham: Centre for English Name Studies, 2000), pp. 74–79. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past* (London: Book Club Associates, 1978), pp. 145-148. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. S. Draper, ‘*Burh* enclosures in Anglo-Saxon settlements: case studies in Wiltshire’, in *Sense of Place in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. by R. Jones and S. Semple (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2012), pp. 334–351, at pp. 348–349. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Draper, ‘*Burh* enclosures’, p. 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Baker and Brookes*, Burghal Hidage*, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Baker and Brookes*, Burghal Hidage*, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Baker and Brookes*, Burghal Hidage*, p. 97, emphasis added. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The same point has been made with regard to the Burghal Hidage burhs: J. Baker, ‘The Language of Anglo-Saxon Defence’, in *Landscapes of Defence in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. by J. Baker, S. Brookes and A. Reynolds (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), pp. 65–90, at pp. 69–70. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. A. Smith, *The place-names of Gloucestershire: part III* (Cambridge: English Place-Name Society Volume XLVI, 1964), pp. 166-167; J. McN. Dodgson, *The Place-Names of Cheshire: Part III* (Cambridge: English Place-Name Society Volume XLVI, 1971), p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. M. Gelling, *The Place-Names of Shropshire, I: The Major Names of Shropshire*, (Irthlingborough: English Place-Name Society Volume LXII/LXIII, 1990), pp. 80–81, the Welsh name is Llanffynhonwen, ‘white-spring church’, first noted c.1566 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. R. Coates, ‘Æthelflæd’s Fortification of *Weardburh*’, *Notes and Queries*, 45.1 (1998), p. 9; Hill and Sharp have suggested that Old English *weard* might relate more specifically to beacon sites in a larger system of lookouts and beacons: D. Hill and S. Sharp, ‘An Anglo-Saxon Beacon System’, in *Names, Places and People: an Onomastic Miscellany for John McNeal Dodgson,* ed. by A. R. Rumble and A. D. Mills (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1997), pp. 157–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. S 1804 (675x692, *Tomtun*); S 120 (781, *Tomeworðig*); S 198 (841, *Tomeuuorðig*); the abbreviation S indicates the charter number given in P. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1968), a convention used hereafter. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. A. Dodd, J. Goodwin, S. Griffiths, A. Norton, C. Poole and S. Teague, ‘Excavations at Tipping Street, Stafford, 2009–10’, *Transactions of Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 47 (2014); *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C)*, s.a. 913 (*Stf-forda*, *Stæfford*, *Staffordaburh*; Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 96). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. W. J. Varley, ‘Excavations of the Castle Ditch, Eddisbury, 1935–38’, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*, 102 (1950), pp. 1–68. A possible univallate enclosure, so far undated, located on Eddisbury Hill in Rainow, near Macclesfield in East Cheshire, has received no support as an alternative location for this burh: N. Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 24, pp. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Gelling, *Place-Names of Shropshire, I*, 80–81; Gelling was surprised by this usage, suggesting that OE *mynster* was more appropriate because St Michael’s church at Chirbury possessed a very large medieval parish encompassing several manors, whereas *cirice* was usually used of the church on a single estate, the classic ‘manorial’ church of the tenth century onwards. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. V. Watts, *The Cambridge Dictionary of English Place-names* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 653. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. D. Horovitz, *Place-names of Staffordshire* (Brewood: David Horovitz, 2005), p. 506. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Horovitz, *Place-names of Staffordshire*, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Horovitz, *Place-names of Staffordshire*, p. 529. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. J. McN. Dodgson, *The Place-Names of Cheshire, Part II* (Cambridge: English Place-Name Society Volume XLV, 1970), p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Gelling, *Place-Names of Shropshire, I*, 56–59; Smith, *Place-Names Elements*, pp. 54–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. J. Baker and S. Brookes, ‘Gateways, gates and gatu: liminal spaces at the centre of things’, in *Life on the edge: social, religious and political frontiers in early medieval Europe*,Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung, 6 (Braunschweigisches Landesmuseum with the Internationales Sachsensymposion, 2017), pp. 253–262. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Gelling, *Place-Names of Shropshire, I*, pp. 56–59. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. References to many of these commentators are collected in D. Horovitz, *Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians; the Battle of Tettenhall 910 AD; and other West Mercian Studies* (Brewood: David Horovitz, 2017), pp. 83–111, which is the most recent study to argue in this way; Jane Croom has also provided a comprehensive proposal in this vein: J. Croom, ‘The Pre-Medieval and Medieval Human Landscape and Settlement Pattern of South-East Shropshire’ (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1989), pp. 294–305. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See M. R. G. Conzen, *Thinking About Urban Form: Papers on Urban Morphology, 1932-1998* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004) [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. J. Haslam, ‘The Landscape of Late Saxon *Burhs* and the Politics of Urban Foundation’, in *The Material Culture of the Built Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World,* ed. by M. Clegg Hyer M. and G. R. Owen-Crocker (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), pp. 181–215, at p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. For criticism see J. Blair, ‘Review of *The Material Culture of Daily Living in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by M. Clegg Hyer and G. R. Owen-Crocker, and *The Material Culture of the Built Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. by Maren Clegg Hyer and G. R. Owen-Crocker’, *English Historical Review*, 132 (2017), pp. 931–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Haslam, ‘Landscape’, pp. 202–203. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Haslam, ‘Landscape’, pp. 202–203, characteristics Ai and J. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Haslam, ‘Landscape’, pp. 202–203, characteristics Aii, Gi and Gii. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Haslam, ‘Landscape’, pp. 202–203, characteristics E, F and K. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Baker and Brookes come to a similar conclusion in their study: Baker and Brookes, *Burghal Hidage*, pp. 100ff. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Haslam, ‘Landscape’, pp. 202–203, characteristics B and C. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. J. Bu’lock, *A History of Cheshire, Volume Three: Pre-Conquest Cheshire 383-1066* (Chester: Cheshire Community Council, 1972), p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. W. Beaumont, *A History of the Castle of Halton and the Priory or Abbey of Norton* (Warrington, 1873), p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Its earliest attestation dates to 1817: Dodgson, *Place-Names of Cheshire, II*, p. 177 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *Annales Cambriae* *s.a.* 1039 (see J. Williams, *Annales Cambriae*, (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1860), p. 24); *Anglo–Saxon Chronicle* *s.a.* 896 (*recte* 895) (see Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 89). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. A. Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries in Pre-Viking Mercia’, *Midland History*, 10 (1985), pp. 1–25, at pp. 18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. P. Baggs, A. Kettle, S. Lander, A. Thacker and D. Wardle, ‘House of Augustinian canons: The abbey of Norton', in *The Victoria County History of the County of Chester,* Vol. 3, ed. by C. R. Elrington and B. E. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 165–171. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries’, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. A. Sargent, ‘A Misplaced Miracle: The Origins of St Modwynn of Burton and St Eadgyth of Polesworth’, *Midland History*, 41:1 (2016), pp. 1–19; B. Meeson, ‘The Origins and Early Development of St Editha’s Church, Tamworth’, *Transactions of the Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 48 (2015), pp. 15–40. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Blair, *Church*, pp. 426–504. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Blair, *Church*, p. 366. Stafford: in Domesday Book thirteen ‘prebendary canons’ (*canonici praebendarii*) held three hides of the king in alms (*Domesday Book: Staffordshire*, ed. by A. Hawkins and A. Rumble (Chichester: Phillimore, 1976), 6,1). Tamworth: by the thirteenth century St Editha’s was a prebendal college, comprising a dean and five canons (G. C. Baugh, W. L. Cowie, J. C. Dickinson, A. P. Duggan, A. K. B. Evans, R. H. Evans, U. C. Hannam, P. Heath, D. A. Johnston, H. Johnstone, A. J. Kettle, J. L. Kirby, R. Mansfield and A. Saltman, 'Colleges: Tamworth, St Edith', in *The Victoria County History of the County of Stafford: Volume 3*, ed. by M. W. Greenslade and R. B. Pugh (London, 1970), pp. 309–315). Warwick: in Domesday Book St Mary’s church held one hide of land in Myton from Thorkell of Warwick (*Domesday Book: Warwickshire*, ed. by J. Plaister (Chichester: Phillimore, 1976), 17,63); early twelfth-century documents make clear that St Mary shared superior status with All Saints’ church, and both appear to have supported communities of clergy until they were amalgamated to form a college of canons in St Mary’s church at some point before *c.*1123. Chirbury: two churches were recorded in Domesday Book (*Domesday Book: Shropshire*, 4,1,10); one of these, St Michael’s, was described as a portionary church with four prebends at the end of the twelfth century when Robert de Boullers, lord of Montgomery, moved a priory of Augustinian canons into it from nearby Snead (M. J. Angold, G. C. Baugh, M. M. Chibnall, D. C. Cox, D. T. W. Price, M. Tomlinson and B. S. Trinder, 'Houses of Augustinian canons: Priory of Chirbury', in *The Victoria County History of the County of Shropshire*,Vol. 2, ed. by A. T. Gaydon and R. B. Pugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 59–62). Runcorn: although it does not appear in Domesday Book, it was part of a large estate with a *caput* at Halton, and it has been suggested that the two priests recorded in the entry for that estate belonged to Runcorn (*Domesday Book: Cheshire*, ed. by P. Morgan (Chichester: Phillimore, 1978), 9,17; A. Thacker, ‘Anglo-Saxon Cheshire’, in *The Victoria County History of the County of Cheshire: Volume 1*, ed. by B. E. Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 237–292, at p. 253). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Angold *et al.*, ‘Bridgnorth’. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Bassett, ‘Warwick’, pp. 140–143; for minster sites see Blair, *Church*, p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Haslam, ‘Landscape’, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. G. Astill, ‘Overview: Trade, Exchange, and Urbanization’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. by H. Hamerow, D. Hinton and S. Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 503–514, at p. 509. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. The charter itself has received attention from various commentators; these are listed at ‘The Electronic Sawyer’ <<http://www.esawyer.org.uk/about/index.html>> and discussed by Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, pp. 59-61 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. S 223 translation from D. Whitelock,. *English Historical Documents, Vol. 1, c. 500–1042* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1955, re-issued 1976), with some alterations. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. S 101, S 102, S 103, S 104 etc.; see also W. Page, and J. W. Willis-Bund, ‘The City of Worcester: Introduction and Borough’ in *The Victoria County History of the County of Worcester,* Vol. 4, ed. by W. Page and J. W. Willis-Bund (London: St Catherine Press, 1924), pp. 376–390.  [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, pp. 61–65; see also Bassett, ‘Defences’, pp. 226–230. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Bassett has previously suggested that St Helen’s is a very old church, possibly fifth- or sixth-century in date, or even late-Roman (S. Bassett, ‘Church and diocese in the West Midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control’, in Pastoral Care Before the Parish, ed. by J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester: Leicester University Press), pp. 13–40, at pp. 20–26); this cannot be ruled out, and an older church could have been reused, as perhaps happened at Chirbury and Tamworth, but the possibility of later origins should also remain open. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, pp. 59–60, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, pp. 61–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. J. Haslam, ‘Planning in late-Saxon Worcester’(unpublished), <<https://jeremyhaslam.wordpress.com/>>, pp. 2–7. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Haslam, ‘Planning in late-Saxon Worcester’, pp. 9–12 [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. J. Haslam, ‘King Alfred and the Vikings: Strategies and Tactics 876–886 AD’, in *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, ed. by S. Semple (Oxford: Oxford University School of Archaeology, 2005), pp. 122–154. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. T. Lambert, ‘Theft, Homicide and Crime in Late Anglo-Saxon Law’, *Past and Present*, 214 (2012), pp. 3–43, at p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. T. Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 326. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. R. Faith, *The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1997), pp. 105–6. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. S 346; S. Kelly, *Charters of St Paul’s, London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. S 1280. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. A. Smith, *The English Place-Name Elements, Part One A-IW* (Cambridge: English Place-Name Society Volume XXV, 1956), pp. 161–2. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Astill, ‘Overview’, p. 508. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Astill, ‘General Survey’, pp. 36–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Holt, ‘Urban Transformation’, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Haslam, *Urban-Rural Connections*, *passim.* [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See in particular R. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: University of California Press, 1988) and also R. Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars; Sources and Interpretations of Anglo-Saxon Warfare in the Viking Age* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars*, pp. 177–179; customs recorded in Domesday Book by which warriors were sent on campaign with specific amounts of cash were perhaps intended to enable such purchases: Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars*, p. 56 and p. 60, n. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars*, pp. 99–101. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Lambert, *Law and Order*, p. 245; see also Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 106–109. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Molyneaux, *Formation*, pp. 107–8; Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 245–6; see Lavelle, *Alfred’s Wars*, pp. 99–100 and references therein for the possibility of a connection between territorial hundreds and army organisation. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. N. Herbert, 'Anglo-Saxon Gloucester: c.680 - 1066', in *The Victoria County History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 4, the City of Gloucester*, ed. by N,. Herbert (London: Boydell and Brewer, 1988), pp. 5–12, and Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries’, p. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. S. Foot, *Æthelstan: The First King of England* (Great Britain: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. V. Thompson, *Death and Dying in later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. A. Thacker, ‘Chester and Gloucester: Early Ecclesiastical Organization in Two Mercian Burhs’, *Northern History*,18:1 (1982), pp. 199–211, at pp. 203–4. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. S 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. For a useful summary see J. M. H. Smith, ‘Rulers and Relics *c*.750-*c*.950: Treasure on Earth, Treasure in Heaven’, *Past and Present*, Supplement 5 (2010), pp. 73–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. G. Jones, *Saints in the Landscape* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), p. 155 and Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries’. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Lambert, *Law and Order*, p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Lambert, *Law and Order*, pp. 183–190. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Campbell, *Æthelweard*, s.a. 877; *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 877 (Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 74). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. F. Wainwright, ‘Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians’ in *Scandinavian England: Collected Papers* by F. Wainwright (Chichester: Phillimore, 1975), p. 307, and N. Cumberledge, *‘*Reading between the lines: the place of Mercia within an expanding Wessex’, *Midland History*, 27 (2002), pp. 1–15, at pp. 2-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. S. Keynes, ‘Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons’, in *Edward the Elder 899–924*, ed. by N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 40–66. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. S 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. S 1441. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. However it should be borne in mind that the chronicles only mention Æthelred twice and ‘have a clear focus on Æthelflæd and her activities’: Stafford, ‘Annals of Æthelflæd’, p. 103. Some have suggested that Æthelred’s illness lasted across the preceding decade: M. Costambeys, ‘[Æthelflæd (d. 918), ruler of the Mercians](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8907?docPos=1)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press Online, 2004) <[www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)> [accessed 08/04/2013]. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. F. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 24–9. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 497–510. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Stafford, ‘Annals of Æthelflæd’, p. 103 and pp. 111–113. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A),* s.a. 894, *recte* 893, and 896, *recte* 895 (Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 87 and p. 89). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A),* s.a. 905, *recte* 904 (Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, pp. 92–94). [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (C)*, s.a. 913 (Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 96, emphasis added). [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Burhs were built at Hertford and Witham (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A)*, s.a. 913, *recte* 912), Buckingham (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A)*, 918, *recte* 914), Maldon (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A)*, 920, *recte* 916), Towcester, *Wigingamere* and Colchester (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A)*, 921, *recte* 917): Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, respectively pp. 96, 100, 100, 101–102. The only exceptions within this period are a burh he built at Bedford in 915 after the army of a pre-existing stronghold there had submitted to him, and restoration work carried out at Huntingdon following his defeat of the army based there in 917. For the probable location of *Wigingamere* see J. Haslam, ‘The location of the 10th century burh of *Wigingamere*: a reappraisal’, in *Names, Places and People; an Onomastic Miscellany for John McNeal Dodgson*, ed. by A. R. Rumble and A. D. Mills (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1997), pp. 111–130. Ealdorman Beorhtwulf of Essex died in a pestilence in 893x895 (*Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (A)* *s.a.* 897; Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, p. 90). [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. It is, of course, impossible to rule out the possible effects of increased insecurity in the eastern midlands caused by the collapse of the Danish hegemony in York after Tettenhall: see D. Roffe, ‘The Origins of Derbyshire’, *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 106 (1986), pp. 102–122, at p. 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Eddisbury is the exception, largely because no settlement survived there and relevant excavation has not been carried out; *Weardbyrig*, if identified with Whitchurch, also possessed a church at its highest point. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. A. R. Rumble, ‘Edward the Elder and the Churches of Winchester and Wessex’, in *Edward the Elder 900–924*, ed. by N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 230–247, 230–247 [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Thacker, ‘Kings, Saints, and Monasteries’, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Warwick lay within the diocese of Worcester and Chirbury within the diocese of Hereford; Bridgnorth might have lain in the diocese of Lichfield or of Hereford in the early-tenth century. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. S. Kelly, *Charters of Abingdon Abbey, Part I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. S 225; see Kelly, *Abingdon*, pp. 85–88, No. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)