

Ismere, Cyneberht's Lost Monastery, and the Province of *Husmeræ*

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ismere lies about 5 km (3 miles) to the south-west of Stourbridge in the West Midlands (fig. 1). It is located in Worcestershire (the county within which Stourbridge also lay until 1974) spanning the boundary of the ancient parishes of Wolverley and Churchill. Although the name appears in a couple of nearby buildings, Ismere House and Ismere Grange (both in Churchill parish), Ismere's focus, as we will see later, is a small pool at the nearby Whitehouse Farm. The pool lies at the head of a stream valley which drains north-westwards (through the Island Pool mill pond) into the river Stour between Caunsall and Cookley. The stream valley here is flanked by moderately-sized hills: High Down to the north and Axborough Hill (known as *heasecan beorh* in 964 CE) to the south. Despite the area now being mostly treeless, the pool and the stream are largely hidden from view by the surrounding topography. Looking down upon the stream valley from the elevated position of High Down, one can understand why early people might have been drawn to this location; and, indeed, when we delve into its past, we find that the site has a long and fascinating history, its importance being out of all proportion to its geographical size.

2. HISTORICAL REFERENCES

The name 'Ismere' is thought to be related to that of the early Anglo-Saxon or British province, *Husmeræ*. The oldest surviving reference to *Husmeræ* in historical records occurs in a single-page charter of 736 CE known as the Ismere Diploma (fig. 2). Subsequent charters refer to the province as either *provincia Usmerorum* (in 757x775 CE), a Latinised genitive plural of *Usmere* seeming to mean '[the lands] belonging to the people of *Usmere*', or *Usmerum* (in 781).¹

The Ismere Diploma records, in Latin, a grant by the Mercian king Æthelbald of ten *cassati* (assumed to be ten hides²) of land to his 'venerable companion Cyneberht' for the construction of a *coenubium*, i.e. a monastery (sometimes translated as 'minster').³ It describes the land as being 'in the province to which the name *Husmeræ* has been assigned from ancient times, beside the river called *stur* [Stour]'.⁴ The charter goes on to describe the location, within the province, of the land granted to Cyneberht: 'the above-mentioned estate is, in circuit, on both sides of the above-named river (i.e. the Stour), having on its northern side the wood which they call *Cynibre* [Kinver], on the west indeed another whose name is *Moerheb* of which the greatest part belongs to the aforesaid estate'. *Moerheb* is often assumed to be an early form of 'Morfe', although this is not universally accepted. Additionally, the reverse of the document is endorsed, apparently by a different scribe, with the words: 'moreover the estate whose name is *Brochyl* is in the said wood of *Morheb*'. Note the different spelling, *Morheb*.

Although the second charter mentioned above is not dated, it is thought to have been produced between 757 and 775. It describes a transfer of the same monastic lands (fourteen *cassati* in total, including the *Brochyl* estate), from Cyneberht's son, Ceolfrith, to the Church and Bishopric of Worcester, and refers to the lands as: *provincia Usmerorum quod nominatur æt Sture*.⁵ Evidently the estate was located at a place called *æt Sture*, within the same *Husmeræ* province (but this time the charter uses a different, Latinised, spelling, *Usmerorum*). The *æt Sture* estate was probably located at a fairly major settlement somewhere along the river Stour. It is not absolutely clear where this was but another charter (S 1826), thought to have been written some time between 716 and 757, offers a clue.⁶ Its text referred to this place-name and Wolverley in the same sentence: 'concerning *Sture* and *þluardele* [Wolverley]', so it may be that *æt Sture* was near to Wolverley but separate from it.

Charters dated after 736 CE mention only the estate's land (i.e. fourteen *cassati*, including *Brochyl*) and not the monastery itself. Partly because of this, it has been suggested that, once the *æt Sture*

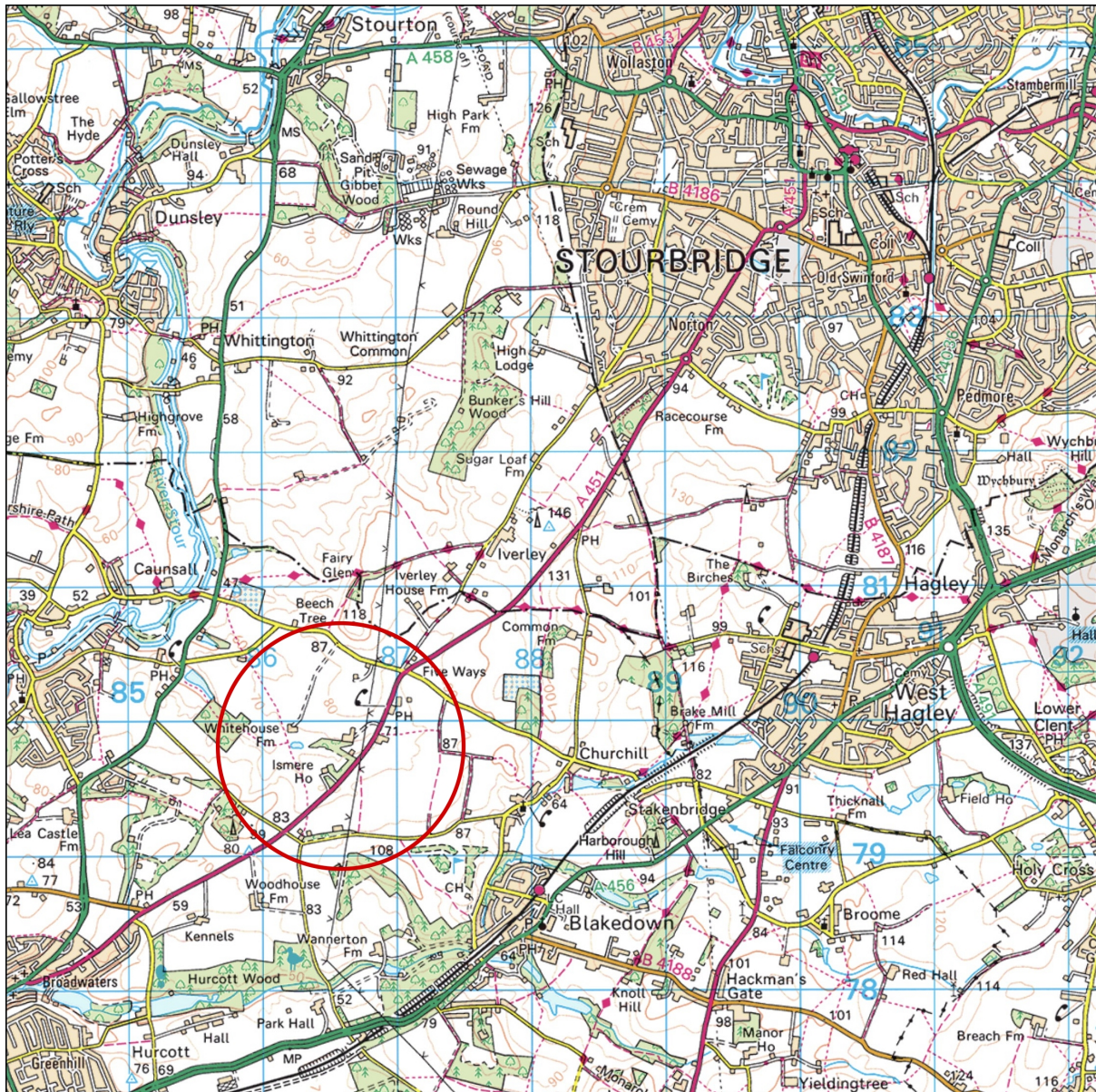


Fig. 1. Location of the modern district of Ismere. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

estate had been transferred to Cyneberht, the monastery was not actually built.⁷ However, both Cyneberht and Ceolfrith began to refer to themselves as *abbas*, 'abbot', in later eighth-century charters,⁸ and this has been taken as evidence to support the opposite view, the apparent omission of the monastery being explained by the fact that monasteries were so commonplace at this time that 'it might simply have not been worth mentioning'.⁹ Furthermore, the fact that Ceolfrith later (i.e. 757x775 CE) gifted the estate to the see of Worcester probably indicates that the monastery was operational at that date. Some researchers have hypothesised that the monastery had been built, but destroyed by the Danes during the late ninth century.¹⁰ Others suggest that the monastery was built at Kidderminster,¹¹ or lay in the vicinity of Ismere.¹² If it was, indeed built close to Ismere, perhaps near Wolverley or Cookley, and subsequently destroyed by the Danes, one wonders whether the minster commemorated in the place-name Kidderminster served as its replacement. These questions are unlikely to be resolved until the monastic estate can be located and excavated archaeologically.

To summarise, we have, in 736 CE, ten *cassati* at a place called *æt Sture*, plus the four-*cassati* *Brochyl* estate within the wood of *Moerheb* to the west, all of which probably lay within the Stour valley between Kinver and Kidderminster. A monastery was probably built there but that is not certain. Additionally, all of these places seem to have been located within the ancient province of *Husmeræ*.

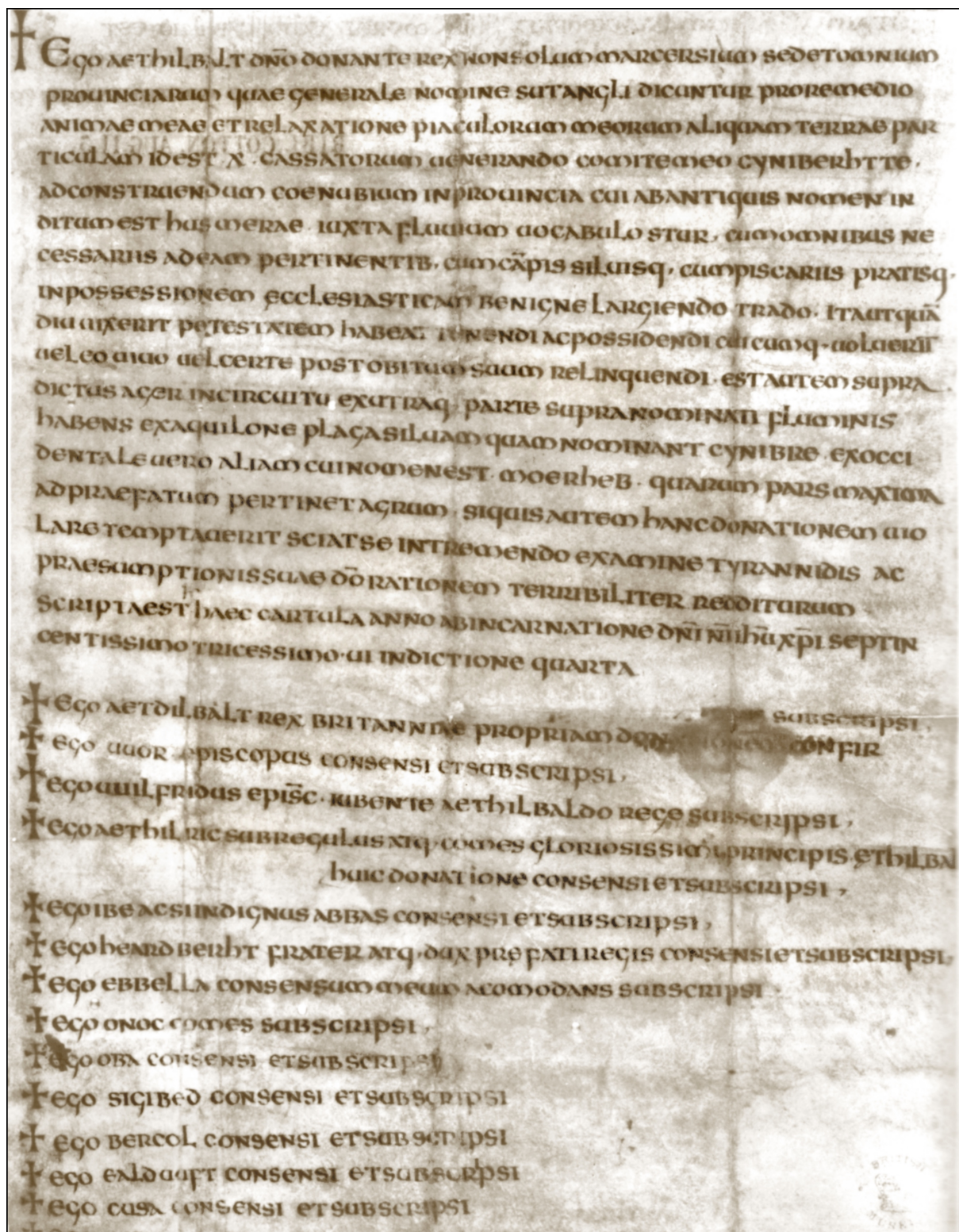


Fig. 2. The Ismere Diploma of 736 CE.

We are now faced with several questions, none of which are easy to answer:

- Where was *æt Sture* and the monastic estate?
- Was the monastery ever built and, if so, where was it?
- Where was the wood of *Moerheb* and the *Brochyl* estate within it?
- How is the modern, and relatively small, Ismere related to the *Husmeræ* province?
- How far did the province of *Husmeræ* extend?

3. THE LOCATION OF *ÆT STURE* AND THE MONASTIC ESTATE

As already mentioned, there has been some discussion about where the monastery and the *aet Sture* estate were located. It has been noted that 'on topographical, onomastic and later parochial evidence, the obvious identification [of the monastic estate] is Kidderminster'.¹³

The 'topographical evidence' is merely that the name *aet Sture* suggests the estate lay on the river Stour. Yet, even just the north-south section of the Stour (i.e. ignoring the up-stream east-west segment between Halesowen and Prestwood) is about 15 miles (23 km) long, so that line of evidence hardly pins down the location precisely; *aet Sture* could have been anywhere along the river.

To my mind, the 'onomastic evidence' (i.e. name-study evidence) is almost as weak. Many scholars have assumed that, because the name Kidderminster includes the term '-minster' (which might have meant either a monastery or an important church), the *aet Sture* monastic estate was located there. But there is no evidence that Kidderminster's 'minster' is identical with the Ismere Diploma's *coenubium*, 'monastery'. Numerous instances of these ecclesiastical institutions sprung up in the first few decades of the eighth century, and even a small geographical area could have had more than one. The ecclesiastical historian Bede (672–735 CE) wrote that '...since 705 virtually every chief nobleman ... had obtained a royal charter to found a minster, that their wives had done the same and that ministers and servants of the king had followed their example'.¹⁴ Many of these minsters have disappeared leaving no trace in historical records. As John Blair notes... 'the known charters, preserved fortuitously in the archives of major churches, may [represent] a minute fraction of the original total [of minsters]'.¹⁵

And finally, the 'parochial evidence', to the extent that we know it, relates specifically to Kidderminster's minster (for example, the later institution of Kidderminster Rural Deanery) but, again, we have no proof, or even convincing evidence, that that minster is the monastery referenced in the Ismere Diploma.

It is thought that Kidderminster's oldest parish church, St. Marys and All Saints, would probably have been erected on the site of any previous minster in the town but, despite a ground-penetrating radar (GPR) survey of the church-yard in 2006, which appeared to show an unidentified buried structure, a subsequent archaeological dig in 2013 demonstrated that this was merely a natural geological feature. Moreover, it revealed no sign of an Anglo-Saxon monastery or minster.¹⁶ Perhaps that is not surprising though, as a minster of that period is likely to have been built mainly of timber with wattle and daub infill which leaves only very ephemeral traces in the soil. Although stonework amongst its fabric cannot be ruled out entirely, particularly for crosses and symbolic decorative features, stone was used very sparingly (or not at all) in most eighth-century constructions.

As already mentioned, the second element of the place-name Kidderminster certainly suggests that a major ecclesiastical building was located there. But to understand the name fully, we must also consider its first element. Kidderminster derives from *Cydelanmynster*, 'Cydel's minster',¹⁷ yet no-one named Cydela is known to have been associated with the Ismere Diploma's monastery; the only abbots mentioned in historical records are Cyneberht and his son Ceolfrith. To potentially circumvent this difficulty, Margaret Gelling has hypothesized that, as personal names having a common initial letter would often be used within a family, Cydela might have been an older brother of Ceolfrith who briefly took charge of the monastery after the death of their father, Cyneberht. There is an obvious objection to this argument: known charter dates would, in this scenario, most likely restrict the time during which Cydela could have been in charge to a relatively short period and, as he is not known from other sources, it would seem unlikely for his name, rather than Cyneberht's or Ceolfrith's, to become associated with the minster and ultimately the town.

There are also a few geographic objections to Kidderminster being the location of the *aet Sture* monastic estate.

The 736 CE charter is endorsed with the words *Norð stur*, 'North Stour'. This probably represents the place at which the charter was enacted rather than the location of the monastic estate, but we cannot be certain; it might be both. Clearly though, as Kidderminster lies about two-thirds of the way down the north-south stretch of the river Stour, 'North Stour' is likely to have lain somewhere north of the present-day Kidderminster, i.e. within the later parishes of Wolverley or Kinver.

The Ismere Diploma itself would have been prepared by a scribe working under the instruction of the king's (ecclesiastical) ministers and/or local bishops. It included a list of witnesses written in the principal scribe's hand. None of the names in the list are actual signatures (autographs), and the document doesn't even bear the king's signature. His role would probably have been simply to make 'an oral grant and/or symbolic gesture such as putting a sod of the granted land on an altar'.¹⁸ It is not known whether the king visited the area to make the grant, but the endorsement seems to suggest that he did. In that case, we have to ask where he might have stayed. Kidderminster probably didn't start to develop significantly before the tenth century¹⁹ and was likely no bigger than the nearby Cookley (*culnan clif*) in 736 CE. Kinver seems a more likely place for a royal overnight stay; the manor certainly has long-standing royal connections. We can trace some of these as far back as the Norman period but the situation becomes unclear through earlier periods. On the balance of probabilities though, the practicalities of a (hypothetical) royal visit tend to support the notion that *Norð stur* and perhaps the *aet Sture* monastic estate lay further north than Kidderminster.

A more substantial piece of evidence to support this notion, comes from the Ismere Diploma itself. In it, 'the wood which they call *Cynibre* [Kinver]' was said to be north of *aet Sture*, seemingly abutting it. While it is possible that Kinver held woodland some miles distant from its main settlement or manor, one might have expected place-name evidence of any such woodland to remain, but there is none. The only Kinver wood which we know of lies within the manor of Kinver itself. Moreover, Kinver's southern boundary (along Gypsy Lane and crossing Kinver Edge) seems to have been important from a very early date: a considerable length of it is delineated by what appears to be a Bronze Age boundary dyke.²⁰ This same line is still in use as a parish and county boundary today. It is, of course, possible that the dyke fell out of use in antiquity, only subsequently being reused in the late tenth century to define the boundary between the (then) new counties of Worcester and Stafford. Yet the dyke's survival and its present function as county and parish boundary suggest that Kinver may have a long-standing territorial identity and, this, together with the aforementioned lack of place-name evidence outside of Kinver parish, may argue against any woodland south of the boundary being known as 'the wood which they call *Cynibre* [Kinver]'.

None of these points is conclusive but, taking them all together, I would have to agree with the place-name scholar Margaret Gelling that 'the case for identifying Stour [*aet Sture*] in Ismere [*Husmeræ*] with Kidderminster is far from watertight'.²¹

4. LOCATION OF 'THE WOOD OF *MOERHEB*', *BROCHYL*, AND THE MONASTERY

4.1. *Moerheb*

It has been suggested that the name *Moerheb* (spelled *Morheb* in the Ismere Diploma's appendix) is an early form of the medieval manorial name Morfe, and means 'horse brambles or thorns of horses'.²² Although both names would appear to be Brittonic, rather than Old English (OE), in origin, and potentially share the same etymology, there is insufficient place-name evidence to say conclusively that Morfe derives from *Moerheb*.²³ Nevertheless, if we assume for the moment that it does, we must consider how a wood associated with Morfe could possibly lie west of a monastic estate which was probably somewhere south of Kinver.

Morfe was a small Domesday manor lying to Kinver's north-west, within the later Staffordshire parish of Enville. It was also the name of a Norman forest which lay, detached from the manor, some 7 to 8 km further north-west. Morfe forest abutted the river Severn and extended from the region around Quatford in the south to the river Worfe in the north (fig. 3). Clearly *Moerheb* cannot have been here, or, indeed, anywhere near the later Norman forest of Morfe. The main monastic estate lay south of 'the wood which they call *Cynibre* [Kinver]', and Morfe forest certainly did not lie to the west of such a location (as is required by the Ismere Diploma).

For this reason it has been suggested by Peter King, that *Moerheb* may have lain in the area now known as Kidderminster Heath, i.e. extending south of Wassell Wood, between Habberley and Wribbenhall.²⁴ The only bases offered for this, however, are the assumptions that the monastery was located at Kidderminster (for which there is very little evidence) and that 'the wood of *Moerheb*' eventually became heath-land.

Another possibility emerges if we consider why Morfe forest lay detached from Morfe manor. The size of the forest changed over time but the name Morfe is preserved at two places which lay at the forest's centre (i.e. within even its most shrunken bounds):²⁵ Morfe Covert lies at SO 767 924 and Morfevalley Covert at SO 769 911. Both are located in the western part of Claverley parish, close to its boundary with Worfield parish. It may be that these locations represent a core woodland area which, prior to the establishment of the forest during the Norman period, had belonged to the manor of Morfe.

Although some miles distant, such a woodland might have been linked to Morfe manor by the practice of transhumance, the seasonal movement of livestock from a main settlement centre to outlying pasture, perhaps wood-pasture.²⁶ Areas for holding and tending a manor's livestock were known as manorial hays. They tended to lie at the manor's extremities and it is thought that they were sometimes (perhaps often) deliberately integrated into the Norman forests, thereby influencing the forests' location and extent to some degree.²⁷ If this occurred in the case of Morfe forest, the former seasonal wood-pasture here would have been at least 7 or 8 km away from the manorial centre of Morfe. It is not difficult to imagine that the manor of Morfe could have held other woodland 10 km or so to the south, i.e. due west of the *aet Sture* monastic estate. If so, might not this also have been known as 'the wood of *Moerheb* [?Morfe]'? Although the foregoing seems to be a feasible scenario, it is quite possible that this line of argument is redundant. As I noted above, and despite assertions made by some researchers, it is not at all clear that the names *Moerheb* and Morfe are related.

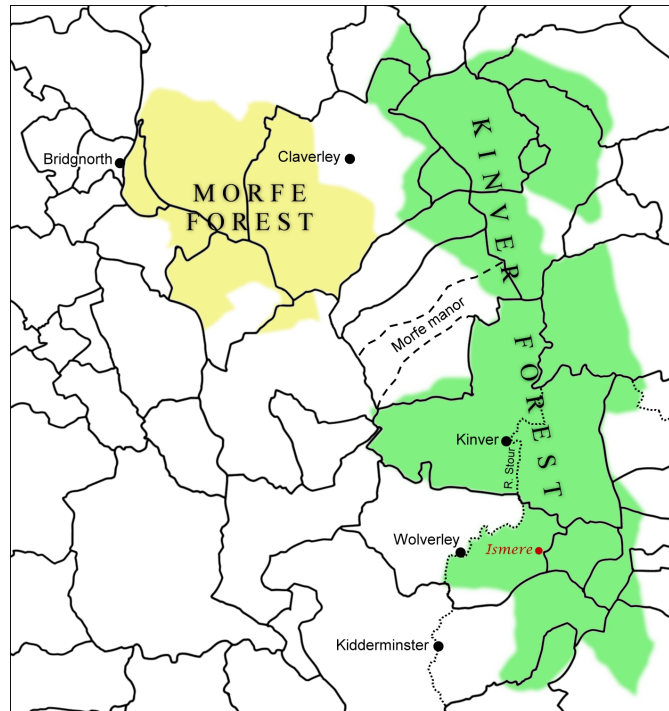


Fig. 3. The Norman forests of Morfe and Kinver overlaid on the pattern of local parish boundaries. Modern place-names are shown for orientation and scale.

4.2 *Brochyl*

The name *Brochyl* is potentially more helpful. This estate was said to have been within 'the wood of *Moerheb*', and identifying *Brochyl*'s whereabouts would undoubtedly help us to locate both *Moerheb* and the monastic estate *aet Sture*, which we know lay to the east of *Brochyl*.

The respected place-name scholar Margaret Gelling has discussed the potential for interchange between the OE terms *-hyl* 'hill' and *-hol* 'hole' in similar place-names, and she considered that *Brochyl* might have been a local expression of the fairly common compound appellative *brochole*, which derives from OE *brocc-hol*, and means 'badger hole'.²⁸ But it is not at all clear that the first element of *Brochyl* comes from OE *brocc*, 'badger'. Indeed, it would seem a little incongruous to name a four-hide (i.e. fairly large) estate after a badgers' den. *Brochyl* may, instead, have contained a representation of OE *brōc*, 'a brook, a stream', such as that which appears in a group of field-names near Wollescote, in Oldswinford parish. These were recorded as *Brockall* in 1699, *Brookal* in 1733, and *Brockhill* in 1782, the associated farm-name being spelled *Brockall Farm* in 1861.²⁹ It is probable that these spellings derived from OE *brōc-halh*, 'the brook hollow or nook', rather than *brocc-halh* as had been previously supposed, and that this ultimately produced the adjacent modern road-name Brook Holloway.³⁰ The notion that the first element of *Brochyl* comes from OE *brōc* has also been considered by other researchers.³¹

In summary, it seems that *Brochyl* might represent OE *brōc-hyll*, 'brook-hill', or in view of Margaret Gelling's comments, *brōc-hol*, 'brook-hole', rather than a 'badger-hill' or 'badger-hole'. But which

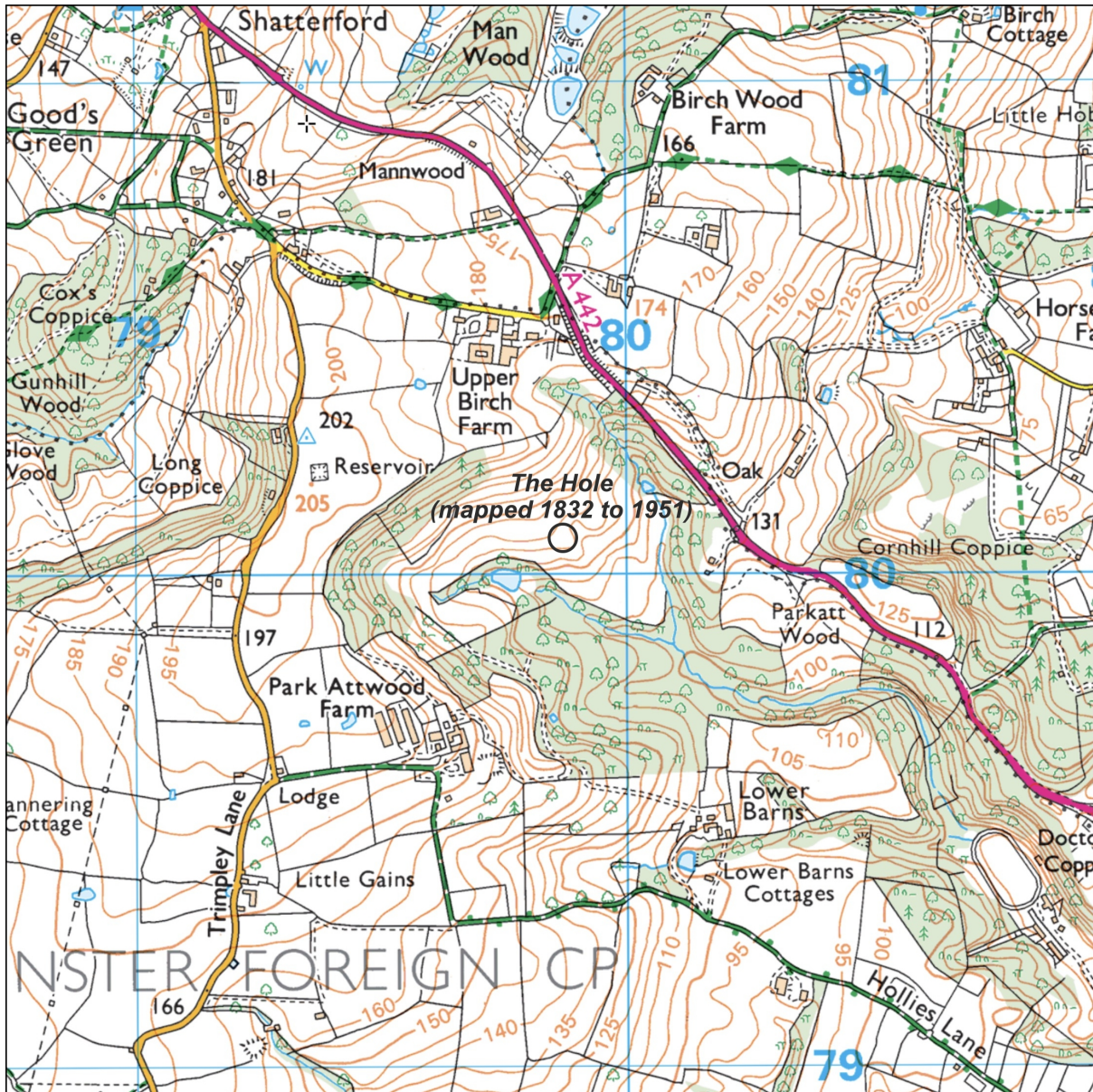


Fig 4. The suspected location of Brochyl: a steep hill-side and deep valley at the source of the Honey Brook. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

brook was this? As it was not referred to by name, it may have been well known in the locality and perhaps an important element of the landscape. Two such brooks are to be found west of Ismere, both being major tributaries of the Stour and both marking early (ninth- and tenth-century) estate boundaries. The Horse Brook delineated the boundary of *culnan clif* (Cookley) in 964 CE, and the Honey Brook marked the boundary of the *seoges læa* (Seckley) estate, in Wolverley, in 866 CE.³² The latter brook has since come to delineate the boundary between Wolverley and Kidderminster parishes so we can surmise that it had been a significant element of the landscape, probably for many centuries. Perhaps of more relevance is the fact that the Honey Brook rises within an unusual and strikingly-shaped geographical feature: a deep, enclosed, steep-sided valley (at SO 795 800). The valley's north-west edge is formed by a pronounced hill-side which possesses several springs that drain into the Honey Brook (figs 4 and 5). Could this hill, being the source of such an important brook, have been known in OE as *brōc-hyll*, and recorded in the Ismere Diploma as *Brochyl*?

Today, the hill is known as Long Coppice Hill. It accommodates Park Attwood Farm, and shares a ridge of high ground with Wassell Wood hill-fort 3 km to the south. This prominent ridge forms part of the Stour-Smestow watershed and provides commanding views out to the Cleve Hills, Wales, the Wrekin and Clent. Parkatt Wood, a locally corrupted form of 'Park Attwood', lies partly upon the hill

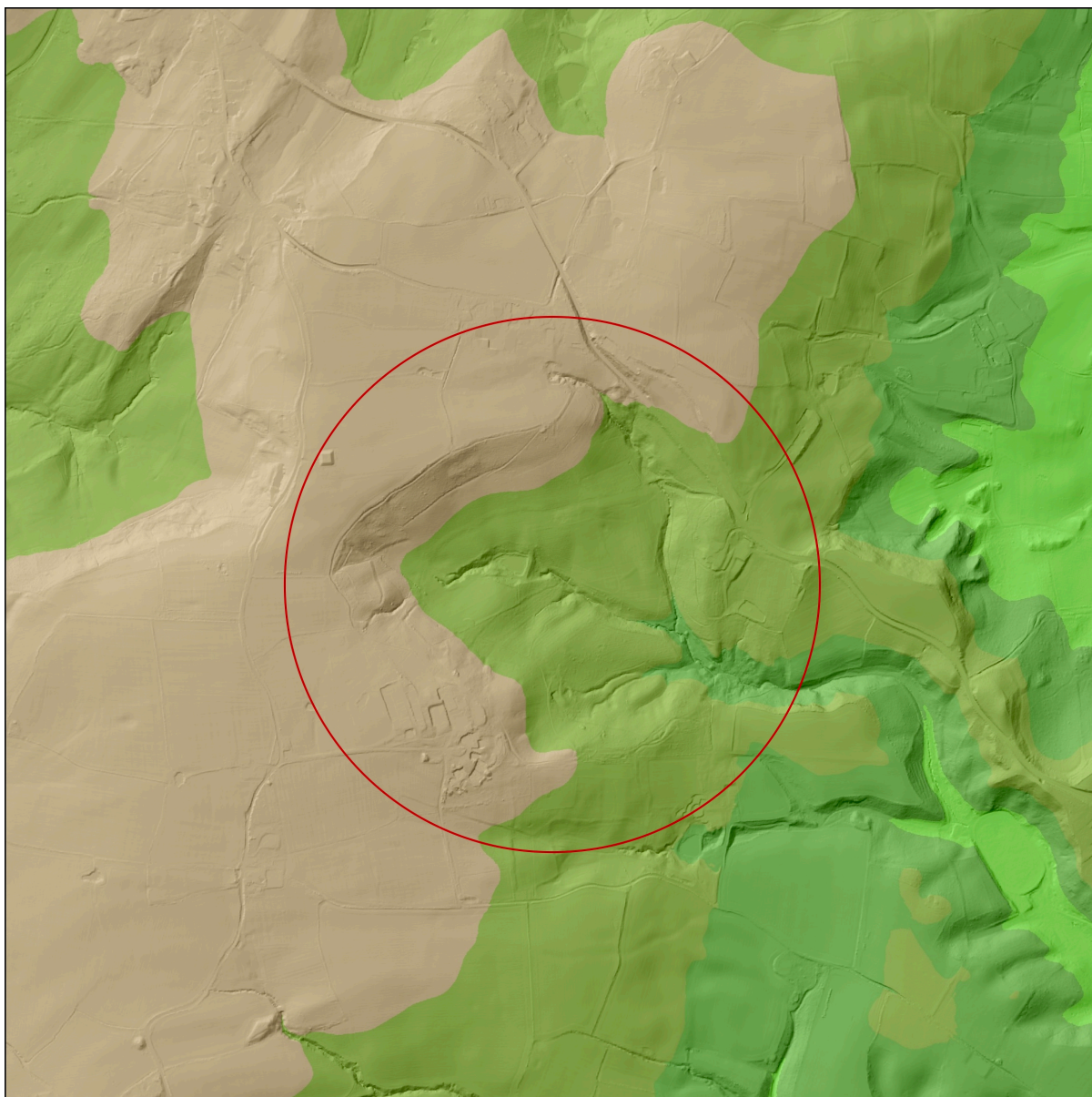


Fig 5. The suspected location of *Brochyl*. This LiDAR plot illustrates why the steep north-western side of this enclosed valley (later to be named 'The Hole') may have been known as 'Brook Hill' or the OE form *brōc-hyll*. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

and partly within the adjacent valley. This place was known as *ate Wode* in 1319; and, in 1362, a John *atte Wode* of Wolverley was granted a license to impark 600 acres of the king's demesne land in what must have been a woodland estate (later reputed to have become a manor) here.³³ Imparkment certainly implies that it would have been, at least, a moderately important place; perhaps being of some long-standing significance.

OS maps dating back to 1832 depict a building called The Hole on Long Coppice Hill's south-east declivity.³⁴ Presumably it was named for the adjacent valley's shape, steepness (1:3 to 1:9 gradient) and depth (90m / 300 feet). Indeed, it may be that the valley itself, enclosed on three sides, had been known as 'The Hole'. It is conceivable that, since the hill-side formed the edge of the valley, the *Brochyl* estate-name mutated over time (perhaps influenced by the common and similar sounding compound *brocc-hol*, 'badger hole') into a form which led to the valley becoming known as 'The Brook-Hole' and then just 'The Hole'.

This tentative identification of Long Coppice Hill and Parkatt Wood as the location of *Brochyl* is based only upon circumstantial evidence but, if correct, it would also put the 'wood of *Moerheb*' in this



Fig. 6. The putative location of the Brochyl estate (circled, left) relative to Ismere (circled, right). If this tentative identification is correct, the aet Sture monastic estate would have straddled the Stour near Caunsall, Cookley and/or Wolverley. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

vicinity, i.e. in a region that is still well wooded today. Clearly the wood covered a greater area than *Brochyl* itself, and it may be that it extended west into what is now called Eymore Wood, perhaps occupying the whole of the north-west protuberance of the later Kidderminster parish. A number of other researchers have also suggested Eymore Wood as being the location of 'the wood of *Moerheb*', but not for the same reason.³⁵ As already mentioned, it has been suggested (but not proven) that *Moerheb* is an early form of 'Morfe'. If this is correct, it is interesting that both Morfe forest and *Moerheb* would have lain adjacent to the river Severn.

4.3 The Monastery

The location suggested above for *Brochyl* would require the main monastic estate to have been situated to the east, in the vicinity of the present day villages of Caunsall, Cookley or Wolverley (fig. 6), a situation which is not incompatible with Sims-Williams' assumption that the monastery lay close to Ismere.³⁶ Such a site would also be consistent with the Ismere Diploma's assertion that 'the wood which they call *Cynibre* [Kinver]' lay immediately to the north of the monastic estate.



Fig. 7. The location of Clee Hall (now Westley Court), the site of 'ancient foundations, and sculpture of undoubted ecclesiastical character' reported by W. H. Duignan in 1910. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

Moreover, in 1910, W. H. Duignan suggested that the remains of the monastery building lay at Clee Hall on Austcliffe Lane, Cookley (circled in fig. 7). He noted that 'the ground is full of ancient foundations, and sculpture of undoubted ecclesiastical character has been dug up and is preserved by the owner'.³⁷ Clee Hall was redeveloped in 1989–90 and its grounds now accommodate Westley Court Apartments and Westley Court Care Home. Though interesting, Duignan's report is inconclusive, and thorough archaeological investigations are needed before we can assert that this is definitely the site of Ismere's monastery. While some of the old building's cellars and foundations have been incorporated into the new development, additional buildings have also been constructed in the former grounds, perhaps destroying any archaeological deposits that remained.³⁸

The site lies upon a very pronounced promontory overlooking the confluence of the Stour with the stream that flows from the pool at Ismere. If, as seems to be the case, Ismere had been an important place within the local territory, it may be significant that the supposed monastery site lay at the opposite end of the stream.

The surface geology at this location consists of 'Worcester Sand and Gravel' river-terrace deposits (formerly known as 'River Severn Second Terrace Deposits') which are typically up to 10m thick. As Sims-Williams notes, 'the most attractive areas for settlement in the kingdom of the Hwicce were the sandy and gravelly terraces of the Severn ... and of its tributaries the Stour and ... the Avon. The concentration of settlements, including monasteries, in these central areas must have had a unifying effect on the kingdom'.³⁹ Such deposits in, and near, flood plains provided fertile and well-drained soils, and a remarkable number of Anglo-Saxon monasteries were built upon them.⁴⁰

It may also be relevant that Romano-British pottery has been found at several places around Caunsall (i.e. 500 m north of Clee Hall) and Roman coins just to the south.⁴¹ Additionally, the field-names Street Meadow (SO 851 809) and Street Leasow (SO 850 811) have been recorded 600m north of Clee Hall.⁴² Although the word 'Street' could relate to the shape of the fields at the time of their naming, it might, alternatively, indicate the presence of a paved (probably Roman) road nearby. This raises the possibility that the *aet Sture* estate, if it was indeed located in this area, had a Romano-British origin or, at least, that previous Romano-British occupation made the area an attractive place for re-settlement during the Anglo-Saxon period, perhaps even influencing the selection of the site for a monastery.⁴³

The area was serviced by two ancient roads. The Bristol–Chester road (of unknown age, and later known as the Great Irish Road) ran less than 1 km to the west;⁴⁴ and a presumably prehistoric east-west route (of which Caunsall Road may have been a part) seems to have connected the Iron Age hill forts at Wychbury and Solcum (near Drakelow).⁴⁵ The western end of Common Barn Lane is directed straight towards the Clee Hall site and could well have linked the putative monastery here to the latter route-way at SO 867 812.

A cluster of ecclesiastical place-names — Deansford Lane and Farm, Friar's Farm, and Monk's House — appears on nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey maps, 4 to 5 km south-east of Ismere. The cluster is connected to Ismere by a seemingly ancient track-way, and we might suppose that these ecclesiastical names could indicate the site of Cyneberht's monastery. However, two of them can be discounted immediately. The term 'Dean' applied to the chief cleric of a cathedral or collegiate church rather than to a monastery, and 'Friar', a term used in the Roman Catholic church, comes from the Norman French word 'frere' meaning 'brother' and doesn't seem to have been used in England before the twelfth century. Monk's House gets its name from Monk's Common (shown on an estate map of c.1745) which was also known as Harvington Common.⁴⁶ Nineteenth-century OS maps show a footpath leading south-west from Monk's House to the Roman Catholic church and presbytery at the nearby Harvington Hall. Although the present church building is of nineteenth century date, the eighteenth-century place-name Monk's Common, which may be related to the medieval place-name *Monkeswall* (possibly meaning 'Monk's well or spring'),⁴⁷ suggests an earlier ecclesiastical connection. *Ceadres leage's* (Chaddesley Corbett's) twenty-five *manentes*, probably including Monk's Common and Harvington, belonged to the Bishop or Church or Worcester.⁴⁸ While we cannot rule out the possibility that Monk's Common is related to the lost monastery — perhaps being an outlying area of seasonal pasture — there is no evidence, other than its name, to support such a supposition.

5. CASSATI AND HIDEAGES

Notwithstanding the fact that 350 years separated the Ismere Diploma from the Domesday survey — which is ample time for major changes to have occurred in the size and number of early estates — it is interesting to compare the *aet Sture* monastic estate's ten *cassati* (plus the extra four *cassati* of *Brochyl*) with local Domesday hideage assessments to get some idea of the geographical area covered by the land granted to Cyneberht. To make any comparison at all, however, we must understand the relationship between one *cassatum* of the 736 CE charter and one Domesday hide. Historians generally assume that they (and indeed *manisculae* and *manentes*, which are also referenced in some charters) are, broadly speaking, identical. While this is not without some evidential basis, it would probably be incorrect to assume that these units remained entirely invariant with respect to either date or geographical location.

The total of fourteen *cassati* (presumably being equal to fourteen Domesday hides) of arable land, together with accompanying woodland resources, granted to Cyneberht in 736 CE would clearly have been a valuable asset of considerable size. As we have seen in section 4, *Brochyl's* four *cassati* and

'the wood of *Moerheb*' may have become part of the twenty Domesday hides attributed to Kidderminster. The remaining ten *cassati* (?hides) must have lain elsewhere. Peter King suggests that Wolverley was not part of the *aet Sture* estate, because charter S 1826 (mentioned in section 2) records that king Æthelbald had granted Wolverley to his ealdorman Hwita.⁴⁹ King's argument is that this cannot have happened if Wolverley was part of the *aet Sture* estate. Yet the date of this charter is not known precisely: it seems to have been enacted some time between 716 and 757 CE,⁵⁰ potentially leaving a 20 year window before the Ismere Diploma, during which Wolverley could have changed hands again. Moreover, the reference to Wolverley in this charter is probably not to the whole of the (later) parish. It is more likely to have meant just the southern portion — being two *manentes* (?hides) in 866 CE⁵¹ — around the present Wolverley village and Lea Castle estate, but again the historical sources are not clear on this point.

Uncertainties such as these make for a shaky foundation on which to base a comparison with Domesday hideages, but we will proceed. Wolverley possessed five hides in 1086 CE but only two or three of these might have belonged to the former monastic estate, so it seems that the latter's ten *cassati* probably extended into areas outside of Wolverley parish, occupying land that ultimately became incorporated into neighbouring parishes. In 1086, Upper Arley and Churchill held two hides each, Hagley five hides, and Kidderminster twenty hides.⁵² As we have seen, Kidderminster might have inherited four of its twenty hides from the *Brochyl* estate. The ancient parish of Hagley possessed a peculiar appendage on its south-western extremity which encompassed Blakedown, Harborough and Stakenbridge, and we may speculate that this area was once part of the *aet Sture* monastic estate. There is no direct evidence for this but its southern boundary does align smoothly with that of Churchill and Wolverley, as though they had at one time all belonged to the same land unit. This boundary line also marks a transition between *lēah* place-names to the north (presumably representing mainly woodland settlements) and *tūn* place-names to the south (perhaps representing more extensively cleared and developed settlements at the time of their naming).⁵³ And, at the western side of Wolverley parish, there is evidence that, in 866 CE, either Upper Arley, Kidderminster or Wolverley had been subdivided by a now expunged estate boundary.⁵⁴ We don't know the form or significance of that additional estate division or, indeed, whether other estate boundaries in the vicinity had also changed in the 350 years since 736 CE, and this makes an accurate comparison very difficult. What is clear, however, is that the *aet Sture* and *Brochyl* estates probably possessed a significant area of land outside the present Wolverley parish, some of it possibly lying within the bounds of the present Kidderminster parish and/or to the south and east of Ismere.

6. ORIGINS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF ISMERE

The place-name Ismere — derived from the earlier *Husmeræ* (736 CE), *Usmerorum* (757x775 CE), *Usmerum* (781 CE), and *Usmere* (964 CE) — is a combination of two terms: the Brittonic (i.e. pre-Anglo-Saxon) *Us*, and the OE term *mere*. The first element, *Us*, seems to have originated from the word **udso*, meaning 'water', and was used both for running water and lakes / pools. It has become a proper noun in certain locations, leading to the modern river-name Ouse.⁵⁵ The second term, *mere*, also means 'a lake, a pool'.

Us may have been the name of the stream which runs through the lake / pool. Alternatively, the name as a whole may be a tautology meaning 'lake-lake' or 'pool-pool'. Such tautologies often resulted when the incoming Anglo-Saxons encountered the established British word for a geographical feature and, assuming it to be a proper-noun, appended their own (OE) descriptive qualifier.⁵⁶

So where was the lake / pool referenced in the name *Usmere* [Ismere]? In the early twentieth century, it was thought to have been located at Broadwaters, 2.5 km (1.5 miles) to the south-west of Ismere.⁵⁷ Because of this, a nearby residential street was subsequently named Usmere Road. It was later suggested that the Island Pool, which abuts the A449 at SO 855 803, was the *mere* of Ismere.⁵⁸ However, it is almost certainly the case that neither of these is correct. An Anglo-Saxon charter (S 726 for *culnanclif*, 'Cookley', in Wolverley) which was enacted in 964 CE, identifies the pool's location very clearly. A detailed description of the estate's boundaries (a perambulation) is included in the document, and this seems, in large part, to correspond to the boundaries of Wolverley parish depicted on nineteenth- and twentieth-century maps. The charter's boundary description begins *Ærest of usmere on heasecan beorh...*, 'First from *Usmere* to (the) barrow (or hill) of the hassock-grass [Axborough Hill]...';⁵⁹ and it is clear from this that the body of water in question, *Usmere* [Ismere], is

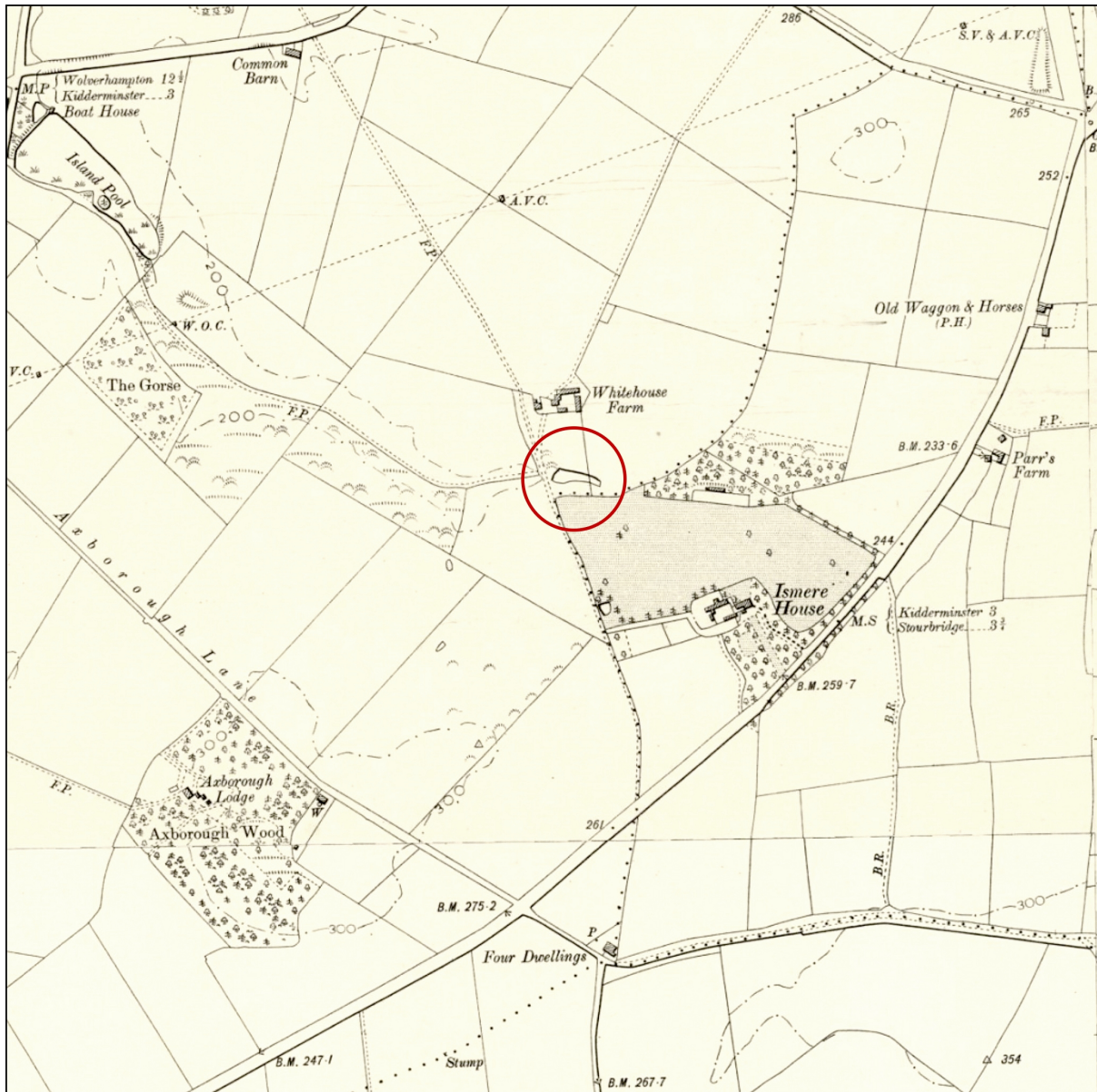


Fig. 8. Extract from Ordnance Survey 6-inch Staffordshire sheet LXXIV.NE (1903) showing the location of Ismere's pool (circled) in relation to the ancient parish boundary (dotted line). (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

the pool which presently lies just inside the Wolverley parish boundary, at SO 862 798, south of Whitehouse Farm (fig. 8). The pool also marks the source of the stream which runs past Clee Hall, the postulated site of the monastery *aet Sture*, just 1.2 km to the north-west (fig. 9).

The pool's small size is striking, particularly when one considers that it must have given its name to a much wider province. Presumably it was the province's central place, perhaps a *mōt* or moot (meeting) site at which the *Husmeræ* people would periodically assemble to discuss matters affecting their community (judicial, political, agricultural, spiritual etc.). It is noteworthy that, for the Brittonic term *Us* to have been preserved at all in the name of such a small pool, the place most likely retained some ongoing significance to the Anglo-Saxons. Margaret Gelling points out that the OE term *mere* was generally used for lakes, not ponds, and that the word *pōl*, 'pool', rather than *mere*, would have been expected for such a small feature.⁶⁰ Yet one wonders whether physical size would have been the only determinant in the choice of name-element here. Could the pool's societal significance have led to the use of *mere* rather than *pōl* in this instance? The question remains unresolved, but the evidence we have does point, very strongly, to this pool at Whitehouse Farm being the *Usmere* from which the modern name Ismere is derived.

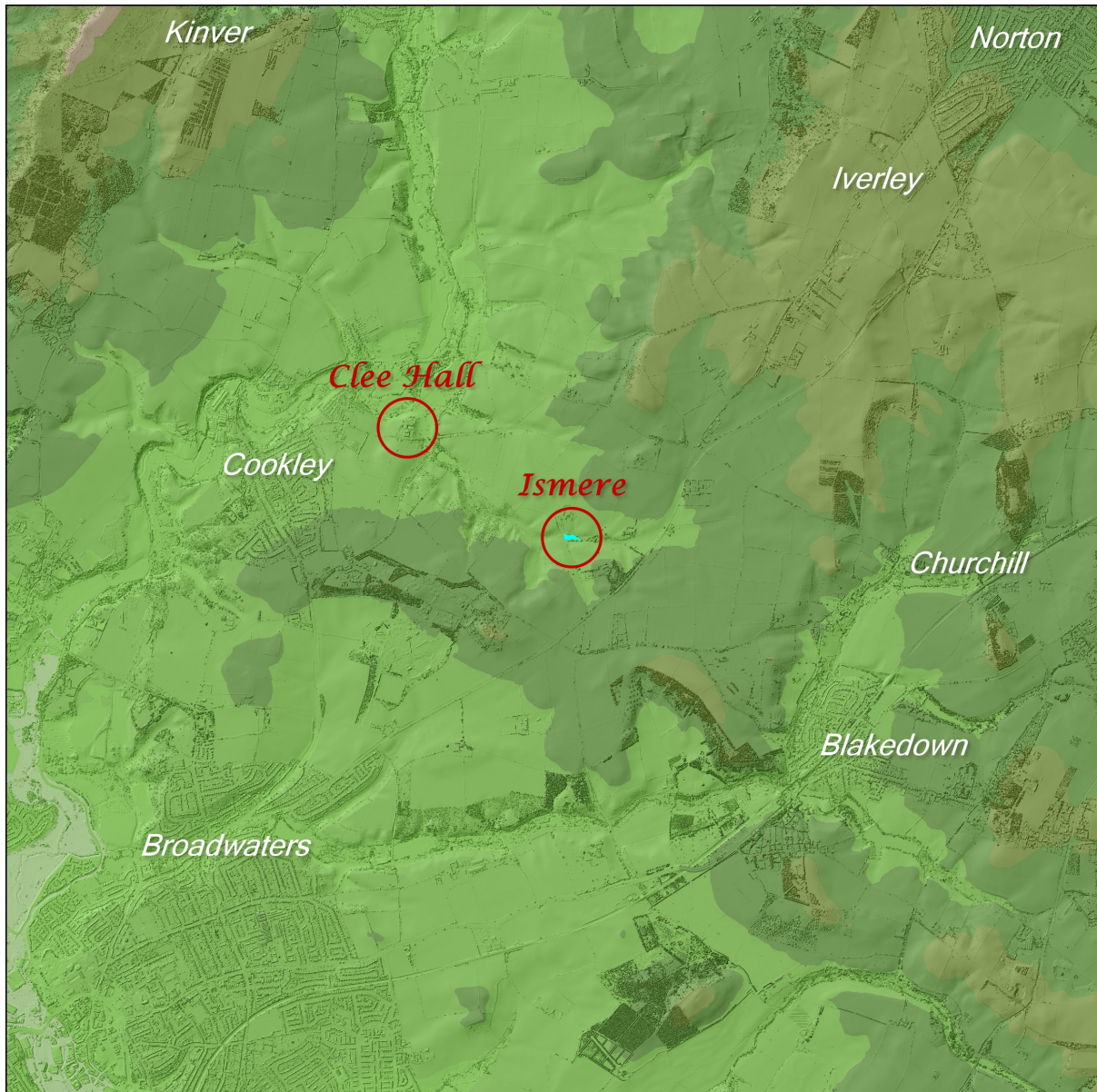


Fig. 9. LiDAR image illustrating the topography around Ismere's pool and stream valley. The stream draining the pool flows north-west to join the river Stour between Caunsall and Cookley. Clee Hall, the putative monastery site, lies on a pronounced promontory overlooking this confluence. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

Perhaps the use of a small geographical feature as the province's central place or moot site should not be surprising. It is known that moot sites elsewhere were sometimes rather small features in the landscape, mounds or single trees, things that we might regard as inconsequential today; and moot sites on or near watercourses were not at all uncommon.⁶¹

It is interesting to consider why this particular pool could originally have become significant enough for the local population to choose it as their central place or meeting site. There seems to be a spring discharging directly into the pool here; there is certainly no sign of an above-ground watercourse of any significant length feeding the pool today. Springs were important to early people — from Mesolithic hunter-gathers through to pagan Anglo-Saxons — sometimes apparently being of spiritual significance. While Ismere is very unlikely to be the archaeological equal of the world famous Blick Mead Mesolithic site near Stonehenge, the two places do have a few things in common. Both possess spring-fed pools occupying small but deeply incised stream valleys, and both pools have pronounced hills or escarpments nearby providing shelter from westerly winds. Not only would their

springs have been a source of clean, and relatively temperature-stable, water for humans, they probably also attracted animals which could be hunted or trapped.

Additionally, there is evidence that the Ismere pool may have been serviced by two ancient roads. A route-way referred to as *windofer* in the tenth century, which linked the Iron Age hill forts at Wychbury and Solcum (near Drakelow) via the high ground of Burys Hill, Iverley and High Down, may have provided access to Ismere via the track now known as Fairy Glen.⁶² (If readers will forgive a less than scientific observation: when walking Fairy Glen in recent years, I have always noted that its straight southern section, aligned towards the Ismere pool, seems almost processional.) If this route is, indeed, related to the aforementioned hill-forts, it would clearly suggest that Ismere played a (possibly important) role in Iron Age society, a function which appears to have continued through to the early Anglo-Saxon period. At the very least, Ismere and the province of *Husmeræ* undoubtedly remained in folk memory into the eighth century and beyond.

Another seemingly ancient route-way (now a combination of roads and foot-paths, but presumably one coherent route in antiquity) runs within just a few metres of the Ismere pool. To the north-west, it passes close to the putative monastery site (the former Clee Hall); and to the south-east, the route-way leads over the aforementioned Monk's Common towards Woodrow in Chaddesley Corbett, possibly linking Ismere to the nearby Bronze-Age round barrow and accompanying bowl barrow on Barrow Hill (SO 090 751).⁶³ Interestingly, this monument lies very close to the Cresselau-Clent hundredal boundary, a division which might have arisen from earlier territorial units or a reorganisation thereof.⁶⁴ Barrow Hill is also located precisely upon the watershed that separates the Stour-Smestow river catchment from that of the Salwarpe; and this begs the question of whether the barrows there served as some kind of territorial marker for the *Husmeræ* province. We will return to this topic in section 9.

7. TERRITORIES AND FOLK GROUPS

Before attempting to reconstruct the territory, or province, of *Husmeræ*, it is useful to consider the wider context of settlement groups and early kingdoms within which the province was located.

It doesn't appear that *Husmeræ* was ever a kingdom as such; it is probably more accurately described as a folk territory. Many such territories, and minor kingdoms, are recorded in Anglo-Saxon charters and in a (probably seventh-century) document known as the Tribal Hideage. It is important to remember that these territorial entities may not all have been in existence at the same time. Some, no doubt, had British origins and others, particularly those with names ending in *-sæte*, seem to represent new Anglo-Saxon settlement taking place a century or two after the initial colonisation period (i.e. c. 600 to 700 CE).⁶⁵ In view of the fact that the Ismere Diploma refers to *Husmeræ* being a name 'assigned from ancient times', it would seem that the *Husmeræ* probably ante-dated many of the *-sæte* groups (notwithstanding the possibility that some of the latter may have usurped earlier British territories whose names have since been lost).

Territorial takeover, either forced or politically consensual, was an ongoing process. Many of the British and Anglo-Saxon folk-groups were themselves absorbed, at an early date, into more powerful groups and eventually into the developing Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, some leaving no trace in historical records. What we do know is that, in the broader west midlands area, there were numerous folk-groups of varying size and importance, including: the *Wreocansæte*, who were named after the Wrekin (hill) and occupied the region around Wroxeter extending northwards to the Mersey; the *Arosæte*, who occupied the valley of the river Arrow in the later Warwickshire; the *Tomsæte*, who occupied large parts of the Tame valley and the area around Tamworth; and the *Pencersæte*, whose territory may have abutted, or overlapped, the earlier *Husmeræ* province (this is discussed in section 10). In many cases, the first part of a *-sæte* folk-name derives from that of either a river or a geographical feature on the boundary of the group's territory.⁶⁶ The *-sæte* element itself, which is fairly common in the west of the midlands region,⁶⁷ is thought to represent an Anglo-Saxon elite (perhaps installed by Mercia) overseeing a former British polity. Just why the *Husmeræ* people seem to have escaped this fate, and their seemingly older name was preserved, is unknown. We might surmise that the *Husmeræ* area had been populated by Anglian incomers (perhaps taking over a well-developed British estate) before Mercia began the practice of installing *-sæte* overseers, but this is of course just speculation.

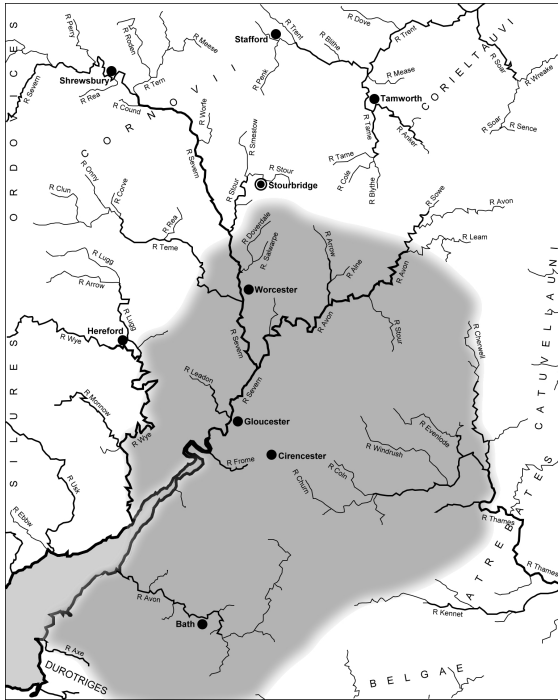


Fig. 10. Approximate extent of the lands belonging to the late Iron Age Dobunni people, based primarily upon the geographic spread of Dobunnic coin finds.

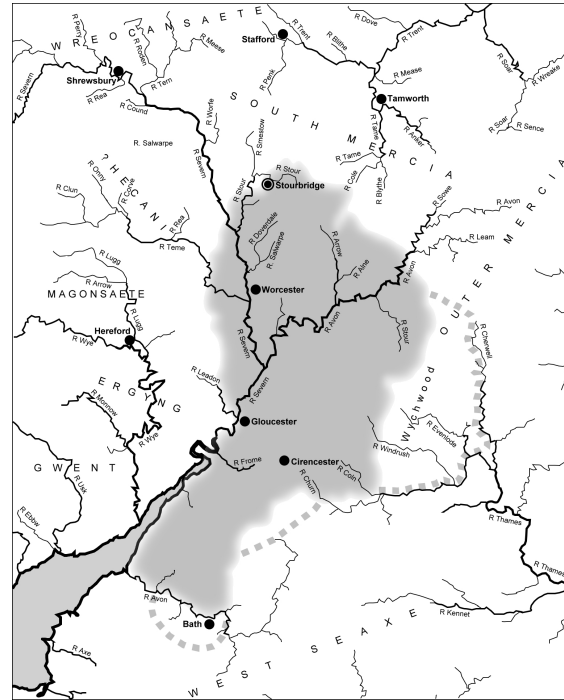


Fig. 11. Approximate extent of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of the Hwicce after c. 680 CE, based upon the medieval limits of the Diocese of Worcester.

Interestingly, the *Tomsæte*, *Pencersæte* and *Husmeræ* people were not mentioned in the Tribal Hideage.⁶⁸ This may be because they had been included within other groups that were listed. The *Tomsætan* territory, for example, was probably part of the *Myrcne landes*, 'Mercian lands', which appears at the very beginning of the Tribal Hideage. This might also have been the case with the *Pencersæte*. And the *Husmeræ* province could have been part of the lands ascribed to the *Hwinca*, 'Hwicce'. When it first appears in surviving historical documents (i.e. in 736 CE) *Husmeræ* is described as a province. The term might imply that it was then subservient to another territorial entity, presumably either the powerful kingdom of Mercia or the minor Hwiccan kingdom, which itself was then being gradually subsumed into Mercia.

In determining whether *Husmeræ* was a province of the Hwicce, we are faced with two difficulties: the geographical limits of the province are uncertain, and we don't know where the northern boundary of the Hwicce lay. To some extent, applying the modern concept of a boundary may not be entirely appropriate here. It is unlikely that precise or fixed boundaries between different tribal groupings existed at an early date (post-Roman to early Anglo-Saxon periods). Each group would undoubtedly have occupied specific core areas but it is unclear how the borders between them operated in terms of tribal rights, power, and jurisdiction. Were the boundaries more like diffuse border zones? To what degree were border regions shared between neighbouring groups, and for what purposes? Was there a hierarchy of groups with overlapping territories? And how did the border zones change over time? These questions are largely unresolved. Nevertheless, it is useful to try to reconstruct approximate territories for the *Husmeræ* and the Hwicce while bearing in mind that their boundaries were probably not absolute and unvarying in all respects.

8. THE HWICCE

We know that the kingdom of the Hwicce had become established by the late sixth century. It is believed that it developed from a late Iron Age tribal grouping of Dobunnic origin which had survived as a Romano-British *civitas* through the first to fourth centuries CE (figs. 10 and 11). It seems that, after the decisive Battle of Dyrham, in 577 CE, at which defending Britons were defeated by West-Saxon forces, much of the former Dobunnic lands came to be administered by Anglo-Saxon elites, with Anglian influence concentrated in the north of the kingdom and Saxon in the south.

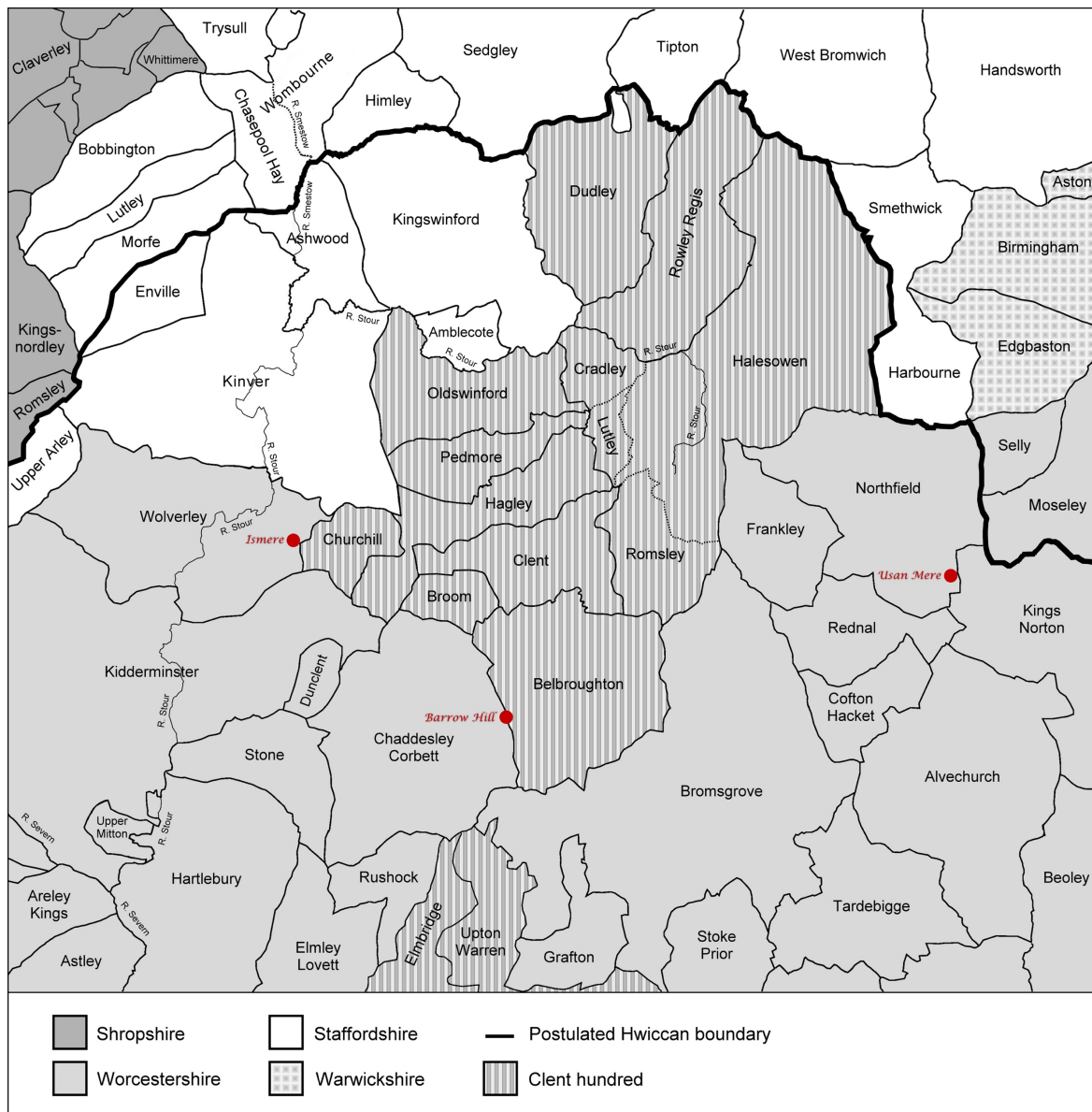


Fig. 12. The northern boundary of the Hwicce postulated by Peter King⁶⁹ shown against the pattern of ancient parish boundaries. County and Hundredal affiliations are those which are likely to have pertained during the late-Anglo-Saxon period. Landmarks mentioned in the present study are also shown in red.

Place-name evidence suggests that, during the kingdom's early years, there was some shrinkage of Hwiccan territory (as shown by the dashed lines in fig. 11)⁷⁰ but its boundaries seem to have stabilised by c. 680 CE when the ecclesiastical Diocese of Worcester was formed to serve the Hwiccan people.⁷¹ The outline of the early Diocese is fairly well understood and is generally taken as defining the extent of the kingdom in around 680 CE (fig. 11). There are still some uncertainties, however, the foremost of which is that it is unclear how far north the kingdom's boundaries originally extended. A charter (S 1272) for *coftune*, 'Cofton', dated 849, refers to the boundary meeting place of the Staffordshire folk groups, *Tomsæte* and *Pencersæte*, on what is now Cofton Common near the Lickey Hills.⁷² (This location has been supposed also to have abutted the territory of the *Arosæte* to the south.⁷³) From this charter reference, Della Hooke has inferred that the Hwiccan kingdom probably did not extend north of this point at the time that the *Pencersæte* and *Tomsæte* boundaries were in use.⁷⁴ We don't know exactly when they *were* in use but the Diocesan boundary evidence suggests that it is likely to have been before c. 680 CE. Despite its representation in fig. 11, the Hwicce's northern boundary line after c. 680 CE is not known with certainty, but a well-argued attempt has been made by Peter King to reconstruct it.⁷⁵ Fig. 12 depicts his results, superimposed on the local pattern of ancient parishes and their later (eleventh century) county affiliations.

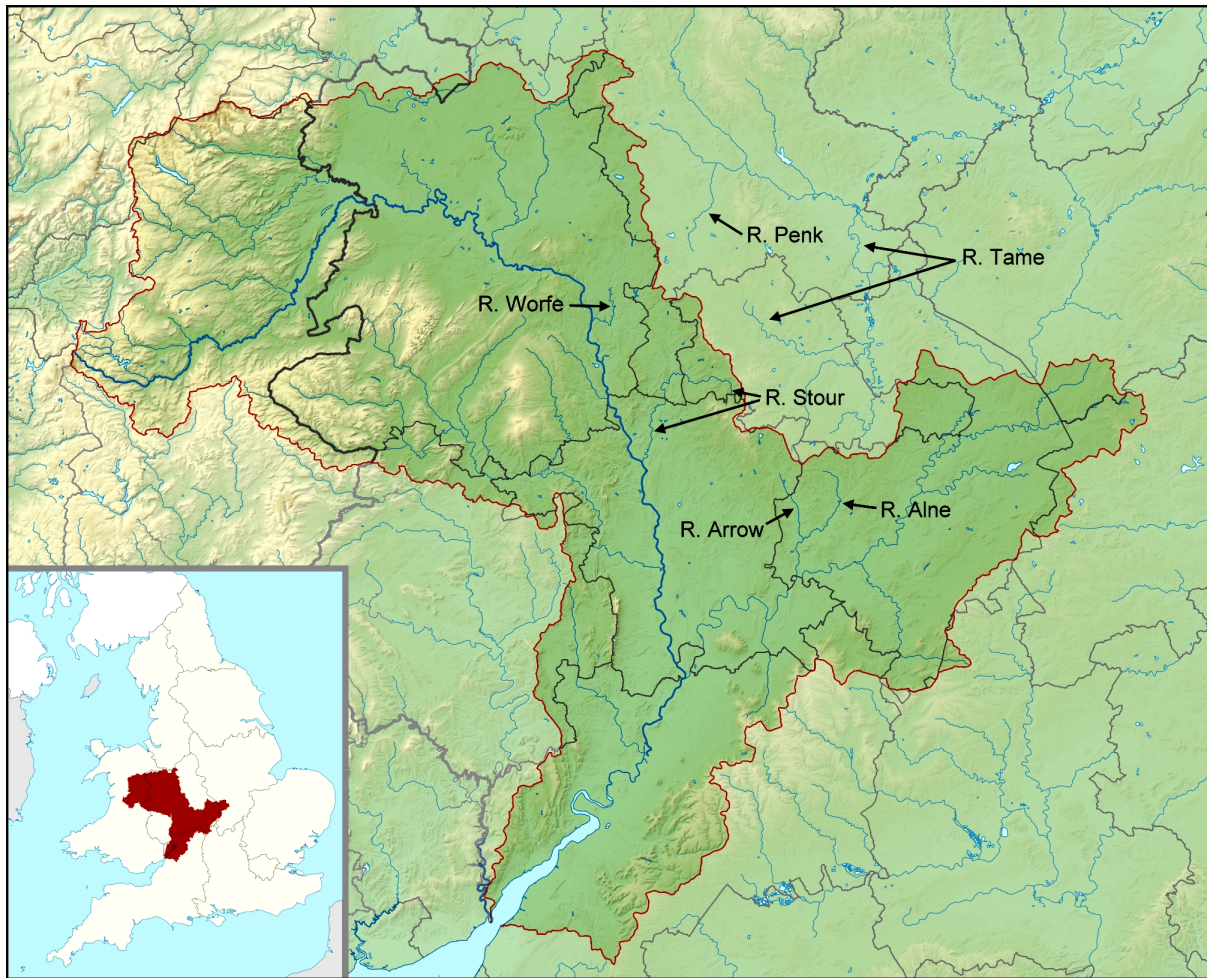


Fig. 13. Catchment (drainage basin) of the river Severn, with selected tributary rivers labelled. (Base image courtesy of Wiki Commons <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>>).

9. THE EXTENT OF *HUSMERÆ* PROVINCE

It would appear that *Husmeræ* lay close to the north-west corner of the Hwiccan kingdom, yet it is not clear whether, at an early date, it was part of the kingdom or lay outside it. As the province may have had British or Romano-British origins, the position of Dobunnian boundaries (fig. 10) is relevant. Much of the Stour valley (and presumably the province of *Husmeræ*) would seem to have lain outside Dubunni territory (but, of course, fig. 10 provides only an approximate representation of its extent). Yet by c. 680 CE, the province of *Husmeræ* seems to have lain at least partly within Hwiccan territory.

The degree of overlap clearly depends upon the extent of the *Husmeræ* province. This is unknown, but there are a few clues.

Firstly, a charter (S 64) for a wooded estate known as *Hellerelege*, refers to a boundary landmark, a pool, called *usan mere* in 699x709 CE.⁷⁶ This was located near the boundary between Kings Norton and Northfield (see fig. 12), and it has been suggested that the pool might have been related to the *Husmeræ* province, perhaps helping to define the latter's extent. Nevertheless, as the same author points out elsewhere, *usan mere* is not an uncommon water name, and its presence here may just be coincidental.⁷⁷

Secondly, we must consider the natural geography of the area. As settlement occurred primarily in fertile river valleys, it is generally thought that early territories tended to arise within specific river basins (i.e. catchment areas), with territorial boundaries aligned mainly along the watersheds between them.⁷⁸ The concept of river catchment areas is illustrated in fig. 13 for the river Severn. All of the

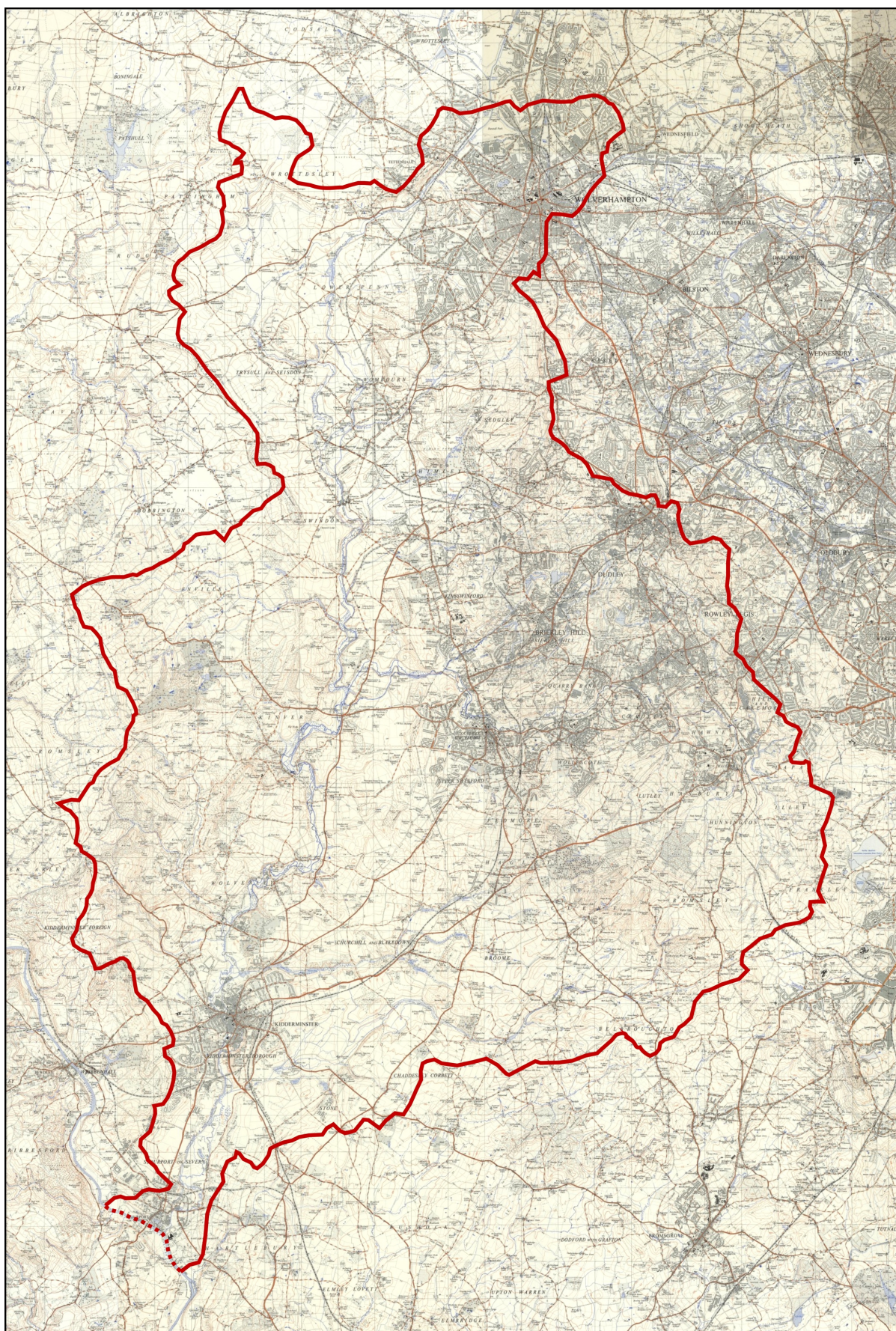


Fig 14. The Stour-Smestow catchment overlaid on a twentieth-century Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 composite map. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).



Fig. 15. Stour-Smestow catchment area in red. Circles represent Iron Age hill forts (grey circles are conjectural sites); squares represent Anglo-Saxon ward-setl (watch-place) place-names; P/T is the boundary meeting place of the Pencersæte and Tomsæte mentioned in the 849 CE coftune (Cofton) charter. Several modern places are also depicted for orientation and scale. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

rainwater falling within the shaded area ends up flowing first along minor streams, then into the smaller rivers (such as the Stour, Worfe and Arrow) before entering the Severn and eventually reaching the sea via the Severn estuary. Rain-water falling outside the catchment area flows to the sea through different river systems such as the Trent or the Thames. Importantly, each of the Severn's tributary rivers (Stour, Worfe, Arrow etc.) has its own defined catchment area within the larger Severn catchment. That for the Stour and Smestow combined is outlined in red in figs. 14 (on page 19) and 15 (above). The latter is a topographical map, colour coded for height, with a selection of modern place-names shown for scale and orientation. The map depicts the valleys of the various rivers and tributary streams in the vicinity.

The Stour begins at springs on the high ground near Frankley and Romsley, and runs north through Halesowen and then west past Cradley and Stourbridge before turning south to flow through Kinver, Cookley and Kidderminster. The Smestow begins at Wolverhampton and flows first west, and then south, past Lower Penn and Wombourn, to join the Stour at Prestwood.

Table 1. Hill forts depicted in fig. 16. (All entries after P. W. King,⁷⁹ except where otherwise noted.)

Name	Grid Reference	Notes
Kingswood Camp	SO 730 769	
Burf Castle ⁸⁰	SO 762 908	
The Walls, Chesterton ⁸¹	SO 786 967	
Stagborough Hill	SO 789 722	
Wassell Wood	SO 795 776	
Arley Wood	SO 804 821	Within Stour-Smestow catchment
Baxters Monument, Solcum (near Drakelow)	SO 822 809	Within Stour-Smestow catchment
Kinver Edge	SO 836 833	Within Stour-Smestow catchment
Harborough Hill	SO 889 791	Within Stour-Smestow catchment
Colton Hills, Upper Penn ⁸²	SO 903 954	Conjectural
Wolverhampton ⁸³	SO 914 988	Conjectural
Wychbury Hill	SO 919 818	Within Stour-Smestow catchment
Bushbury Hill ⁸⁴	SJ 929 024	
Oldbury	SO 977 893	
Wednesbury	SO 987 954	

Table 2. OE *weard-setl*, 'watch-place', names depicted in fig. 16. (All entries from A Mawer and F M Stenton.⁸⁵)

Name	Grid Reference	Notes
Wassell Wood	SO 795 776	Identical with nearby p.n. Warshill
Wassell Grove	SO 934 825	
Wast Hills	SP 040 760	

John Hemingway, the former Dudley Borough Archaeological Officer, has suggested that the combined Stour-Smestow river catchment might represent the territory of the *Husmeræ* people.⁸⁶ While this is not, on the face of it, an unreasonable assumption, we should allow for the possibility that not all early territories were configured in this way. Indeed, some river catchments seem to have been divided between different folk groups (or related sub-groups). The *Tomsæte* referenced in the 849 CE *coftune* charter, for example, may actually have been a detached south-westerly sub-group of this tribe,⁸⁷ presumably occupying the valley of the Rea south of (the later) Birmingham. And, for some groups, tracts of high ground rather than river valleys were important elements of their territories, often being commemorated in their names. The *Wreocansæte*'s relationship to The Wrekin has already been mentioned, and the *Bilsatena* folk-name (from which the modern place-name Bilston is partly derived) is most probably another reference to hilly topography.⁸⁸

The Stour-Smestow catchment seems to have been divided by a band of five Iron Age hill-forts running from Arley Wood in the west to Wychbury hill in the east (Table 1); and it may be that this band represents an early border region which constrained the northern extent of the *Husmeræ* province. This idea is supported by the presence, within the band, of two place-names containing the OE term *weard-setl*, 'watch-place'. Another such place-name lies to the east at Wast Hills, about 1.5 km (1 mile) south-east of the boundary meeting point of the *Pencersæte* and *Tomsæte* referenced in the 849 CE *coftune* charter. The place-name is mentioned in a grant by king Offa of Mercia, so it must have been coined prior to (or during) his reign (757–796 CE). All three *weard-setl* place-names are listed in Table 2.

Within the band of hill-forts and watch-places lies another significant boundary marker. A Bronze Age dyke (earth bank) runs, east to west, over Kinver edge and along Gypsy Lane, as shown by the black dashed line in fig. 15.⁸⁹ As this still marks the southern boundary of Kinver parish, as well as the



Fig. 16. Aerial photograph showing crop marks (in the top-right quadrant of the image) resulting from a Neolithic pit alignment at Treherne's Farm, Pedmore. The pit alignment is oriented east-west and is almost co-linear with the Bronze Age dyke running along Gypsy Lane some 6 km to the west in Kinver parish. (Photograph supplied by Martyn Cole).

millennium-old county boundary, it may represent a long-standing territorial marker, perhaps being in use at the same time as the aforementioned hill forts. At least three of the five forts (Wychbury, Solcum and Kinver) seem to have been connected by an ancient road network, the eastern section of which was known as *windofer* in the tenth century (see section 6). This route may also have linked these forts to the Ismere pool via the track now known as Fairy Glen.⁹⁰ These apparent interconnections suggest that all of the forts belonged to the same Iron Age tribe; and, given the name associated with one fort, Wychbury, 'the fortification of the Hwicce', that tribe probably consisted of the Hwicce's Iron Age predecessors, the Dobunni.

Roughly co-linear with the Gypsy Lane dyke, on the opposite (eastern) side of the Stour, is a tract of high ground with moderately steep inclines on its north and south faces. This carries the ancient *windofer* route (mentioned above) from High Down, via Iverley Hill and Burys Hill, to Wychbury.⁹¹ That route appears to have serviced a Bronze Age settlement located on the high ground west of Wychbury; and evidently remained in use during the Anglo-Saxon period, as it still does today.⁹² It is possible that the ridge and the *windofer* route-way, along with the five hill forts, were elements of the territorial-boundary infrastructure here. It seems hardly credible that these prehistoric features could all define parts of a long-standing boundary zone that survived into the Anglo-Saxon period, but their location and orientation does suggest a link. Stretching credibility somewhat further, it is interesting that a Neolithic pit alignment has been noted, near Pedmore, within this boundary zone (fig. 16); and, again, it is aligned almost co-linearly with the Bronze Age dyke at Gypsy Lane.⁹³

This putative border region may have constrained the *Husmeræ*'s northern extent within the Stour-Smestow catchment. The notion that the province occupied only the southern portion of the river catchment accords, to some extent, with an analysis by Della Hooke.⁹⁴ She notes that ecclesiastical

boundaries often reflect earlier territorial arrangements (as we have already seen in respect of the Worcester Diocese and the kingdom of the Hwicce) and she uses this observation to suggest a territory for the *Husmeræ* aligning with the boundaries of local medieval Rural Deaneries (see fig. 17). Clearly, as Hooke also notes, the boundaries of the rural deaneries would be affected by 'changing patterns of land ownership', which may also have influenced the local hundredal affiliations. Nevertheless, we can see a striking correspondence between the Kidderminster Rural Deanery (KRD), particularly that part in Cresselau hundred and land lying south of the hill-fort band, and it is probably not unreasonable to regard Cresselau hundred as being a late-Anglo-Saxon remnant of the earlier *Husmeræ* territory. It may be relevant that the aforementioned Bronze Age Barrows on Barrow Hill, Chaddesley Corbett (which seem to have been linked by road to Ismere) are sited at the intersection of the Cresselau Hundred boundary and the southern watershed of the Stour-Smestow catchment.

The remainder of KRD consists of the Domesday hundred of Clent. A large part of this hundred was made up of Swinford, a royal estate which included the manors of Kingswinford, Oldswinford and perhaps Pedmore, Hagley and Clent, and which was referenced in a charter of 951x959 CE. This estate is known to have been in the process of fragmentation during the mid-tenth century when Kingswinford became separated from land that eventually morphed into Oldswinford manor.⁹⁵ Thus we may conjecture that KRD originally encompassed Kingswinford, which probably included Amblecote at some time prior to 1086 CE, hence the pale yellow tint of these manors in fig. 17. Rowley Regis might also have been part of KRD and is shown with a similar tint. Although it was not mentioned explicitly in the Domesday survey, Rowley Regis is known to have been a chapelry of Clent, the latter being a royal manor and probable minster site.⁹⁶ As such, Rowley Regis is likely to have been within the Clent minster's parochia and to have belonged to the same hundred. It may also have been part of whatever tribal territory preceded the hundred, although we have no evidence for what that might have been or, indeed, for precisely where its boundaries lay.

10. THE *PENCERSÆTE* AND *HUSMERÆ* IN THE STOUR-SMESTOW CATCHMENT

As already noted, the *Pencersæte* were a folk group that seemed to have occupied part of the region that later became south Staffordshire. However, very little is known about them. They are mentioned in only one surviving historical document, the *coftune* charter (S 1272) of 849 CE, and even this is little more than a passing reference. A landmark on the boundary of Cofton Hackett, on what is now Cofton Common near the Lickey Hills, was then described as being the boundary of the *Tomsæte* and *Pencersæte*.

It is not known with any certainty where the heartlands of the *Pencersæte* were located (see fig. 18). It had been supposed in the 1970s that they lay around Penkridge in the valley of the river Penk, primarily because of the similar initial elements of the names; and an argument was made that the folk group may have developed around the Roman settlement of *Pennocrucium*, which developed into Penkridge. The place-name Penkridge is Brittonic and derives from **penno*, 'head, end, headland', and *crouco* or *crūco*, 'hill, mound, tumulus'.⁹⁷ While the *Pencersæte* group may indeed have taken its name from this source, a derivation directly from the river-name Penk is unlikely. The latter is not recorded before 1577 and seems to have been a back-formation from the place-name Penkridge.⁹⁸ This means that the folk-name *Pencersæte* probably does not contain a reference to a river or river catchment as is found in many other local folk-names. Moreover, the apparent commonality between *Pencersæte* and Penkridge (or *Pennocrucium*) may be simply coincidental: a number of Pen- or Penn- place-names exist outside the Penk river catchment, one of them being (Upper and Lower) Penn, in the north-east of the Stour-Smestow catchment.

David Horovitz suggests that Penn, or an earlier form of the same name, had been applied to 'a considerable area of high ground to the south of Wolverhampton, and included, for example, Pensnett'. He cites, as evidence for the area's importance, the fact that a track-way leading to Penn was recorded about 10 km to the north-east in a charter of 994 CE.⁹⁹

In fact, at least nine Pen- or Penn- place-names (possibly representing this hypothetical regional name and/or deriving from the Brittonic element **penno*) are to be found in, or very close to, the Stour-Smestow river catchment. These include Upper and Lower Penn (near Wolverhampton),¹⁰⁰ Penn Hill (west of Seisdon)¹⁰¹, Pensnett,¹⁰² and the lost 1273 CE place-name *Penyval* (thought to

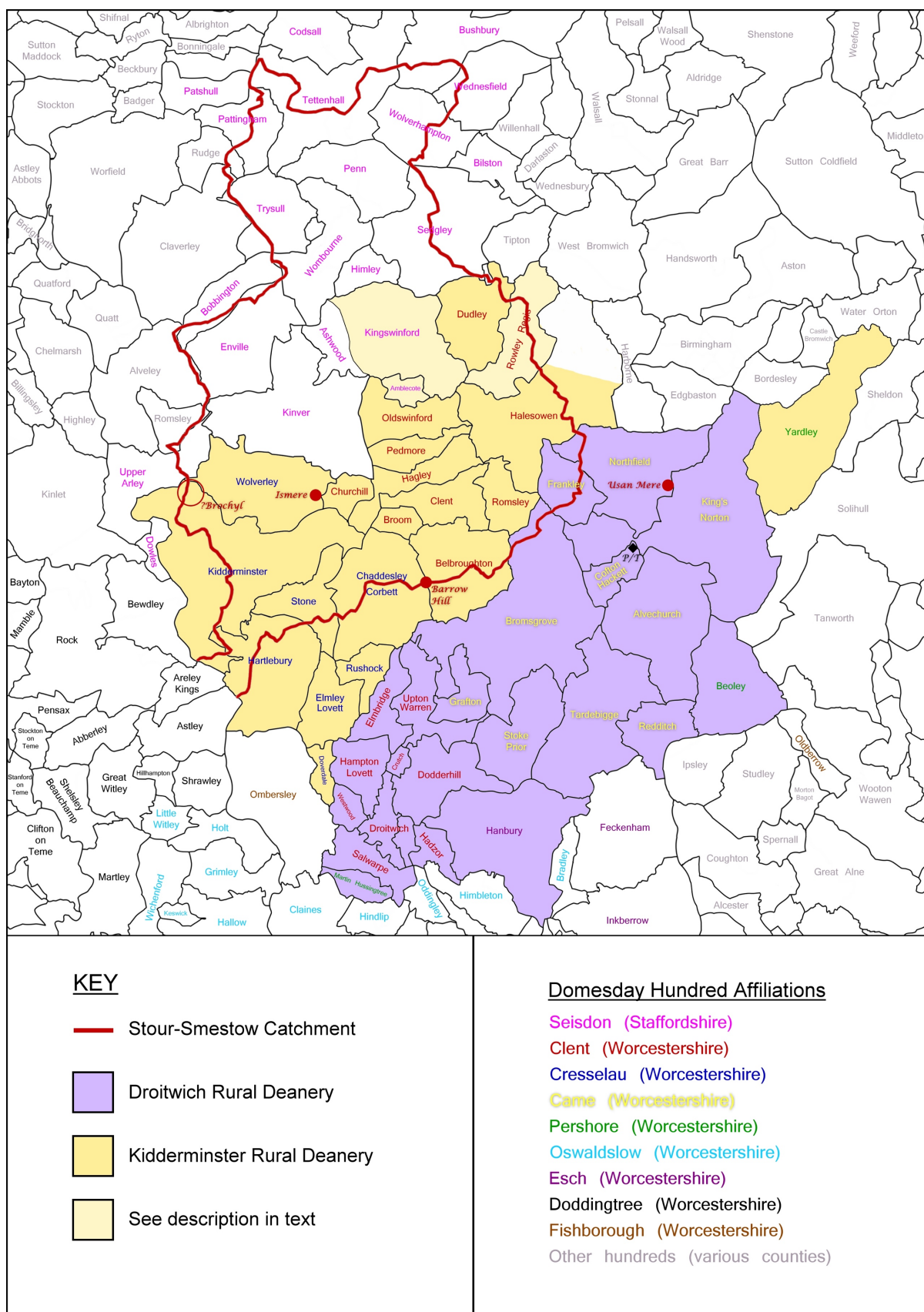


Fig. 17. Stour-Smestow catchment (red line) superimposed upon the Kidderminster and Droitwich Rural Deaneries and local Domesday hundreds. Places mentioned in the text are also shown. 'P/T' represents the boundary meeting place of the Pencersæte and Tomsæte mentioned in the 849 coftune (Cotton) charter.

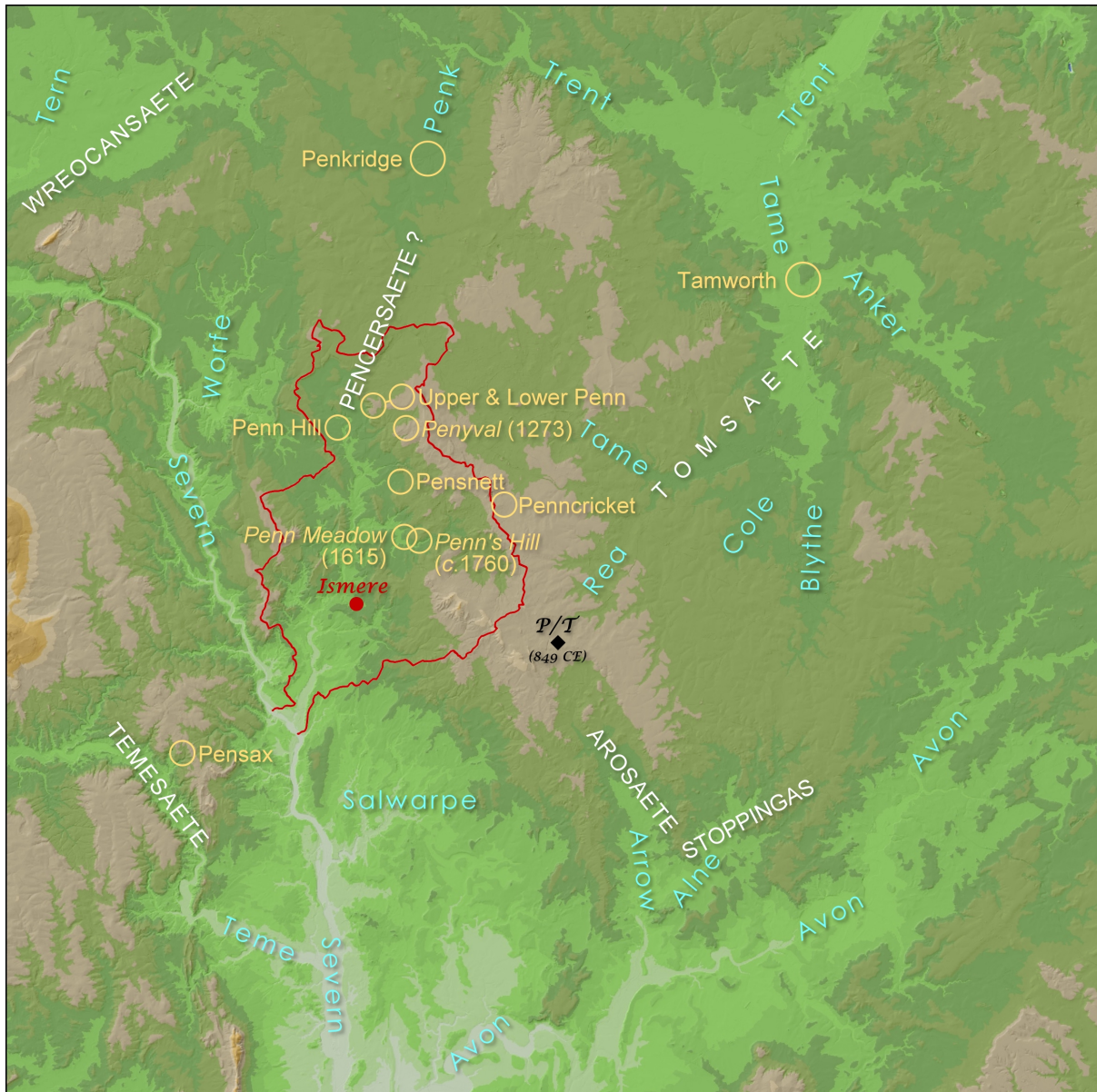


Fig. 18. Folk groups in the west midlands region depicted in relation to local topography. The Stour-Smestow river catchment is shown in red, and place-names mentioned in the text in yellow. Pen- place-names may be associated with the Pencersæte. Their boundary meeting place with the Tomsæte, recorded in the 849 coftune (Cofton) charter is identified by 'P/T'. (Base image reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland).

have been located near Gospel End, SO 900937).¹⁰³ And, lying just 1 km outside the Stour-Smestow catchment, is a road named Pennocricket Lane (from **penno* and late-British -*crūgo* or Primitive Welsh **crūg*).¹⁰⁴ Additionally, a *Penn Meadow* existed in Amblecote manor. This was enclosed by Roger Perrot in 1615 CE,¹⁰⁵ and a cluster of five fields bearing the name Perrot is shown on a map of the manor dated c. 1760 CE (at SO 897849, just north of the river Stour) suggesting this had been the location of *Penn Meadow*.¹⁰⁶ The same map also depicts a field named *Penn's Hill* at SO 908846, about 1.5km to the east. The possessive (genitive) form of the field-name suggests that, in this instance *Penn* could be a personal name, but it might, equally, indicate that the hill here was considered to belong to, or be associated with, the land occupied by the *Pencersæte*. The name *Penn's Hill* has been preserved in the nineteenth–twentieth-century *Penfield House* and in the names of the modern *Penfields Road* and *Penfields housing estate*.

There was also a *Penal Meadow* near Windsor Holloway at Whittington, Kinver (SO 852826) in 1688.¹⁰⁷ The name *Penal* has subsequently mutated to 'Penhole' and, given the local topography

(hollows and precipitous slopes), we might surmise that the *-al* ending comes from OE *halh*, meaning 'a nook, a corner of land' sometimes used for a 'hollow in a hill-side'.¹⁰⁸ *Penal* or 'Penhole' has more recently been used for the coppice located within the hollow here. The site lies just 700 m north of the Bronze Age Gypsy Lane boundary dyke which, today, still demarcates a regional (i.e. county) boundary. If the dyke served to separate the *Pencersæte* and *Husmeræ* folk groups during the early- or mid-Anglo-Saxon periods, *Penal Meadow* would have lain just within the *Pencersæte*'s territory. Crop-marks of a supposed Iron Age hill fort have been observed in the field immediately to the north-west of Penhole Coppice. However, there are no obvious signs of such a fortification in LiDAR images, and site investigations have been inconclusive. There is consequently some doubt over whether the crop-marks observed here are archaeological or geological in origin.¹⁰⁹ There is also doubt as to whether the first element of *Penal* comes from the Brittonic word **penno* (and, thus, could be related to the hypothetical extended district of Penn) or from the OE word *pen*, 'an animal pen'; and for this reason the *Penal* site has been omitted from fig. 18.

Nevertheless, as already indicated, Pen- (or Brittonic **penno*-) place-names are not exclusive to the Stour-Smestow catchment. Pensax, 'the hill of the Saxons', and Pendock, 'the head barley field', for example, are to be found further south in Worcestershire,¹¹⁰ so, while the foregoing place-name evidence may support the hypothesis that the *Pencersæte* occupied lands in and near the Stour-Smestow catchment, it is not decisive.

The *coftune* charter would seem to be the primary argument in favour of the *Pencersæte*'s reach extending some considerable distance south of the Penk valley. Their boundary with the *Tomsæte* (marked 'P/T' in figs. 15, 17 and 18) lay south-east of the Stour-Smestow catchment, about 28 km (18 miles) away from the closest part of the river Penk at Tettenhall. For this reason, it has been supposed that the *Pencersæte* may have occupied the Smestow valley as well as that of the Penk, and many subsequent researchers have adhered to this suggestion. For a folk-group to occupy two valleys would be unusual, particularly as they span one of England's principal watersheds, but it is not altogether improbable from the point of view of local topography: the two river valleys are essentially co-linear, their watercourses lie less than 2 km apart near Wightwick, and the ridge separating them is no more than about 30m (100ft) high.

The 'Penk + Smestow' theory has been adapted by Christopher Baker who proposed that the *Pencersæte* occupied only the Stour-Smestow catchment.¹¹¹ This idea has recently been examined by Steve Lewitt who notes that the first two elements of *Pencersæte* may have a Brittonic origin related to the modern Welsh 'Pen Caer', meaning 'the chief fort' or 'the fort on the headland', and that the name may reflect Roman settlement.¹¹² The conjectural fort sites at Upper Penn and Wolverhampton (fig. 15 and Table 1) are obvious candidates for this putative 'Pen Caer'.

A scenario in which the *Pencersæte* occupied the Smestow valley and the high ground around Wolverhampton, Upper and Lower Penn, Penn Hill (near Seisdon), *Penyval*, and Pensnett, perhaps extending as far south as *Pen Meadow* and *Penn's Hill* (Penfields) in Amblecote or even to *Penal Meadow* in Whittington, is entirely compatible with the *Husmeræ* territory proposed in section 9, and with the hypothetical earlier boundary zone marked by the band of Iron Age hill forts in fig. 15. If the *Pencersæte* also occupied the remainder of the high ground along the eastern watershed, it would explain why their boundary-meeting place with the *Tomsæte* (as recorded in the 849 Cofton charter) lay so far south.

The west-east section of the Stour and its tributaries (i.e. from Prestwood to Frankley) could have provided a straightforward route for the *Pencersæte* to reach their mutual boundary with the *Tomsæte* on Cofton Common while not impinging upon the territory of the *Husmeræ* to the south and west. Moreover, it is conceivable that such usage might lead to this section of the Stour, and/or the well-wooded land to the south,¹¹³ becoming a dividing line or boundary zone between the *Pencersæte* and the *Husmeræ*, perhaps taking over from the border marked by the hill forts a few miles further south.

It might also explain the presence of the boundary dykes which run along Wollaston ridge (SO 882845) a short distance south of the Stour. They are known to have been in existence by 951x959 CE,¹¹⁴ and may have been constructed to separate land in the vicinity of the later Stourbridge and Oldswinford from the southern-most lands of the *Pencersæte*, i.e. around the confluence of the Stour and the Smestow at Prestwood and Whittington.

11. CONCLUDING SUMMARY

While it is possible to theorise about the chronology of the Wollaston dykes' construction, the putative boundary movement, and the dates at which certain regions of the Stour-Smestow catchment were in use by different folk groups, we quickly descend into the realms of pure speculation. Nevertheless, the foregoing examination of the area's topography and place-names has been worthwhile, bringing to light new potential locations for *Brochyl*, *Moerheb* and perhaps, the Ismere monastery itself.

We have seen that, while many scholars assume that the monastery was located at Kidderminster, there is no archaeological or historical evidence to support this. The only evidence (so far) in favour of this theory is the '-minster' element of the place-name Kidderminster. But, as Bede noted with some concern, minsters had proliferated greatly during the early eighth century and many elite families held them, so there could well have been other minsters or monasteries close by. Indeed we have evidence of one at Clent.

For the Ismere Diploma's monastery to have been located at Kidderminster, 'the wood which they call *Cynibre* [Kinver]' would have to have extended for several miles south of Kinver's ancient and long-standing southern boundary at Gypsy Lane. That seems unlikely unless the said wood was an outlying possession of Kinver (for which there is, again, no evidence). Moreover, if the place-name *Moerheb* can be equated to Morfe, we would have to invoke the notion of it being an outlying wood at an unknown location some considerable distance south-west of the parent manor.

Evidence for the location of the *aet Sture* monastic estate, *Moerheb*, *Brochyl*, and the monastery itself is sparse. Researchers are divided on many aspects of it, so new observations are potentially useful. One such observation, a new strand of topographical and place-name evidence, has come to light in the present study, i.e. the existence of a steep hill-side abutting a deep, enclosed stream valley at Parkatt Wood. The valley is associated with 'The Hole' place-name and hosts several springs which feed the Honey Brook, a historically important (and long-standing) boundary watercourse mentioned in Anglo-Saxon charters. In light of Margaret Gelling's discussion of *Brochyl*'s *-hyl* element, in which she explored the possible interchange of 'hole' and 'hill' meanings, it is hypothesised that the valley's steep north-western side was originally the *-hyl* referent of *Brochyl*; and, since the hill-side formed the edge of the valley, that the *Brochyl* estate-name mutated over time (perhaps influenced by the common and similar sounding compound *brochole*, 'badger hole') into a form which led to the valley becoming known as 'The Brook-Hole' and then just 'The Hole'. The importance of this location is emphasised by the fact that it marks the source of the brook (the Honey Brook) which separated the ancient parishes of Wolverley and Kidderminster for many centuries and, in 866 CE, marked the south-western extremity of the *seoges læa* (Seckley) estate in Wolverley.

If the foregoing analysis correctly identifies the site of *Brochyl*, it would put 'the wood of *Moerheb*' at Eymore Wood in the north-western projection of Kidderminster parish (as has been suggested by some other researchers), and would indicate that the *aet Sture* monastic estate must have lain to the east around Cookley, Caunsall or Wolverley. This fits very well with W. H. Duignan's 1910 report of finds of an ecclesiastical nature at Clee Hall (now Westley Court, on Austcliffe Lane), a location on a promontory overlooking the confluence of the river Stour and the brook flowing from Ismere. Romano-British finds and field-names suggesting a Roman (or, at least, paved) road in the vicinity might indicate some long-standing continuity of occupation in this vicinity.

We have also seen that the province of *Husmeræ* seems to have been represented, in large part, by the Domesday hundred of Cresselau, and that the *Pencersæte* folk group may have occupied the northern part of the Stour-Smestow river catchment as well as the high ground to the east. The boundary between the two groups may have eventually stabilised around the heavily-wooded Stourbridge area and, ultimately, the stretch of the river Stour upstream of Whittington and Prestwood. This might explain, and help to provide a chronology for, the construction of the Wollaston ridge boundary dykes a short distance south of the Stour.

APPENDIX: CHARTERS RELATING TO LAND IN *HUSMERÆ* PROVINCE

This appendix summarises the charters referenced herein which relate to land in or near the province of *Husmeræ*.

- S 64¹¹⁵ Grant of 33 *cassati* at *Hellerelege* (in Kings Norton) by Offa, king of Mercia, to the church of Worcester. 699x709 CE.
- S 89¹¹⁶ The Ismere Diploma. Grant of 10 *cassati* in *Husmeræ*, and apparently 4 *cassati* at *Brochyl*, (implied by charter S180) by Æthelbald, king of the Mercians to Cyneberht. 736 CE.
- S 1826¹¹⁷ Charter concerning *Sture* and *þluardele* [Wolverley]. The original manuscript was recorded in the seventeenth century but has since been lost. 716x757 CE.
- S 1411¹¹⁸ *Sture* and either Henbury, Gloucestershire or Hanbury, Worcestershire. Grant of land at ?Henbury and *Sture in prouincia Usmerorum* by Ceolfrið, Abbot (son of Cyneberht) to the church of St. Peter and the Bishopric of Worcester. 757x775 CE.
- S 1257¹¹⁹ Confirmation by Offa, king of the Mercians, of land *aet Sture in Usmerum* held by the church of Worcester. 781 CE.
- S 180¹²⁰ Surrender by Bishop Deneberht of Worcester, of 14 *manentes* in two parts (i.e. presumably including *Brochyl*), in the place which is called *aet Sture*, to Cenwulf, king of Mercia. 816 CE.
- S 212¹²¹ Grant of 2 *manentes* at *seoges laea* (Seckley, now in Wolverley parish), including the village of Wolverley, by Burgred, king of Mercia, to Wulferd. 866 CE.
- S 726¹²² Grant of 2 *manisculae* at *Culnan clif* (Cookley, now in Wolverley parish) by king Edgar to Beorhtnoth. 964 CE.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Martyn Cole for supplying a copy of the aerial photograph reproduced in fig. 16, and to Peter Horton, Ruth Kiosses, David Sankey, Phil Sealey, and other members of the *Stourbridge's Historical Landscape* group for their comments on the first draft of this article.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- ¹ These charters have been allocated the Sawyer catalogue identifiers S 89 (the 736 Ismere diploma); S 1411 (the 757x775 charter for Sture and ?Henbury), and S 1257 (a 781 charter confirming the church of Worcester's right to hold the monastic estate). Details of each can be found in Della Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, Boydell Press, Woodbridge (1990), 61–3, 29, and 32–3.
- ² A hide was a measure of arable land that was able to produce a certain amount of produce (generally taken to be sufficient to support one extended household) per year, on which taxes could be levied. Its area, was typically 125 acres but this varied from place to place due mainly to variations in soil productivity. Thus the 10 *cassati* of the Ismere Diploma, if equivalent to 10 hides would be about 1250 acres (5 km² or 2 miles²) of arable land. To this would need to be added the unknown, but presumably considerable, area of land occupied by associated meadows, woods, and fisheries. It is thought that the measurement units, hides, *cassati*, *maniscalae* and *manentes* are broadly equivalent.
- ³ Margaret Gelling, 'Stour in Ismere', *Myth, Rulership, Church and Charters: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Brooks* (eds. Julia Barrow and Andrew Wareham), Routledge, Oxford (2008), 83.
- ⁴ Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, 61–3.
- ⁵ Gelling, 'Stour in Ismere', 83–4.
- ⁶ Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, 27.
- ⁷ W. H. Duignan, *Worcestershire Place Names*, Oxford University Press (1905), 92–3.
- ⁸ In, for example, charters S 1411 and S 1257: Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, (1990), 29, 32; Patrick Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600–800*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1990), 149.
- ⁹ Nigel Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, Phillimore & Co. Ltd, Chichester (2004), 9.
- ¹⁰ Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, 9; Nigel Perry, *A History of Stourbridge*, Phillimore & Co. Ltd, Chichester (2001), 5.
- ¹¹ John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, Oxford University Press, Oxford (2010), 102.
- ¹² Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, 31.
- ¹³ Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 102.
- ¹⁴ Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 102.
- ¹⁵ Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 104.
- ¹⁶ Richard Bradley and Dennis Williams, *Dig Minster Community Archaeology Project 2013*, Worcestershire Archaeology, Archive & Archaeology Service, (2014) <<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B2eAFhE-m0yhYmJ1WXk3bUxZR0E/edit?resourcekey=0-v6BA0tWCSmxmFKP417UN7w>> [accessed 05/01/2024].
- ¹⁷ Gelling, 'Stour in Ismere', 85.
- ¹⁸ James Campbell (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons*, Penguin Books, London (1991), 97.
- ¹⁹ Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, 13.
- ²⁰ Edmund Simons, *pers. comm.* (2022).
- ²¹ Gelling, 'Stour in Ismere', 85–6.
- ²² Andrew Breeze 'Britons at Morfe', *Transactions of the Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society XLV* (2021), 107–8.
- ²³ David Horovitz, *A Survey and Analysis of the Place-Names of Staffordshire*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham (2003), 450–1.
- ²⁴ Peter W. King, 'The Minster Aet Stur in Husermere and the Northern Boundary of the Hwicce', *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, Third Series, **15** (1996), 74–7.
- ²⁵ John Langton and Graham Jones, *Forests and Chases of England and Wales c.1000 to c.1850*. Web-site <<https://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/forests/ForestsMapTileSheet130.html>> [accessed 24/01/2024].
- ²⁶ Della Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape: The Kingdom of the Hwicce*, Manchester University Press, Manchester (1985), 78–9, 85, 174; Della Hooke, *The Landscape of Anglo-Saxon England*, Leicester University Press, London (1998), 141–4.
- ²⁷ Kevin James, 'The Norman Forest of Kinver: An analysis of the forest's extent and place-names recorded in the Great Perambulation of 1300', *Transactions of the Staffordshire Archaeological and Historical Society*,

- LIV (2023), 26–7; Sarah. J. Wager, 'The hays of medieval England: a reappraisal', *Agricultural History Review*, 65, part 2 (2017), 169–70.
- 28 Gelling, 'Stour in Ismere', 86.
- 29 Kevin James, *Oldswinford Parish Boundary: Landscape, ownership, and place-names recorded in the 1733 perambulation* (2024) <<http://kjdocs.co.uk/1733%20perambulation/1733%20perambulation.pdf>>, 29–30.
- 30 Kevin James, *Place Names of Stourbridge, The Black Country and their Environs: Origins, meaning and interpretation* (2017), 28. Unpublished revision of a two-part article which first appeared in the June, September and December editions of *The Blackcountryman*, the magazine of the Black Country Society, is available from the author's website: <<http://www.sbcplacenames.kjdocs.co.uk/Place%20Names%20of%20Stourbridge%20the%20Black%20Country%20and%20their%20Environs.pdf>>.
- 31 Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, 7.
- 32 Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, 120–25, 169–174.
- 33 A. Mawer and F. M. Stenton, *Place-Names of Worcestershire*, English Place-Name Society vol. 4, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (1969), 251; 'Kidderminster: Introduction, borough and manors', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3* (London, 1913), pp. 158–173. *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp158-173>> [accessed 17/02/2024].
- 34 The earliest Ordnance Survey map to depict 'The Hole' is the *1-inch First Series* sheet 55NW of 1832; the same place-name appears on OS maps up to and including the 1:25,000 scale edition of 1966 (revised 1959–1964).
- 35 King, 'The Minster Aet Stur in Husermere and the Northern Boundary of the Hwicce', 74, end-note 30, comments that some researchers equate the present-day Eymore Wood to *Moerheb* because of the superficial similarity in their place-names (-more and *Moer*-), yet the former is considered to be Old English and the latter Brittonic.
- 36 Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, 31.
- 37 W. H. Duignan (1910) *A Forgotten Worcestershire Monastery*, cited in Worcestershire and Worcester City Historic Environment Record (HER) entry WSM 7184. Accessible via the Heritage Gateway website <<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>> [accessed 14/01/2024].
- 38 Worcestershire and Worcester City HER entry WSM 25334. Accessible via the Heritage Gateway website <<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>> [accessed 24/01/24]
- 39 Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, 371.
- 40 Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, 371–6.
- 41 Gilbert, *A History of Kidderminster*, 4–5.
- 42 Worcestershire and Worcester City Historic Environment Record, WSM30877 and WSM30878, heritage Gateway web-site <<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>> [accessed 14/01/2024].
- 43 It is known, for example, that Roman centres were often chosen as the sites for new Anglo-Saxon minsters; see for example John Blair, 'Minster Churches in the Landscape', in *Anglo-Saxon Settlements* (ed. D. Hooke), 1988, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford, 40–7.
- 44 Peter W. King, 'Some Roads out of North Worcestershire', *Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society*, 20 (2006), 88–90; James, 'The Norman Forest of Kinver: An analysis of the forest's extent and place-names recorded in the Great Perambulation of 1300', 18, 24.
- 45 Kevin James, 'Windsor, *windofer* and Iwerley: illustrating the place-name element *ofer in the Anglo-Saxon road network', *Journal of the English Place-Name Society*, 51 (2020), 41–51.
- 46 Worcestershire and Worcester City Historic Environment Record, WSM28922, Heritage Gateway web-site <<https://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/gateway/>> [accessed 07/02/2024].
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- 48 'Parishes: Chaddesley Corbett', in *A History of the County of Worcester: Volume 3* (London, 1913), pp. 35–43. *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/worcs/vol3/pp35-43>> [accessed 17/02/2024].
- 49 King, 'The Minster Aet Stur in Husermere and the Northern Boundary of the Hwicce', 77.
- 50 Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, 27.
- 51 Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, 120–5.

- ⁵² John Morris (ed.), *Domesday Book (vols. 16 and 24)*, Phillimore, Chichester, 1982.
- ⁵³ Kevin James, *Black Country Parish Boundaries: Echoes of Ancient Territory* (2017), <<http://local.kjwebs.co.uk/Black%20Country%20Parish%20Boundaries%20TBCM2017.pdf>>, 9–10, fig. 3.
- ⁵⁴ An additional estate boundary is recorded at Wolverley's western extremity in charter S 212 for Seckley in 866, suggesting that either Upper Arley, Kidderminster or Wolverley had been subdivided at that time; Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, 123.
- ⁵⁵ Eilert Ekwall, *English River-Names*, Oxford University Press, London (1968), 313–7; Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds* (1990), 63.
- ⁵⁶ The name Bredon, for example, comes from the Primitive Welsh **brez*, 'hill' and the OE *dūn*, 'hill'; and this tautology has been compounded in recent centuries by the addition of 'Hill' to form 'Bredon Hill'.
- ⁵⁷ William H. Duignan, *Worcestershire Place Names*, Oxford University Press, London (1905), 92–3.
- ⁵⁸ Kevin James, 'Interpreting Place-Names (part 1)', *The Blackcountryman*, 49, No. 3, The Black Country Society, Kingswinford, 12; James, 'Place Names of Stourbridge, The Black Country and their Environs: Origins, meaning and interpretation', <<http://www.sbcplacenames.kjdocs.co.uk/Place%20Names%20of%20Stourbridge%20the%20Black%20Country%20and%20their%20Environs.pdf>>, 11–2; Peter W. King, 'The Minster Aet Stur and the Northern Boundary of the Hwicce', 85.
- ⁵⁹ Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds*, 171.
- ⁶⁰ Gelling, 'Stour in Ismere', 84.
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