Frontispiece: Professor Emeritus Richard N. Bailey, OBE: 'in medio duorum' (Photo: Alison Bailey)

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CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Art, Material Culture, Language and Literature of the Early Medieval World

Edited by

ERIC CAMBRIDGE AND JANE HAWKES

Essays presented to Professor Emeritus Richard N. Bailey, OBE,
in honour of his eightieth birthday

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Front cover: Mosaic image of Edgar and the kings crossing the bar; modern public art in Edgar's Field Park, Chester (Photo: P. Everson)
Back cover: Taplow gold braid (Photo: Jane Hawkes)

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Preface

It is a great pleasure to be able to put on record our thanks to the contributors to this volume, not only for their good humour, patience and sustained commitment to the project, but also for having the courage to seize the opportunity to approach their chosen topics from what are sometimes unorthodox angles. If the results occasionally court controversy, so be it: that is precisely what a volume of this kind should do. Their willingness to take risks, and the wide range of the subject-matter of their contributions, is also an apt reflection of the breadth of interests and learning, and the originality of approach, of the honorand, Professor Emeritus Richard Bailey, OBE. Far more than that, it is an eloquent testimony to the considerable affection and respect in which he continues to be held by friends, colleagues and pupils alike, all of whom have benefited from his wise advice and acute criticism, generously proffered, over many years. We are delighted to dedicate this volume to him as a token of our thanks and appreciation.

Though the response to our request for contributions has been overwhelming, it has inevitably proved impossible for a number of friends, colleagues and pupils of the honorand to participate who, in other circumstances, would very much have wished to do so. They would, nevertheless, like to join us in celebrating the occasion of his eightieth birthday. They include: Peter Addyman; Coleen Batey; Carol Farr; Roberta Franks; Signe Fuglesang; Luisa Izzi; Susan Mills; the late Jennifer O'Reilly; Steven Plunkett; Julian Richards; the late Charles Thomas; Ross Trench-Jellicoe; Sir David Wilson; and Susan Youngs.

Finally, we take this opportunity to place on record our warmest thanks to the anonymous readers, and to the publisher for its support and guidance in facilitating the production of what has proved to be a technically complex volume.

Eric Cambridge and Jane Hawkes
January 2016

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Transactions on the Dee: the 'exceptional' collection of early sculpture from St John's, Chester

Paul Everson and David Stocker

The collection of early sculpture from St John's in Chester as catalogued by Richard Bailey numbers nine items. Two numbered additions are probably duplicates.[1] Additionally, it seems at least probable that two other carvings found close to the church originated in its graveyard.[2] An original association with St Werburgh's has been suggested for two further, unprovenanced stones from the city; Bailey himself was judiciously unconvinced but nevertheless inclined to differentiate these pieces stylistically from the collection at St John's and to suggest that they might have been produced by a second potential workshop associated with St Werburgh's, separate from that presumed to be connected with the quarrying of the cliff immediately south of St John's graveyard.[3] Admittedly, as Bailey demonstrates, their stylistic connexions are entirely different from the core St John's group (Fig. 16.1).[4] All, however, were produced in local Cheshire stone (or from reused Roman blocks from the same petrological sources); all represent modest, small-scale monuments (grave-markers and perhaps a small grave-cover in the case of the Unknown Provenance pieces). There is little doubt that such monuments marked individual graves; an important development from the major 'saintly' and 'communal' monuments of the ninth century and earlier.[5] Because of this, there is no inherent reason to believe that stylistically different monuments might not coexist in the same graveyard; and consequently it must be a possibility that they all had the same provenance at St John's, at either first or second hand. In fact the diversity of stylistic links with distant regions also relates to the maritime and trading connexions that bulk large in our account of the collection's context that follows.

Most if not all known pre-Conquest sculpture in Chester comes from St John's, then. No other church site in the city has produced any, unless the Unknown Provenance items come from St Werburgh's. Furthermore, as well as being arguably from a single site, this collection has other notable characteristics. It is of exceptional size, matched only in Cheshire by groups at Neston and West Kirby (of which more below) and best paralleled in Lancashire, perhaps, by that at Lancaster. Its monuments are not only quite uniform but also uniformly modest in scale and elaboration. Most strikingly of all, without exception they were first erected in the period between the early tenth and early eleventh century. In so far as any explanation has been offered for these characteristics it seems to have been either general – in terms of the late Saxon commercial growth of the city, still reflected most clearly in its mint, or specific – in terms of the antiquity of the church site of St John, with its proximity to the ruined Roman amphitheatre, and its eleventh-century profile and patronage.[6] With 'exceptional' collections of this type in eastern England, and especially in urban contexts, however, we have developed and tested a proposition that they and their host churches represent the ecclesiastical provision for waterborne trading communities. Typically the churches stand on or just behind the riverside hards or sea-shore beach markets, sometimes in notably prominent locations and several are close to, or above, the maximum contemporary head of the tide; and the stone funerary monuments represent the markers of deceased merchants and resident aliens. In more developed urban situations, the church, merchant community and beaching place are located clearly outside a reserved enclosure that is the locale of established secular power, with its own ecclesiastical provision and facilities such as a mint – sometimes, where the topography suits it, across the river. The proposition has been set out *in extenso* using examples in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, but its roots lay in our earlier consideration of the 'exceptional' early sculptural collections of the

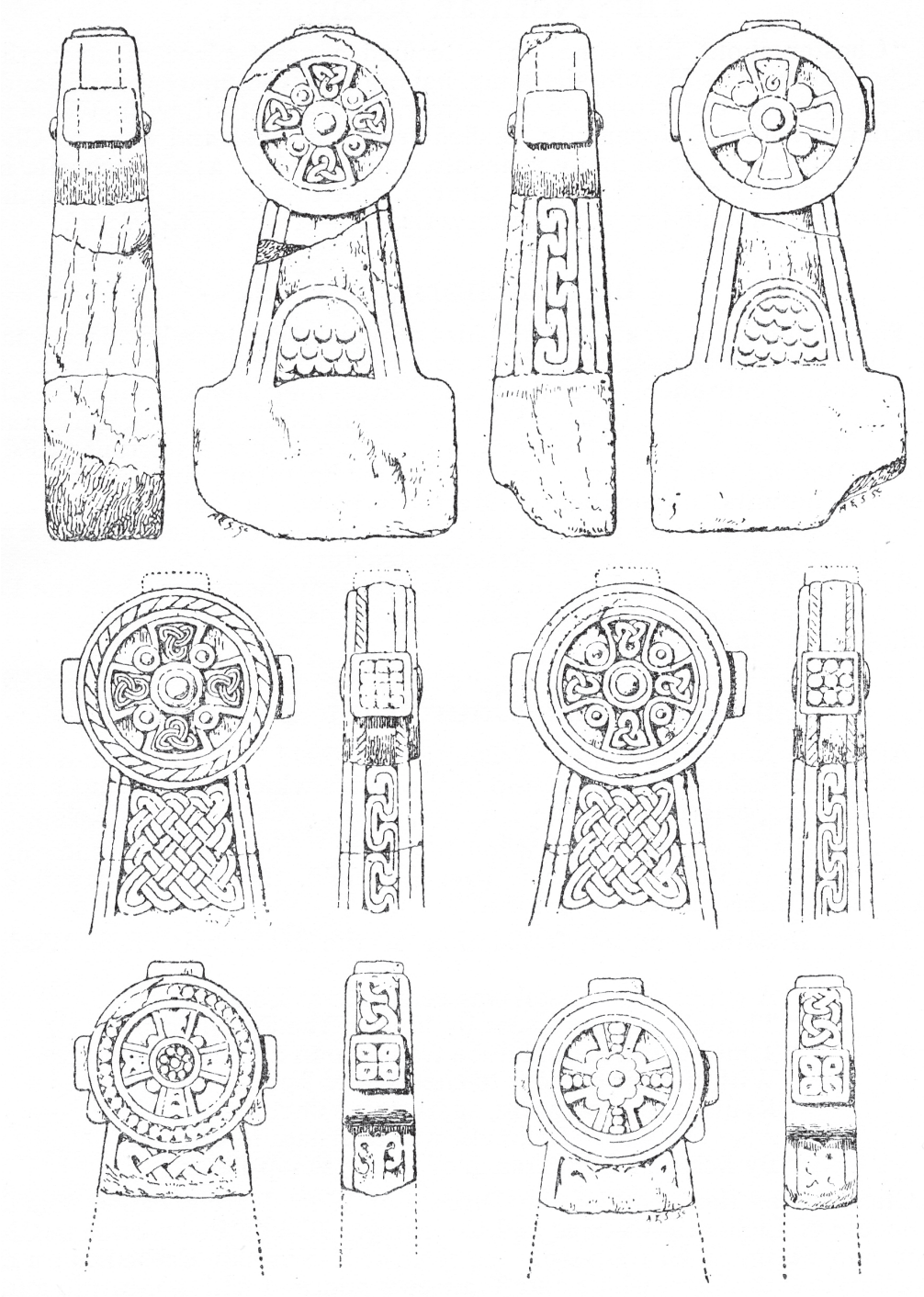

Fig. 16.1 Engraved sample of pre-Conquest grave-markers from St John's church, Chester (Scott 1899, 7)

Wigford churches of St Mary and St Mark in Lincoln and at Bicker and Marton on Trent; and we have most recently explored its relevance to the early urban centres of East Anglia at Thetford and Norwich.[7] Both the prominent siting of St John's in relation to Chester's riverside hard and its topographical location clearly outside and to the south-east of the Roman *enceinte* correspond to these characteristics (Figs. 16.2–3).

Bailey himself applied this idea that 'exceptional' collections of early sculpture might relate to trading communities to the particular concentration of Anglo-Scandinavian stone monuments in the northern Wirral and

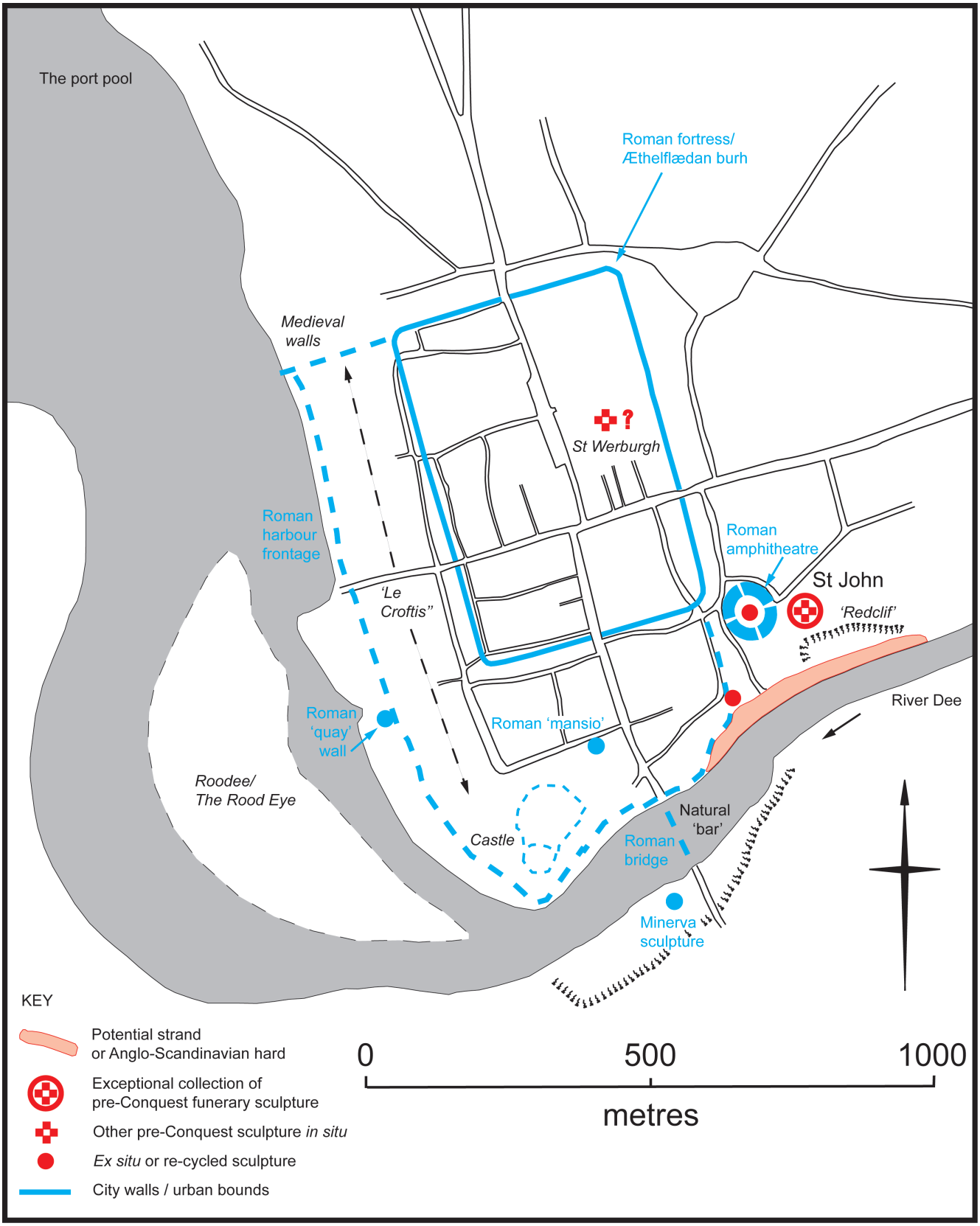

Fig. 16.2 Map showing the Dee strand and St John's church in Chester, and their relationship to the Roman amphitheatre, walled enclosure and the river's outfall with sculpture superimposed (Drawing: P. Everson, based on Sylvester & Nulty 1958, 51)

its potential connexion with the long-established trading place at Meols.[8] Yet he was not drawn, it seems, to the more obviously 'exceptional' collection at St John's in Chester itself. To us, by contrast, both this collection and the local topography match the characteristics of eastern England's urban trading locales perfectly. The hard or strand lay below St John's and must have had at least 300m of river frontage on the north bank of the Dee, and if not the width of up to 35m that is now available, then at least sufficient for the purpose. A broad funnel of a road, Souters Lane, deeply worn into the sandstone cliff, supplies what is acknowledged to be an ancient as well as modern way up to the church and the area of the amphitheatre beside it.[9] This was *Souters Lode* in the thirteenth century, leading to a landing place on the river from the area of the city's tanneries in the later Middle Ages, and associated crafts such as shoemaking.[10] In the seventeenth century there were also paths and stairs to the Dee exiting from both the south-east and south-west corners of St John's churchyard.[11] The significance of the footprint of the Roman amphitheatre in this era and to this grouping of facilities may have been that it was an open space, available and suitably defined for a market place. The rather miscellaneous evidence of this era in recent and earlier excavations may reflect this type of activity, rather than the high-status residential occupation conjectured; finds certainly included late Saxon ceramics and a Hiberno-Norse pin that found its way into the robbing of the eastern side of the amphitheatre in the later eleventh or twelfth century. A coin of Eadred (946–55) is recorded as found 'near the amphitheatre' in 1951.[12] The notable early tenth-century coin hoard found at St John's itself in 1862 contained one Chester penny of the so-called 'tower (or reliquary?)' type, one of the East Anglian St Edmund memorial type and no less than seven pennies of the York St Peter series out of only eighteen coins recorded. A significant reverse link for this York trading connexion is provided by the Chester customs tag, also of Eadred's reign, found in the Coppergate excavations.[13] If this Chester coin type refers to the lordly enclosure of the refurbished burh, it is tempting to identify another Chester reverse depicting a church as an image of

Fig. 16.3 View north-east from Dee bridge to the bar, the strand and St John's church (Photo: P. Everson)

St John's, as the church sponsoring the market here, in line with the York St Peter and Lincoln St Martin series.[14] In the twelfth century, Chester's main midsummer fair on the feast of St John Baptist was moved to the space in front of the abbey (St Werburgh's) gate; perhaps that established saintly patronage suggests that the earlier location of the city's main market had been adjacent to St John's.[15] Use of the arena of an abandoned amphitheatre for marketing has been identified at Cirencester, and may be more common than is reported.[16] At Norwich in similar circumstances, we have argued that there was a large open marketing space behind the Anglo-Scandinavian hard on the Wensum, to which the name 'Tombland' originally applied, and around and behind that, areas of manufacturing, often with specialist zones. Thetford, too, exhibits a similar arrangement.[17] By contrast, direct and contemporary evidence for manufacturing is scarce at Chester (Fig. 16.4). It all lies outside the Roman walls, to the south and south-east, however. By common consent leather-working and ancillary trades are likely to have featured strongly, and (as noted above) are well evidenced in the St John's area after the Conquest. Chester ware ceramics, which occur widely across the city and as exports to Dublin, imply kilns exploiting the local clays. None is yet located, but we may perhaps anticipate that they lay east and perhaps also north of St John's, where a later medieval ceramic industry is known north of Foregate Street and east of Frodsham Street.[18] Only on the west side of Lower Bridge Street has good evidence of dense urban activity in this era been excavated, including manufacturing involving moulding metal ingots and leather-working and contact with the distant Carolingian world.[19] The misalignment of the excavated buildings with the Roman street frontage has puzzled some commentators; but to us it signals their participation in a manufacturing zone lying behind and servicing the hard and marketing area to the east and south-east rather than the Roman alignments. The churches of this area – St Olave and St Bridget – have Hiberno-Norse dedications; and the zone east of Lower Bridge Street and extending east to the amphitheatre and St John's includes not only St Olave's, first documented in decline in 1119, but also lost street names – *Clippe Gate* and '*Ulfaldi's gate*' – both fossilising un-anglicised Norse personal names; it may, as Dodgson has supposed, have housed a distinctive Scandinavian enclave, whose origins lay in the tenth- and eleventh-century trading community.[20]

We suggest, then, that on the evidence of several parallels in eastern England St John's might be understood as a church serving a tenth-century trading community, against the backdrop of the revivification of Chester as an urban and commercial centre. This revivification was evidently brought about by the West Saxon royal dynasty in the early years of the tenth century, and presumably included the re-occupation of the city as a burh and establishment of a mint there to serve the market. Locating St John's as this type of church goes against received and well-established academic understanding that it had earlier – if not more important – origins.[21] On examination, however, this 'importance' proves to depend largely on the evidence of a lost work of Giraldus Cambrensis, incorporated into the fourteenth-century chronicles of Chester, which claimed that St John's was founded in 689 by the Mercian king Æthelred (fl. 674–704), in association with an otherwise unknown 'St Wilfric', bishop of Chester.[22] There is clearly confusion and perhaps creative interpretation in the transmission of names, dates and roles here, and its resolution in an early date, as Thacker has proposed, depends on identifying 'St Wilfric' as St Wilfrid in the Mercian phase of his vigorous and influential career.[23] The possibility that a much earlier church was taken over by the trading community is, in practice, no stumbling block to our proposal, though no such evidence for a pre-existing church of high status has yet been brought forward in respect of any of the various eastern English comparanda for such merchants' churches. Alternative explanations of St John's might point to its later foundation. 'Wilfric' is a rare name in original pre-Conquest documents in that form, but very common as 'Wulfric', numbering 113 individuals in the PASE data-base, all – like the only Wilfric – of the mid-ninth century and later.[24] One, 'Wulfric 45' fl. 985, was both a cleric and closely associated with King Æthelred 'Unræd', whose priest he was. King's clerks were important players in the creation of pre-Conquest ecclesiastical institutions; perhaps Wulfric the clerk and King Æthelred were indeed linked in a foundation at St John's, but of the collegiate institution sometime around the millennium. Another royal Æthelred with very clear connexions with Chester was of course the *patricius* of Mercia and husband of the formidable Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians;[25] the period following her refortification of Chester as a burh and before his death in 911 might have been just when the merchant church of St John was founded. This would have made it coeval with the refoundation of the minster of St Werburgh within the burh, probably by Æthelflæd; and perhaps with the almost equal and complementary division of parochial rights that can be discerned as the earliest layer of ecclesiastical arrangements in the city.[26] Alternatively Sargent has suggested a confusion of place rather than uncertainty about the protagonists. He proposes that the author of the *Annales Cestriensis* (misreading *Legraceaster* as *Legaceaster*) confused Chester with Leicester, where Wilfrid as bishop of the Middle Angles – a see created by King Æthelred in 690 or 691 – had his seat, in an attempt to account for the origins of St John's as an episcopal church.[27]

St John's is otherwise first documented in connexion with King Edgar's famous visit to Chester in 973; and then in the mid-eleventh century as one of many senior Mercian churches that were patronised by Earl Leofric of Mercia and his wife Godgifu.[28] At the Conquest it was a

collegiate foundation with a dean and seven canons, who occupied eight houses exempt from customary dues; and it was situated on the small but important Lichfield episcopal manor called 'Redclif' and briefly, between 1075 and about 1087, it became the principal church of the diocese, before the see moved again to Coventry.[29]

There is little doubt that a significant factor in the attraction of an early date for St John's has been the church's proximity to the site of Chester's Roman amphitheatre. That conjuncture raises the possibility of attractive if otherwise unsubstantiated parallels with continental examples of a similar linkage, where early churches mark the site of a Christian martyrdom and a continuity of ecclesiastical presence from late Roman times.[30] Contrariwise, the pre-Conquest collegiate foundation at St John's matches in type and purpose Lichfield's collegiate foundation in Shrewsbury in the church of St Chad, staffed at Domesday by sixteen canons.[31] Indeed, Gem has seen the role of St John in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, aside from its brief service as the bishop's seat, as the mother church of the northern part of the diocese and comparable with the eleventh-century 'sub-cathedral' institutions created at Southwell, Beverley and Ripon in the diocese of York by late Saxon archbishops.[32] These York foundations colonised relatively minor churches in the ecclesiastical hierarchy; by contrast, St Chad at Shrewsbury is understood to have been an early minster church, and St Mary's church there, which also became collegiate, affords a more plausible candidate for a merchants' church, both from its location and its associated early sculpture.[33]

A more striking parallel to St John's Chester is offered by another church with an 'exceptional' collection of late Anglo-Saxon sculpture, St Mary the Great situated near the merchants' strand at Thetford. Like St John's, it was deemed fit to host the East Anglian see between 1071 and 1094, in transit from Elmham to Norwich, and subsequently to become a monastic foundation.[34] There is, nevertheless, no archaeological sign that St Mary the Great dates from any earlier than the tenth century.

The putative strand or hard at Chester is now occupied by The Groves. The weir below it is now the tidal head of the Dee (Fig. 16.3), and because of the geomorphology must always have been so. For the late Saxon trading strand to have functioned as we envisage, as the port of Chester accessible via the estuary from the open sea, then this barrier must have been negotiable on at least a part-time and predictable basis with the normal full tide.

This location, where the river debouched through the sandstone gorge into the large tidal basin that is now Chester's Roodee,[35] seems likely to have been a numinous place since prehistoric times, especially given the sacred status accorded the river itself. It remains a distinctive spot despite the reduction of the land to either side by extensive stone quarrying. Those intrusions into a numinous location are strikingly acknowledged by the famous early Roman shrine fashioned in the quarry face at Edgar's Fields on the south side of the river gorge (Fig. 16.5). Its carved tutelary figure is identified by its attendant owl as Minerva, *qua* Pallas Athene, and thought to acknowledge her patronage of skilled craftsmen, here quarrymen and masons.[36] But the deity, equipped with helmet, shield and spear in the war-like mode that is one of her core attributes, arguably represents the *genius loci* whose disturbed presence needed acknowledging and placating. In a form of naming that was a pre-Roman, pan-Celtic phenomenon, the river-name itself means 'goddess', and it gave the name *Deva* to Roman Chester. The Dee was also equated with the early Welsh war goddess, *Aerfen*, and even in the medieval period its behaviour was taken to presage the outcome of planned conflict.[37] In the circumstances, it is tempting to suggest that the unusual Roman building, with its odd associations, set high on the north side of the gorge, was part of a temple complex, rather than the *mansio* it is traditionally interpreted as.[38] Before the medieval configuration of bridge, mills and weir, there was probably some form of bar in the river at this location: 'a rocky natural feature underlying the man-made causeway or weir constructed just upstream from the Dee bridge no later than the 1090s'.[39]

The very extensive Roman port facilities, which were vital both to Chester's function as a military base and as a civil urban settlement, were situated below the gorge, lining the east side of the Roodee basin.[40] A massive masonry revetment that has traditionally been interpreted as the Roman quay wall can still be seen within the curtilage of the modern racecourse occupying the Roodee. Repeated and quite extensive excavations in the sector of the Roman suburbs between it and the city walls have revealed distinctive types of storage buildings and evidence of individuals and artefacts indicating wide-ranging trading contacts.[41] This area, however, was equally clearly not a base for early medieval trading, which required quite different facilities: strands rather than quays.[42] Rather, important investigations into relative sea levels through time have documented significant variation in sea levels in the Irish Sea basin and its major river estuaries – including the Dee – in the post-Roman period, with a marked rise from the seventh century to a peak in the later pre-Conquest era and a fall again from the thirteenth century to the present day.[43] Those falls in sea level led to well-documented, gradual impacts on the viability of Chester as a sea port in later medieval times, to the development of successively more distant down-stream alternatives at Portpool, Little Neston and Parkgate, to the silting and reclamation of the Roodee, and to major engineering and expenditure on canalising the lower reaches of the river.[44] But the early medieval sea rise, coupled with the loss of the Roman bridge serving the main road from Chester south and standing at approximately the point where its medieval successor stands, opened up the

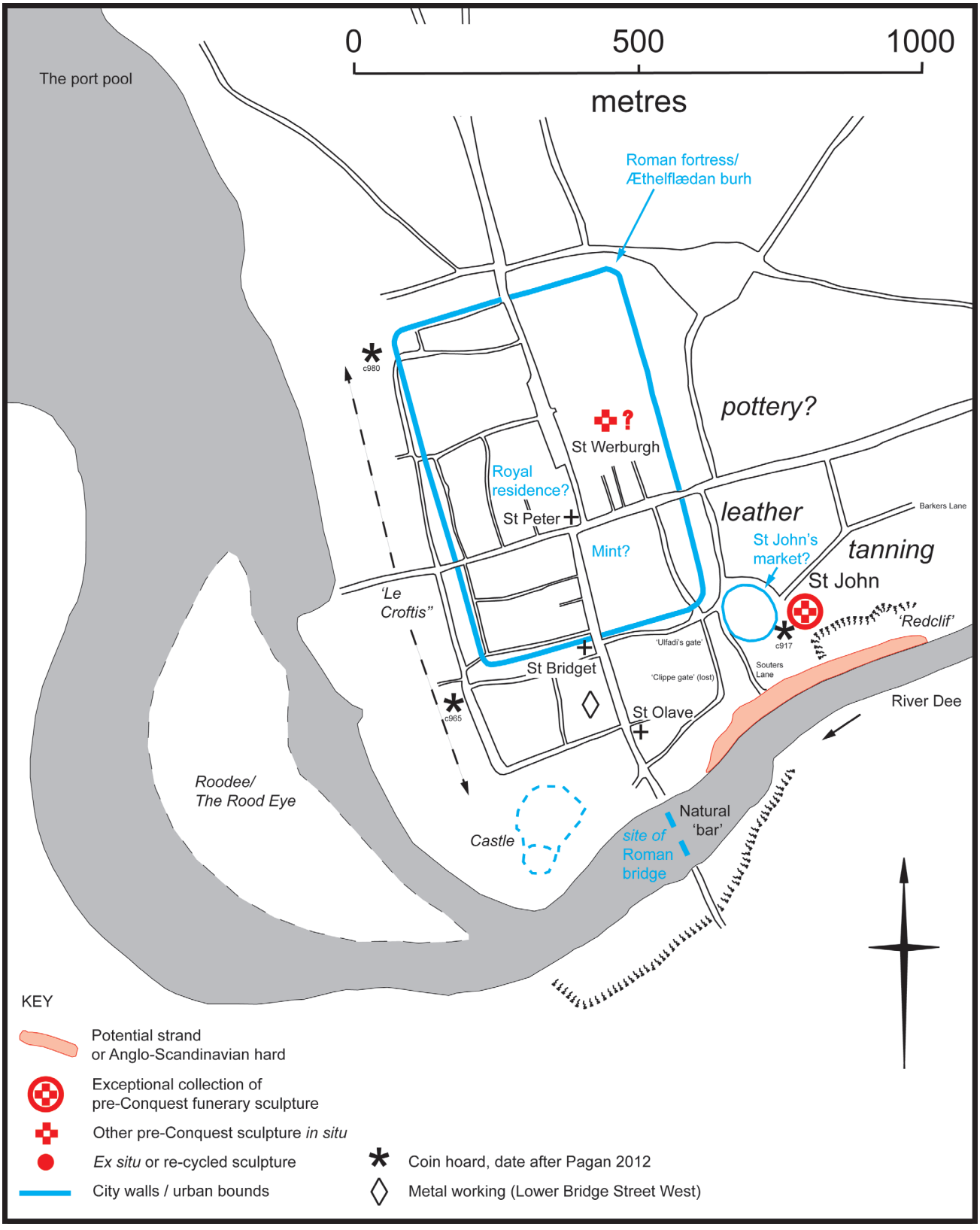

Fig. 16.4 Map showing evidence for later pre-Conquest marketing and manufacturing – outside the Roman enceinte/burh containing royal minster, mint and (unlocated) royal residence – in relation to the Dee strand and St John's church in Chester (Drawing: P. Everson, based on Sylvester & Nulty 1958, 51)

possibility of riverside landing facilities of a sort typical of the age actually further upstream and above the gorge: at the strand below St John's. The Roman bridge's survival is often presumed; but, as the VCH editors laconically note, its fate after the Roman army left Chester is uncertain. In similar circumstances, when addressing the same uncertainty about the Roman bridge over the Witham at Lincoln, modern scholarly consensus is that it did not survive, and the circumstance that both bridges were probably of the same standard Roman construction of a timber superstructure on masonry piers adds to the likelihood that they would have been lost without regular maintenance.[45] At Chester, the road south via the important settlement at Heronbridge was completely lost. The burden of bridge repair in 1066 – and presumptively for its construction? – lay with the shire as a whole; and, as at Lincoln, the sequence of medieval bridges seems to have been positioned just off line from the Roman one.[46]

This combination of circumstances – a strand and associated church, a natural bar at the river's outfall and tidal sea-levels sufficient to allow passage across that bar – gives a point and a context which has hitherto been unexplored, we suggest, to the most famous incident of Chester's early medieval history: Edgar's rowing on the Dee in 973. The extent to which it represented an act of submission by neighbouring rulers has been much discussed, and it has been noted that Chester's Roman past was a significant factor in the choice of venue in Edgar's imperial style of overlordship.[47] In brief, the sources are the spare primary account of the D and E texts of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* stating that Edgar went with naval force to Chester, where six kings met him and 'with him they all pledged that they would be co-operators on sea and on land';[48] a generation later, Ælfric recalled the same event with extra details to the effect that 'all the kings of the Welsh and Scots who were in this island came to Edgar – once, on one and the same day, eight kings together – and they submitted to Edgar's rule'.[49] In the twelfth century John of Worcester gives the detail and colour that have made the incident memorable: naming the eight kings and – in a Latin version of the Chronicle account – noting their oath to be loyal to Edgar and to co-operate with him by land and sea, he adds that 'With them, on a certain day, he boarded a skiff; having set them to the oars, and having taken the helm himself, he skilfully steered it through the course [*recte* 'flow' or 'current'] of the river Dee, and with a crowd of ealdormen and nobles following in a similar boat, sailed from the palace to the monastery of St John Baptist. Having prayed there, he returned with the same pomp to the palace'.[50]

The later chroniclers presented this event as a triumph for Edgar intended to demonstrate his power and superiority over neighbouring rulers; but they, as Barrow has shrewdly pointed out, were Benedictine monks interested in lauding their patron and hero.[51] Nevertheless that simplistic agenda of 'submission' has held sway in modern scholarship until quite recently, when subtler, more nuanced understandings

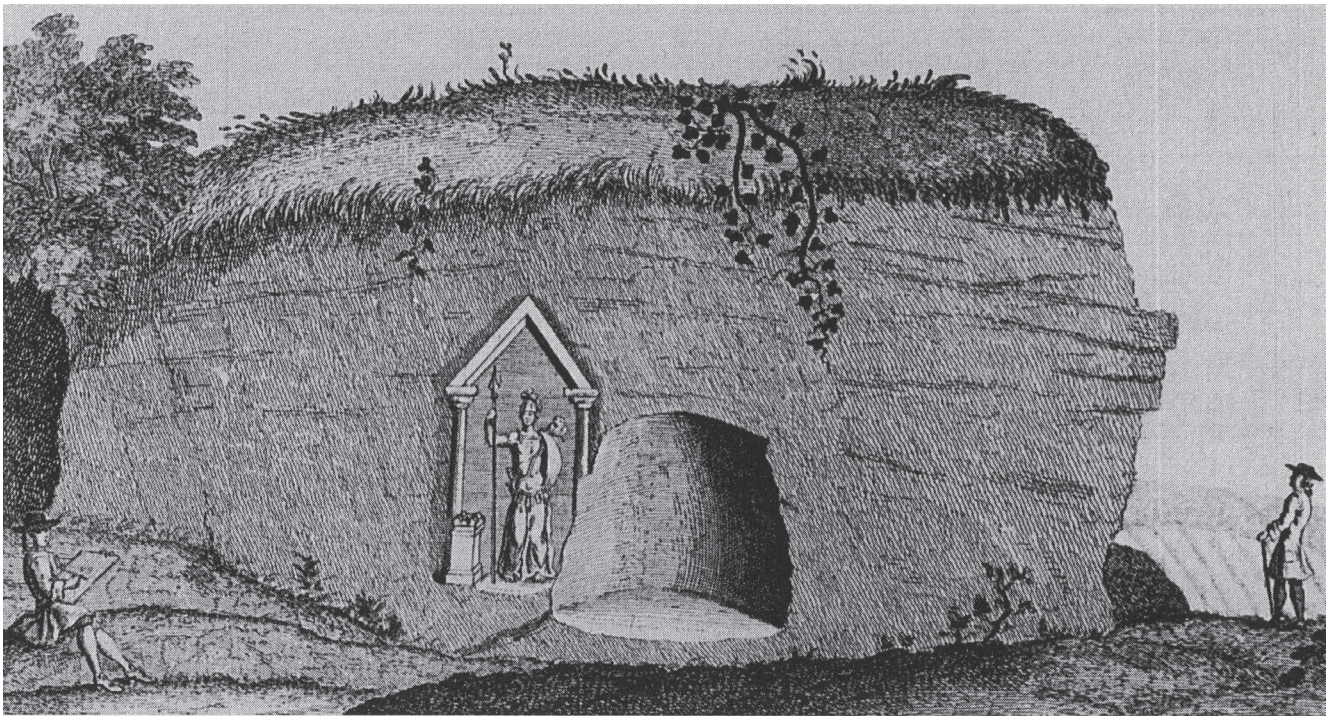

Fig. 16.5 The shrine of Minerva found in the Roman quarry in Handbridge, drawn and engraved by William Stukeley in 1725 (Stukeley 1776, pl. 67)

have emerged. The language (the words and phrases) deployed in the Chronicle account are the diplomatic standard for such contacts: there are echoes of Æthelstan's meeting with his northern and western neighbours at Eamont Bridge in 927 and both events resemble the 'submission' of the northern kings to Edward the Elder on the Pennine borders of York and Mercia in 920.[52] These were diplomatic events, designed at one level to settle spheres of interest. Characteristically they took place on borders, because there the parties – though actually unequal in power or in setting the agenda – were symbolically co-operating equals. Citing Roman, Carolingian and Ottonian instances of diplomatic meetings on boundary rivers, often on islands in, or boats on, the river – in traditions to which the Wessex kings aspired in constructing their public rituals – Julia Barrow has suggested that Chester was the chosen locale in 973 because it was generally a neutral, boundary location for the parties involved.[53] Molyneaux has gone further, tracing the extended history of such contacts and the language of titles and status surrounding them, characterising thereby a difference between 'intensive' rule and 'extensive' overlordship.[54]

It is not principally as a diplomatic event, however, that the Chester meeting is best understood or its location and details explained. Not uncommonly, such occasions had a more specific and short-term agenda woven into them. At Eamont Bridge, for example, the parties renounced all idol-worship (*deofolgeld*), presumably in response to a proposition by Æthelstan. No such agenda is explicitly recorded at Chester; but the event, as the VCH editors wisely hint, has a strong maritime flavour.[55] Edgar came with his fleet, his *sciphere* or *scipfyrd*, which is known to have been a formidable mercenary force.[56] Unless, with Matthews,[57] we set aside the straightforward sense of John of Worcester's account, he sailed around the west coast of Wales and arrived at Chester by sea; and presumably the fleet anchored in the Roodee basin. Work on the names of the eight kings listed has identified two of them – Juchil or Judethil and Huual or Hywel – as likely to have been local rulers in Brittany, whom the Wessex dynasty had patronised and supported; scarcely 'kings', they may in fact have travelled with Edgar as part of his entourage in a client relationship, but they were also practical examples of the king's maritime reach and the benefits of co-operation with him.[58] The others have variously been identified as Kenneth, king of Scots, Iago, king of Gwynedd; Maccus, son of Harold, ruler of Man and the Isles, and perhaps his brother Siferth or Giferth; Dyyfnal (alternatively Dunmail or Donald), king of Strathclyde, and Malcolm his son and heir.[59] What is striking is that the spheres of interest of this group, set alongside Edgar's own, embrace the Irish Sea on its northern, eastern and southern sides (Fig. 16.6). Strikingly, too, such mapping also correlates rather closely with the main distribution of coinage of the Chester mint, which was so prolific in the tenth century.[60] This strongly suggests that the main purpose of the Chester meeting was a trade negotiation between equals, to which Edgar brought evidence of his naval muscle, and, by staging it there, displayed Chester's favourable facilities as a regional centre of trade and his commitment to afford that trade his royal protection. No doubt the reform of the English coinage, which Edgar instituted the same year as the meeting at Chester with the intention of establishing an unprecedented control on the quality and volume of coin in circulation, was also on the agenda, with Edgar guaranteeing the new coinage as a medium of trade in the market under his protection.[61] After 973 the already prolific Chester mint, which featured an exceptionally large number of moneyers with Scandinavian and Gaelic names, switched to the reformed coinage and again featured a similar mix in its moneyers' names before the Conquest. The facts that the numbers of moneyers fell from over twenty to five, and dies continued to be issued from Winchester even when most other mints had recovered the privilege of making their own, have been taken as signals of Chester's coin production not having the consistency or independence that might have been expected of a major trading centre, even of a 'recession' in Chester's trading development.[62] But might it not rather indicate the measure of supervision and control by the Wessex kings of England over their important, distant north-western outpost of trade and influence: a control established so memorably and with such style in 973? A century later Domesday Book reveals Chester as a lively trading entrepôt, if battered by the immediate impact of conquest; and with royal interests, ceded pragmatically to a new line of earls.[63]

Both the nature of such meetings as that at Chester in 973 and its principal documented aspects, then, suggest that its prime purpose was to promote a joint trading commitment among the principal Irish Sea parties whom Edgar could influence (i.e., excepting the Dublin Norse), with Chester – under the protection of the English king – as its focal trading place. Edgar's initiative no doubt sought to reinforce Chester merchants' exploitation or supplanting of trade that used long-established 'traditional' beach sites around the Irish Sea margins, such as that at Meols.[64] The commercial interrelationship to which the parties committed in 973 would focus here, where the mint was, and where English royal authority had been vested since the start of the century in the burghal enclosure. Edgar's own land grants to St Werburgh's, in 958, had enhanced his position as 'King of the Mercians', in an exceptional step that perhaps recognised Chester's developing commercial importance.[65] Meols, where activity increased markedly in the tenth century and especially post-973 through the eleventh century, must have formed part of these developments, but perhaps not in the way traditionally conceived. As noted above, St Bridget's church at West Kirby has an 'exceptional' collection of sculpture in its own right, by the same definition as St John's

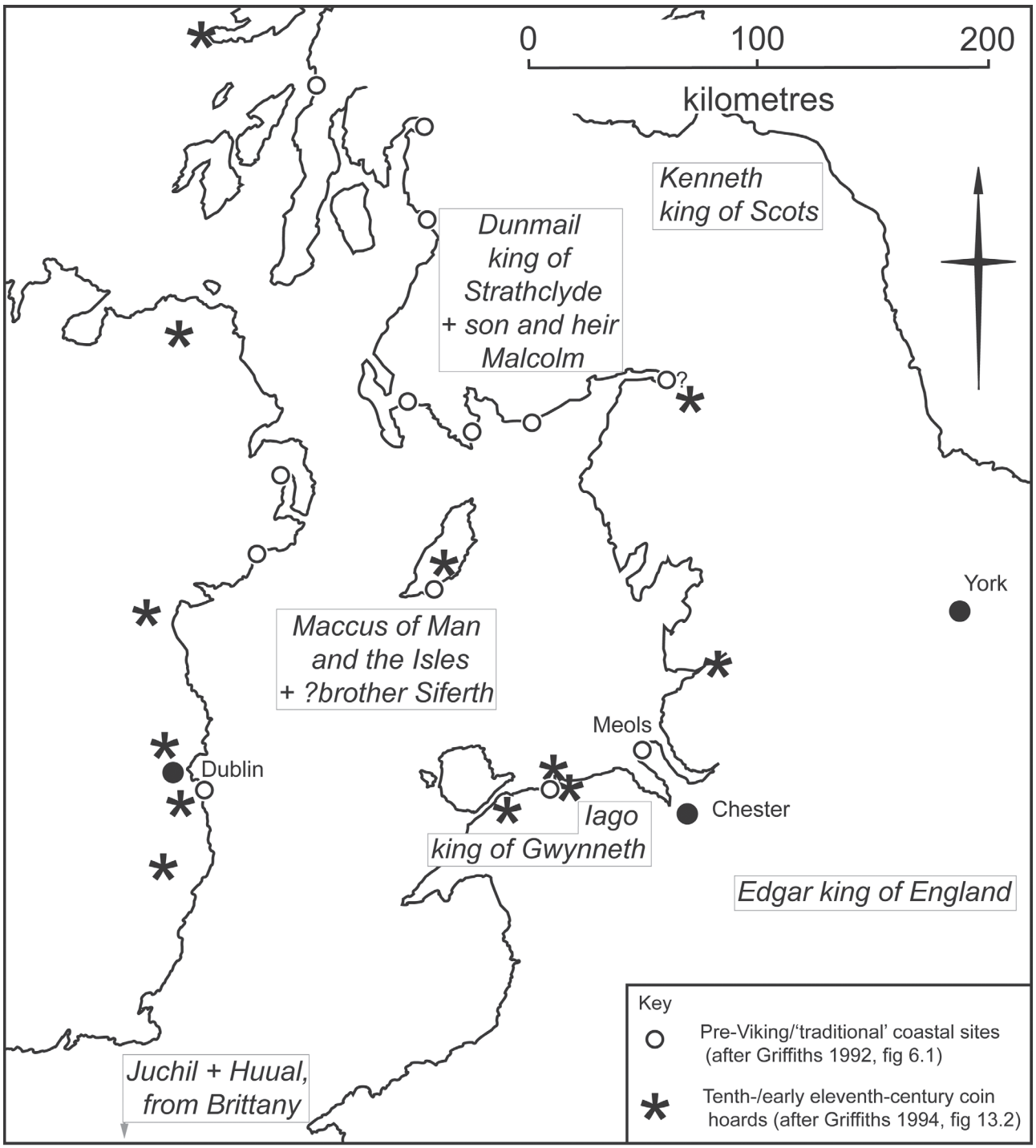

Fig. 16.6 Irish Sea maritime province, with 'traditional' coastal trading sites (after Griffiths 1994, fig. 13.2); later pre-Conquest coin-hoard distribution; and 'kings' identified at the Dee regatta (Drawing: P. Everson)

Chester does. In British Academy Corpus terms, it numbers five main catalogue pieces and a further three Appendix A items, all of tenth- or eleventh-century date: grave-markers and -covers, the monuments of individuals. The collection might be thought to include several items of similar forms and date from Hilbre Island, just off-shore from West Kirby, where (though remote from the parish graveyard) they perhaps marked contemporary burials located on the prominent headland that, as the sea-mark at the mouth of the Dee estuary, was of particular significance to seafaring traders.[66] The trading strand of West Kirby was presumably the lost bay of Hoylake, which is well documented as an

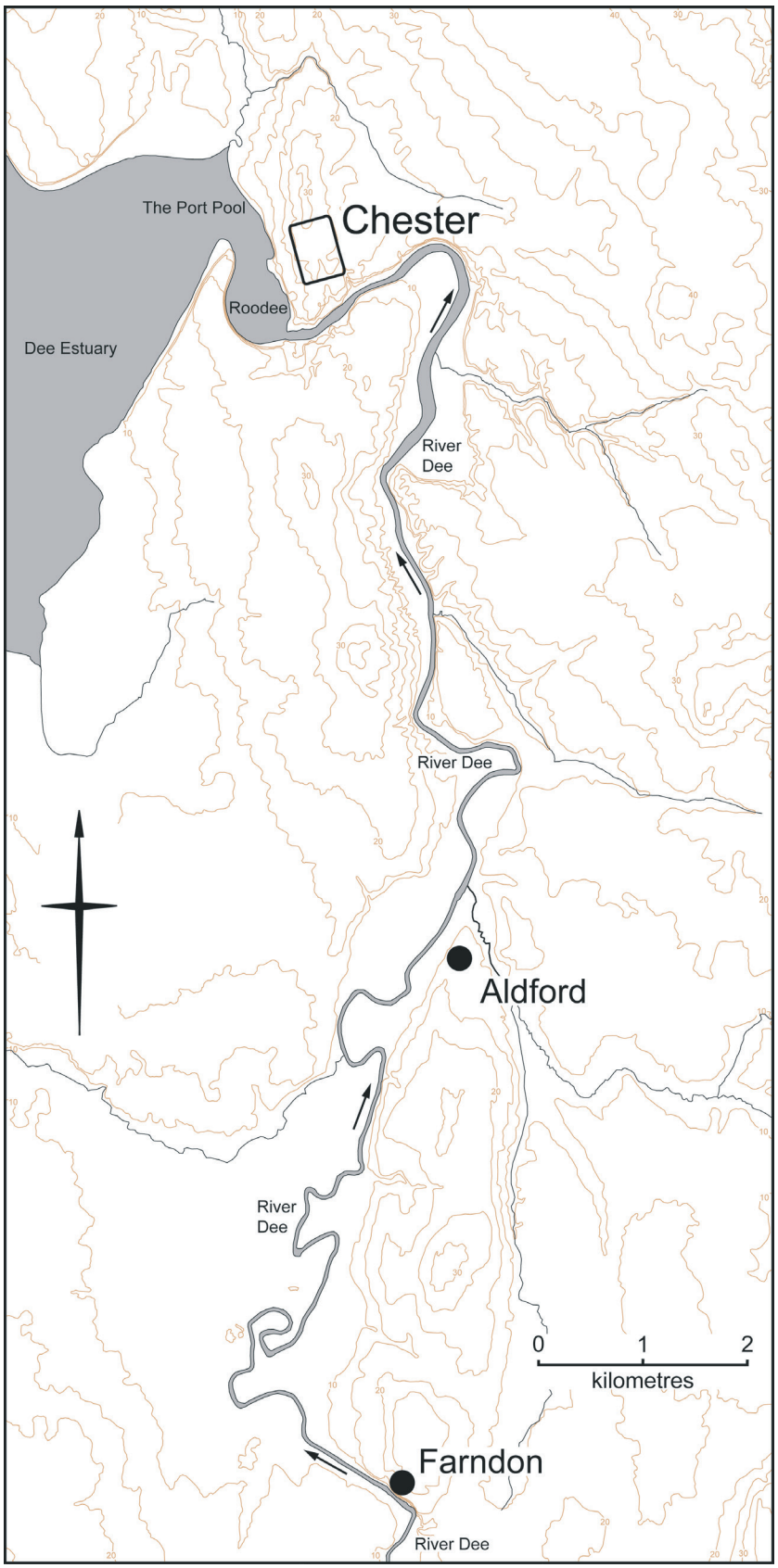

Fig. 16.7 Chester, the lower Dee and the estuary (Drawing: P. Everson)

established port of embarkation to Dublin, and the sands at Meols; both places being townships (as Little and Great Meols and Hoose) within the parish of West Kirby. The relationship between a church set back from the sea and elevated above an extensive beaching place is reminiscent of Lythe on the North Yorkshire coast and its beaching place at Sandsend Wyke.[67] What was the relationship of this north-west Wirral beach market to late pre-Conquest Chester? On the one hand, Meols has been contrasted with Chester in being considered a 'free-port', without any supervising authority, principally on the grounds that it lay outside the port of Chester's jurisdiction – considered ancient in 1354 – whose defining limit was the rocks of Arnald's Eye;[68] on the other, defined as a place under the supervision of West Kirby, it might be thought to lie topographically *within* Chester port's jurisdiction so defined, if that was relevantly ancient. More obviously, its sculpture demonstrates a clear connexion with Chester, notably in the occurrence of Chester-type circle-headed markers at both West Kirby and Hilbre Island, as well as a hogback in a non-local stone, evidently from North Wales, which plausibly signals an alien merchant from one of the partner regions represented at 'the rowing'.[69] A tenurial interest of the king and earl is indicated by the record that West Kirby was held immediately after the Conquest by Robert of Rhuddlan, cousin of Earl Hugh, his leading tenant in Cheshire and his 'governor of the whole province'. Furthermore, Robert singled out West Kirby, its church and its associated chapel at Hilbre to grant to the abbey church of Saint-Evroul in their native Lower Normandy, in a grant confirmed by William I in 1081. This post-Conquest alien cell on Hilbre Island was transferred to St Werburgh Chester in the mid-twelfth century – perhaps recalling an earlier link – with the result that Hilbre remains ecclesiastically attached to St Oswald Chester.[70] With this evidence of links, the role of this trading place might rather have been as an 'out-port', with a relationship to Chester

Fig. 16.8 Mosaic image of Edgar and the kings crossing the bar; modern public art in Edgar's Field Park, Chester (Photo: P. Everson)

analogous to that better documented for Torksey vis-à-vis Lincoln, and under the control of the king or earl.[71] The late medieval poetic tale of the twelfth-century constable of Chester Castle who, being unable to sail from Chester for North Wales because of adverse conditions on the Dee and its estuary, rushed with his force to Hilbre in order to do so, not only shows that he anticipated there being shipping there to commandeer in the earl's name, but also reveals the route from Chester to have been reckoned 'a royal road … night and day'.[72] The absence of Chester coinage of the period prior to 973 from the Meols collection, but its frequency afterwards, might even suggest that a negotiated trading arrangement such as we have envisaged stimulated a switch from a 'free-port' to an 'out-port'. Whatever the relationship between the Hiberno-Norse of the north Wirral and the Mercian and West Saxon kings in the period *c*. 910–*c*. 970, it changed markedly at the moment of the regatta. While the waterside facilities at Parkgate are better documented much later, the same mutually advantageous stimulus perhaps lay behind the exceptional funerary collection at Neston, half way to the open sea from Chester and overlooking an earlier strand within the estuary.[73]

We wish, furthermore, to propose that the best evidence that the purpose of the 973 meeting of parties was fundamentally commercial is to be found in the topographical detail of the show-piece incident that fixed in the chroniclers' memory: the rowing on the Dee. It has been described, and dismissed, as theatrical and a piece of improbable showmanship.[74] And indeed, whilst each modern reassessment that has accepted it as an authentic occurrence has brought out important points, no account has yet explained why a waterborne event with the characteristics reported was organised as the emblematic focus of Edgar's negotiations at Chester, or in what ways it was so appropriate to the moment that it became their most persistent image. Whether (as the chroniclers variously report) as pilot in a seat in the prow, or as *gubernator* at the rudder in the stern, the tableau presented Edgar as both leader and governor, both collaborating with, and distinguished from, the eminent oarsmen in their joint venture. Some have, with Thornton, been inclined to dismiss the whole account as late invention, rendered implausible by its failure to fit the local topography, since it plainly implies a transit from the southern end of the gorge, over the natural bar marked by the later weir and so to St John's.[75] The alternative suggestion is that John of Worcester describes a journey from a palace at Farndon, where King Edward the Elder had died in 924. But Farndon lies ten miles above St John's, along a winding river (Fig. 16.7), and such a journey, also necessitating a hard slog back against the stream, is implausible.[76] Out of public view, this voyage would have minimal symbolic content or memorable impact, and does not easily correlate with Worcester's description. Thornton is clearly correct in thinking that John of Worcester's end-points of the rowing transit were defined in anachronistic twelfth-century terms: the 'palatium' being the castle, just as the 'abbey' of St John was the earlier, non-monastic church.[77] In this case the distance travelled would have been as little as five or six hundred metres, but the passage was full of symbolic significance: passing from the upper reach of the tidal estuary in Roodee pool, through the narrow curving sandstone gorge to the point where the estuarine waters met the sacred river. Indeed we might ask whether it was not replicating a traditional ritual journey; the successor, perhaps, to journeys made by generations of priest-kings in this place, communing with the river deity since pre-Roman times. As envisaged above, however, it required a rising tide to cross the natural bar, and even then the mingling waters probably caused a turbulence that marked the numinous spot of the river's outfall where the waters appeared to stand still (Fig. 16.8). Here Edgar's skilful helmsmanship came into play, combined with the strenuous co-operation of the oarsmen – the whole combining in an image of successful waterborne triumph over adversities, under effective direction. Furthermore, Edgar's successful negotiation with the river deity might have been seen by contemporaries not just as a feat of navigation, with commercial consequences, but also as a Christian 'appropriation' of the river deity. Their destination was the ample strand and safe beaching facilities overseen by the merchants' church that gave explicitly Christian oversight to the marketing activity. Edgar's prayers in the church aligned that divine protection with his own. The return was an easier downstream transit, perhaps with the main concern being adequate depth of water on an ebbing tide, so that Edgar took a pilot's place in the prow.

All this is slightly fanciful in detail; but it perhaps indicates how Edgar's rowing on the Dee could stand as a potent image and celebration of an Irish Sea trade agreement, focussed on the distinctive features – both practical and symbolic – of the contemporary port of Chester. What better way to symbolise this than a public show of co-operation by the kings standing in for and, giving a lead to, their people? Seen in this way, it truly qualifies as a 'form of demonstrative behaviour employed to underline political transactions and decisions'.[78] As such a ritual, it exploited an anciently numinous location and engaged with the river's reputation as pre-Christian goddess, whose current and power and dangers were skilfully negotiated. This *numen* had been formally Christianised by the foundation of St John's church upstream, and perhaps by the cross on an island – the Roodee – downstream of it. Perhaps the latter also featured, like St John's, in the arrangements we have outlined: it may have stood as a marker of the turn into the gorge giving access to the bar and the strand beyond, and perhaps it also functioned as an indicator of the state of the tide (was safe passage over the bar possible when the island was covered, for example?).[79] Having returned

safely from St John's and the strand, the righteous king of Wessex had cemented himself in the on-lookers' minds not just as a notable patron of Chester, but as guarantor of Chester's international trading facilities.[80]

In summary, our suggestion – prompted by the similarity of the 'exceptional' collection of pre-Conquest sculpture at St John's Chester to collections in churches overseeing trading places up and down eastern England – is that St John's should also be considered as a merchants' church associated with a riverside strand or hard on the north bank of the Dee below it and perhaps with a marketing space in the ruined Roman amphitheatre alongside it. This suggestion alters our thinking somewhat about the layout of the tenth-century city and it may offer some explanation for why direct archaeological evidence of the commercial re-growth of the city at this time has been so remarkably sparse:[81] the trading focus for that short period, exceptionally in Chester's history, lay away from the Roman fortress enclosure and away even from the established main access roads. This new focus, we suggest, was enabled by rising sea levels allowing access to the lower reaches of the Dee, above the natural bar at the river's outfall; it provided ample beaching and marketing facilities of a type familiar throughout the maritime regions of north-west Europe at this time and common certainly in eastern England. The bar at the river's outfall, in making the strand accessible only tidally, perhaps also provided an element of security and protection against casual piratical raids that was an asset in a still-uncertain era. Characteristically, too, the trading site featured a church to provide regulation of marketing activity, a cure of souls and a place of burial, which for the better-off merchant was marked by funerary monuments of a standardised and appropriately middling sort. Finally, the distinctive identity of the individuals commemorated by these memorials was indicated not just by the fact that they marked their graves with stone markers (at a time when this would have distinguished them from most other burials in the graveyard), but also through the distant associations of both the monument forms and the style of the sculpture with which they were decorated. These monument forms and art styles associated their obsequies with far-off places: Bailey cites parallels for various details extending from the putative nearby trading sites on the Wirral and Maen Achwyfan (Whitford) and Dyserth (both Flintshire), to the Isle of Man, the Solway basin, County Durham, Yorkshire (including York itself), Worcestershire, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Cornwall.[82] Though we cannot now explain the monuments' semiotics in detail, their decoration indicated that their owners were not only distinct in status and practice from their contemporary Cestrians, but that they belonged to a much wider, more mobile, community.

The 'exceptional' collection of sculpture at St John's, then, helps us to understand the character, location and importance of Chester's tenth-century trading heartland. Edgar's voyage on the Dee in 973 can be read as a very public confirmation of his intention both to establish Chester's market as a commercial hub for Irish Sea trade, to service that market with his reformed coinage, and to protect its alien traders as overlord of the city. Representing Chester's early merchant community, we propose that St John's 'exceptional' collection of monuments offers confirmation that Edgar's trade initiative was so much more than a whimsical regatta.

Envoi

All recently involved in the study of stones from the Anglo-Saxon period have benefited from Richard Bailey's constant presence, guiding and inspiring us to greater efforts. Both authors here experienced his wisdom as a teacher and it was at least partly through this shared interest, instilled in us both by Richard, that some thirty years ago we first started working and writing together. We have gone on to collaborate on projects ranging from the prehistoric period to the twentieth century and to explore topics from rural settlement to Renaissance painting, but in all our work together we have never been without an Anglo-Saxon sculpture project; and that enduring interest has continued to be stimulated by Richard's work. In the past we have been both flattered and further encouraged by Richard's responses to the distinctively archaeological approach we adopted in our studies of early sculpture, so one of our jointly authored papers has been offered here in Richard's honour. Typically, perhaps, it opens with a collection of pre-Conquest sculpture that he knows very well; but, not content with mere description and dating, following Richard's example we have sought additionally to locate its significance in a wider topographical, cultural and historical context, tying together other work, and offering alternative understandings of a diverse range of evidence. We know that Richard enjoys observing such activity, and that sometimes he even identifies with it.

Acknowledgements

Academic lectures stand at the beginning and end of this piece's development: first to the archaeological research seminar at the University of Chester in 2012 and secondly to the Society for Church Archaeology's conference at Chester in 2014. We are grateful respectively to Professor Howard Williams and to Dr Michael Shapland for the relevant invitations. We have benefited notably, too, from the interest and generous advice of Drs Gill Chitty, Alan Thacker and Richard Gem at different stages; and we are particularly indebted to Professor Julia Barrow for sight of sections of her then forthcoming book on secular clergy.[83]

Notes

1 Bailey 2010, 62–9, 151.
2 Ibid., 69–70 (Chester City Walls 1, and Chester Roman Amphitheatre 1).
3 Ibid., 27, 33, 70–2 (Chester Unknown Provenance 1 and 2).
4 Ibid., 39–40.
5 Everson & Stocker 1999; Stocker & Everson 2001.
6 For commerce and mint, see e.g. Dolley 1955; Thacker 1988; Ward 2001; Lewis & Thacker 2003, 17, 20–2. For these aspects of St John's, see Thacker 1982, 200–1; 2000; Blair 2005, 357, citing Darlington & McGurk 1995, 582–3.
7 Stocker 2000; Everson & Stocker 1999; 2015; see also Stocker 2013. For a consideration and definition of what might be considered 'exceptional' in such cases, see Stocker 2000, 183 and n. 2.
8 Bailey & Whalley 2006.
9 E.g. Wilmott et al. 2006, 14, 17.
10 Dodgson 1981, 77; Lewis & Thacker 2003, 215.
11 Lewis & Thacker 2005, Fig. 72; there was also a (lost) *Paynes Lode*, 'a gayte that goeth downe to the water of Dee', Dodgson 1981, 55–6.
12 Wilmott et al. 2006, 13–15; Pagan 2012, no. 270.
13 Hughes 1864; Mack 1967; Pagan 2012, 16–17; Vince 1991, 335, 340.
14 Blunt et al. 1989, 51–2, Pls 4, 14–21, 27. The association between the early memorial coinages and markets has been explored recently in Stocker 2013.
15 Lewis & Thacker 2003, 29–30; compare Strickland 1988, especially 110.
16 www.pastscape.org.uk (Accessed 8 March 2014). For example, at Lucca the arena of the amphitheatre became 'Piazza del Mercato', with shops developing in the Middle Ages in the *cavea*, which fossilised the structure in the street plan, and other examples.
17 Everson & Stocker 2015.
18 Carrington 1975; Wallace 1986; 1987; Lewis & Thacker 2003, 25, 30, 52.
19 Mason 1985; 2007, 100–8; Thacker 1987, 287.
20 Dodgson 1968, 50–3.
21 Thacker 1982, 200–1; 2000; Lewis & Thacker 2005, 125; Bailey 2010, 7.
22 Christie 1887, 11; Hawkins 1848, 86.
23 Thacker 1982, 200.
24 www.pase.ac.uk (Accessed 8 March 2014).
25 www.pase.ac.uk 'Æthelred 1' (Accessed 8 March 2014).
26 E.g. Alldridge 1981, especially 11–17; Lewis 2008, 114–15.
27 Sargent 2012, 239; see Thacker 1982, 200, n. 12.
28 Darlington & McGurk 1995, 424–5, 582–3.
29 Sawyer & Thacker 1987, 302–3, 343–4; Lewis & Thacker 2005, 125–33, 324; Gem 2000. 'Redclif' was assessed at only two-thirds of a hide, as compared with the bishop's four hides at Farndon or six at Tarvin, but he enjoyed valuable customary dues and other assets in Chester, which made it the diocese's most important Cheshire holding.
30 E.g. Matthews S. 2000–1, 73; Matthews K. 2003; Wilmott et al. 2006, 13; but the idea seems to originate in Thacker 1982, 200–1.
31 Barrow 2015, 277-8; Baker 2010, 86–7, 90–1, 94–5, 211–12.
32 Gem 2000, 32; for a discussion of this process in York's archdiocese and the buildings it created, see Everson & Stocker forthcoming.
33 Baker 2010, 92–4, 115–16, 211–12; Bryant 2012, 309–11.
34 Everson & Stocker 2015.
35 OE *rōd* (cross) + OE *ēg* (island, water-meadow): Dodgson 1981, 62–3.
36 Henig 2004, 5, Pl. 5.
37 Rivet & Smith 1979, 336–7; Dodgson 1970, 21–2; Nicolaisen 1997. Semple (2010, 30–3) anticipates 'watery' ritual deposits in the Roodee, but we suggest that the rituality of the place was more specifically focussed on the gorge itself – see below, 172–3.
38 Mason 1980; 2001, 108–9, 205–7. There is an inscribed altar to Minerva, decorated with sacrificial weapons and ritual vessels, from the southern part of the city, Henig 2004, 5–6, pl. 7.
39 Lewis & Thacker 2005, 1–2.
40 Mason 2001, 111–17; Waddelove 2001.
41 Ward 2012.
42 Milne & Hobley 1981; McGrail 1985; Hodges & Hobley 1988.
43 Tooley 1980; for a helpful digest and modelling for the Dee, see Ward 1996.
44 Lewis & Thacker 2005, 83–7; Reid 2007–8 for convenient recent summaries; Lewis & Thacker 2005, 1–2, 255–60 for the reclamation of the Roodee.
45 Jones et al. 2003, *passim* (esp. RAZ text 9.15). For the form of these bridges, see Strickland 1988, 113–14 and Lewis 2012.
46 Lewis & Thacker 2005, 76–7; Mason 2003.
47 For recent substantial comment see, e.g. Barrow 2001; Thornton 2001; Lewis & Thacker 2003, 22–3; Williams 2004a; 2004b; Matthews 2007; Breeze 2007; Woolf 2007, 207–9; Keynes 2008, 48–51; Matthews 2009; Molyneaux 2011, esp. 66–8.
48 D text: 7 þær him common ongean .vi. cyningas, 7 ealle wið him getreowsodon þæt hi woldon efen wyrhtan beon on sæ 7 on lande (Cubbin 1996, 96); E text: 7 sona æfter þam se cynig geleadde ealle his sciphere to Lægeceastre, 7 þær him common ongan .vi. cyningas, 7 ealle wið trywsodon þet hi woldon efenwyhton beon on sæ 7 on lande (Irvine 2004, 59); trans. Whitelock et al. 1961, 76.
49 Ælfric, XXI *Natale Sancti Swyðuni Episcopi*, lines 450–3: and ealle ða cyningas þe on þysum iglande wæron cumera and scotta common to eadgare hwilon anes dæges eahta cyningas and hi ealle gebugon to eadgares wissunge (Skeat 1881–1900, 469); Lapidge 2003, 606–7; Williams 2004a, 230 translates the final word as 'direction'.
50 Cum quibus die quadam scapham ascendit, illisque ad remos locatis, ipse clauum gubernaculi arripiens, eam per cursum fluminis de perite gubernauit, omnique turba ducum et procerum, simili nauigio comitante, a palatio ad monasterium sancti Iohannis baptiste nauigauit (Darlington & McGurk 1995, 422–5); William of Malmesbury similarly names the eight kings but figures Edgar as sitting in the prow of the vessel, Mynors et al. 1998, 238–41.
51 Barrow 2001, 89–93.

52 See Davidson 2001.
53 Barrow 2001.
54 Molyneaux 2011.
55 Lewis & Thacker 2003, 23.
56 Hooper 1989; Jayakumar 2001.
57 Matthews 2007, 17–20.
58 Breeze 2007.
59 Thornton 2001; Williams 2004a; Woolf 2007, 207–9; Charles-Edwards 2013, 543–5.
60 Griffiths 1994, especially Fig. 13.2; Pagan 2012.
61 Jonsson 1987; Thacker 1988, 123 notes the complete absence of portrait heads from Chester issues and suggests that it represents a concession to Norse preferences in the interest of promoting the city's Irish Sea trade.
62 Dolley & Pirie 1964; Griffiths 1994, 127–8; Lewis & Thacker 2003, 20–2.
63 Ibid., 24–5.
64 Griffiths et al. 2007, esp. 399–406; and see Griffiths 1992; Graham-Campbell 1998.
65 Lewis 2008. Edgar might have had Chester, 'the crossroads of the British Isles', in mind when he legislated – perhaps in the 970s – that measures for the organisation of sworn witnesses to supervise buying and selling were to be 'gemæne eallum leodscype, ægðer ge Englum ge Denum ge Bryttum, on ælcum ende mines anwealdes', that is 'common to the whole people, whether Englishmen or Danes or Britons, in every part of my dominion': Robertson 1925, 32; Wormald 1999, 318 (trans.), 148, 442 (date).
66 Bailey 2010, 81-2 (Hilbre Island), 133–6, 145–6 (West Kirby).
67 For the parish and its components, see Brownbill 1928, 1–6; Dodgson 1972, 282–305; for Hoylake and the evolution of the western end of the north Wirral coast, see Griffiths et al. 2007, 11–24, 355–71, 373–9, 406–11; for Lythe, Stocker 2000, 200–3, fig. 9.
68 The proposition is explored most fully in Griffiths et al. 2007, especially 406, 412–20, 433.
69 Bailey 2010, 31–3, 38.
70 Brownbill 1928, 87–9; Sawyer & Thacker 1987, 307–8, Robert was Hugh's man-in-charge in Cheshire 'princeps militiae eius et totius provinciae gubernator'; Griffiths et al. 2007, 369–71.
71 Sawyer 1998, 183–4, 196–7.
72 Hume 1863, 27 and Brownbill 1928, 29–30, both quoting Bradshaw's verse life of St Werburgh, see Horstmann 1887, 180 line 1441; it was alternatively *le Porteswaye*, Dodgson 1970, 39.
73 Bailey 2010, 85–90; Place 1996; Hartwell et al. 2011, 501, 522–3.
74 For example, Thornton 2001, 74–9; Matthews S. 2009.
75 Thornton 2001.
76 Dodgson 1972, 73–5; Bu'Lock 1972, 55; even if the royal *tun* was at Aldford, as has been suggested, that is rather more than half way.
77 Since the tenth-century *palatium* must surely have been within the Roman enclosure, the royal party perhaps exited and returned via the Westgate and took to the water on the Roodee pool, using the Roodee cross as the sea-marker and guide to the state of the tide, as suggested below.
78 Barrow 2001, 82. The formal, processional aspect of this performance at Chester – both by land and water – no doubt deserves more attention. Processions as practised in pre-Conquest England were as much a ceremonial legacy of the late antique world as important aspects of contemporary religious practice: Gittos 2013, 103–45.
79 There was a well-documented tradition of erecting stone crosses at critical points as sea-marks in Norway in the eleventh century, see Hutchinson 1994, 170–1 citing Morcken 1969. Locally, the place-name Crossens on the Lancashire coast, meaning 'headland or promontory with crosses', refers to the promontory at the mouth of the River Ribble, with sea-marks guiding access to this important estuary, see Fellows-Jensen 1985, 118.
80 Earl Ranulph II (1129–53) acted in precisely the same way – only by written charter – in pledging his peace to all who attended, when he reorganised Chester's main midsummer fair to take place before the abbey (St Werburgh's) gate; Lewis & Thacker 2003, 29–30.
81 Ward 1994.
82 Bailey 2009; 2010, 62–73. To this list we would also add the remains of what we suspect might be an encircled cross-head at Marton, Lincolnshire, not just because of the stylistic parallel but also because we believe that it too is associated with a church built on an early strand-market, see Everson and Stocker 1999, 226–8; Stocker 2000, 190–1; Stocker and Everson 2006, 215–21.
83 Barrow 2015.

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