of the Castle Mill were indicted for not cleaning 'the town ditch from Castle Ditch to Eign Gate'.

The water to feed this ditch was obtained by diverting part of the Yazor Brook which approaches the city from the north-west (Fig 3). The original course was probably to the north of the city through Widemarsh following a course similar to that of the present Widemarsh Brook which becomes Eign Brook close to the river on the east of the city. (The place name Eign is used as a stream and road name both to the west and to the east of the city) (Watkins 1919a). The diversion was apparently at Faster's Moor, some 1.6km to the west of the city, from where an artificial branch was cut going directly to Eign Gate. At this point a part of the stream was allowed to flow towards Friars' Gate below which must have been some form of sluice gate, and the other part encircled the town in the city ditch, fed the castle moat and mill and fell into the Wye at the east of the castle.

The earlier defensive circuit of stages 1-4 included a ditch for at least part of its period of use and there is some evidence to show that it was water filled. The examination of the ditch fill material from two sites on the northern part of the circuit (Shoesmith 1971, 237) (p 68) has shown that it was filled with water for some time and that it was not excessively polluted. At the north-western corner of the Saxon city, the subway sections show a portion of the ditch which must have been backfilled when the extended defence of stage 5 was built. This section contained a layer of silt some 0.4m thick, which was also probably water deposited. It is thus likely, though not absolutely certain, that the ditch was filled with water when it had a defensive use. The presence of relatively clean water in the ditch suggests that it was fed by one of the streams which ran to the north of the city.

There are two possibilities for the original source of this water. The first and most straightforward is that the diversion of the Yazor Brook to feed the ditch in the vicinity of Eign Gate, as described above, was associated with one of the early stages of the defensive development and was reused in stages 5 and 6 for the extended defence. The relative shallowness of the ditch at the subway sections compared with sites further to the east, which would allow the water to flow from west to east, may be seen as some corroboration of this hypothesis.

The second possibility is completely conjectural but does provide an explanation for several features which otherwise have no simple solution. There is some evidence to show that a deep, water-filled ditch ran in a north-south direction through the centre of the city, ending in a marshy area between King Street and the river. The marsh was seen at a point close to the river in the Bishop's Palace Gardens (p 69) further to the north, behind the Methodist Chapel in Bridge Street where it was in excess of 4.6m deep (Heys and Norwood 1958, 122), and again during excavations in King Street (p 69). North of the line of King Street, but on the same alignment, a ditch was found bordering the eastern edge of Aubrey Street (Heys and Nor-wood 1958, 119). The presence of this ditch had been postulated by Watkins who thought that it either represented the western limb of the earliest defences of the city, or that it delineated the area held by the cathedral (Watkins 1920). The course of this ditch, as described above, if continued to the north beyond the line of the Saxon defences reaches the vicinity of All Saints' Church. During the restoration in AD 1892 a ditch was found underneath the north aisle. 'This ditch, which was not cleaned out and contained black mud, passed under the tower, so that the north wall of the tower stood on the edge of the ditch' (Clarke 1920).

If these various observations can be linked together, they may indicate the presence of an early stream course leading from the Widemarsh area to the river (Marshall 1940, 71, footnote). This stream could have been diverter in the vicinity of Northgate, at the northern end of Broad Street, to feed the eastern and western limbs of the Saxon defences. The original stream course may have been retained as an open sewer. As the stage 3 defences fell into disuse and the market was extended into the area of High Town, the stream course could have been blocked in the Widemarsh area and its waters diverted into the Widemarsh and Eign Brooks. A slight element of confirmation may be inferred from the parish boundaries. The boundary between All Saints' and St. Nicholas' parishes on the west, and St. John's and St. Peter's parishes on the east, has the appearance of following a natural feature (Fig 8) and in part follows the line of the postulated stream.

The origins and growth of Hereford

Introduction

The previous section has concentrated on the developmen of the defensive features of Hereford but has largely ignored the changes in the internal plan caused by the gradual growth of the city and the constraints imposed both by the defences and by the two religious institutions. The excavations during the last twelve years have only been sufficient to establish an outline of the development of part of the city, but the apparent almost complete fossilization of the street plan since at least the 13th century and the restrictions caused by the defensive circuit allows several hypotheses to be presented.

The following chapter includes details of the Roman occupation in the immediate area of the city, a brief resume of the available evidence for an early Saxon foundation and a hypothetical picture of the growth of the city from the 8th to the 13th century. The chapter should be considered as a foundation upon which future archaeological work in the city can be based.

The whole of this chapter should be considered together with the concluding parts of Volume 1 which deal with the cemetery, the religious settlement, and the castle immediately to the east of the original nucleus of the city around the cathedral. The development of the city after the end of the 13th century is beyond the scope of this volume and is adequately documented elsewhere (Duncumb 1804).

The Roman period

The Roman road system in the neighbourhood of Hereford is described earlier in this volume (p 3) and shown in Fig 2. The crossing of the east-west road, which led from Worcester to Kenchester and then into Wales, with the north-south road, which came from Chester and led to Monmouth or Weston-under-Penyard, at a point some 2.5km to the north-west of what was to become the site of the cathedral, must have been of some importance in the Roman road network. The presence of this crossroad, the alignment of the road from the north towards the ford at Hereford, the regular grid pattern of streets, and the occasional finds of Roman material in the

Link to previous section

city area have led several writers to postulate that the primary use of the gravel terrace next to the Wye was as the site of a Roman fort (Marshall 1940; Dudley 1954). This theory was resurrected as recently as 1975 in an article on the geographical approach to urban growth (Carter 1975).

The fort as postulated would have been *c* 4.4 hectares in extent with Church Street as the north-south axial road (Marshall 1940; Carter 1975). The northern Saxon defensive line along East Street and West Street and the ditch described as King's Ditch, close to Aubrey Street on the west (Heys and Norwood 1958) (p 8), would then represent the northern and western defences. Marshall suggested that the north-eastern corner should be represented by the rounded corner of East Street at the Offa Street junction, and that the eastern defence went from this point parallel to Church Street on the ditch line postulated by Watkins (Watkins 1920) (p 8 and Fig 6). The course of the proposed southern defensive line is indicated by the river terrace which runs across the Bishop's palace garden. This is a standard shape and size for a Roman fort and the evidence needs some consideration.

Sections have been cut across the northern ditch (minor sites-City Arms: p 68), (Shoesmith 1971) and the western (King's) ditch line (Heys and Norwood 1958), since Marshall wrote his article. In both cases the ditches had obviously been re-cut and possibly deepened as they became medieval sewers and the original shape and size could not be established. There was no evidence for any defensive works on the inside of the ditch line in the western excavation but later disturbances were such that any traces could have been totally lost. In the northern section (Shoesmith 1971), there was evidence for a dump rampart which was assumed to be Saxon. No Roman materials were found at any of these sites but this need not be conclusive as most of the work was done by machine and the features had suffered from many late disturbances

There have been no archaeological excavations whatsoever within the limits of Marshall's proposed Roman fort, half of which comprises the cathedral and its precinct. The remainder has had little development involving earth-moving during the last twelve years. Marshall's suggestion was based on topographical features and, although it has 'little to commend it' (Lobel 1969), it has not been conclusively disproved.

Roman material from excavations in the city includes coins, pottery, metalwork and stonework. The three Roman coins (Vol 3: Inventory nos 1 to 3) were in 12th century or later contexts on the Brewery and Bewell House sites. One was of first century date and the other two belonged to the late third century. The few sherds of pottery were found on sites in the western part of the city, but not in pre-Saxon contexts. At least one sherd is of early date (Vol 3: Fig 52.2). Part of a late 1st or early 2nd century copper brooch (Vol 3: Fig 17.1) was found in a mid 13th century context at Bewell House. The Victoria Street grain dryers (p 30) were built of reused Roman masonry, including large building stones and two altars (Vol 3: Fig 9.3), and quern stones of a Roman type (Vol 3: Fig 10.1 and 2) were found in the 10th century Saxon defensive wall on the same site.

There have also been sporadic finds of Roman material from within the city boundaries during the last 200 years which are now either lodged in the museum or, in some cases, lost. Many of the Roman coins found in the city were probably collectors' pieces, lost in recent times, but several were apparently lost in antiquity and are listed in the inventory (Vol 3). They are mainly of 4th century date and include one small hoard from south of the river dated to perhaps AD 400. A large Roman altar was found in AD 1821 near St John Street (Vol 3: Fig 9.1) and in AD 1829 a small bronze figurine of Hermes was found behind the Eignbrook Congregational Church in Eign Street (Bevan and Haverfield 1896; VCH 1908, 193) but has since been lost.

The distribution of the Roman finds has no particular concentrations apart, perhaps, from that consistent with the density of archaeological work on the western and north-western side of the city. No conclusive argument for a Roman origin for Hereford can be based on such a wide distribution, especially as the objects, when found on archaeological sites, have been invariably in post-Roman contexts. However, the presence of three altars and the statuette of Hermes deserves further consideration. The altars are reasonably large and heavy and it would be surprising if they had been brought as building materials all the way from Kenchester in preference to the large quantity of cut, smaller stone which would have been available on that site. The presence of this massive Roman material suggests a Roman site in the vicinity of Hereford, perhaps a temple or shrine.

Buildings of this nature are often close to a road junction or a natural spring. A road junction has been identified and several springs originally came out of the gravel terrace close to the Wye including Pipewell, close to Gwynne Street and St Ethelbert's Well, near the castle.

There is a lack of any firm evidence to support the premise of an early fort partly underneath the present cathedral. However, archaeological work in the city has been insufficient to disprove the theory completely. The available evidence suggests that it is more likely that there was a third or fourth century temple, shrine or small wayside settlement in the immediate vicinity of Hereford, perhaps associated with one of the fords across the Wye.

The early and mid Saxon periods

The Roman road system probably continued to be an important feature of the landscape for many centuries after the end of Roman rule. In the immediate Hereford area, the east-west road eventually became the northern boundary of the liberty of the city (Fig 10) and is still in use as a road. The alignment of the north-south road was preserved to the north of the city but is not apparent within the city boundary. This may not be due to a complete disuse of the road but rather because of later diversions crossing the Yazor and Widemarsh brooks and their associated marshlands (Fig 3) just to the north of the Hereford gravel terrace.

It has been suggested that during much of the Roman period, the main north-south thoroughfare along the Welsh border crossed the Wye by a bridge south of *Magnis* (p 6) (Fig 2). After the collapse of the Roman Empire, this bridge would have fallen into decay and was probably destroyed by one of the floods for which the Wye is notorious. Consequently the routeway down the Welsh border would have had to be diverted to the nearest convenient ford which was at Hereford. Thus, perhaps as early as the 5th century, the site of Hereford would have been of some considerable importance as a recognized crossing of the Wye.

Leland, writing in the mid 16th century, suggested that 'of the decaye of Kenchestre, Herford rose and florished'. He was then referring to the 'people of

Hereford town' who 'yn tymes paste pulled down muche and pyked out the best for there buildinges' rather than to the origins of the city, for later he noted that he could not 'perceyve that Hereford had any great begynning afore King Offas tyme' (Smith 1908, vi, 102).

The archaeological evidence tends to agree with Leland for there are few features which have been found during the excavations which can with any certainty be attributed to a date earlier than the 8th century. However, the evidence must be viewed with caution for two main reasons; the lack of dateable material from the earlier levels on most of the excavated sites and the distance of these sites from the area around the cathedral, which is assumed to be the nucleus of the earliest urban occupation.

The origins of urban settlement in Hereford may be related either to the foundation of the diocese, which is generally assumed to be AD 676, or to the tradition that the site was an earlier centre of British religious activity. The excavations have produced no indication for this postulated early religious settlement but the historical evidence, although obscure, is worthy of consideration.

The tradition that Hereford was a centre for a British diocese is apparently dependent on the list of bishops who disputed with St Augustine in AD 601. However, the list, which includes the Bishop of Caerfawydd, otherwise Hereford, and six other bishops (Williams 1848, 143), may have been invented at a later date to identify the seven British Bishops mentioned by Bede (*Hist Eccles* 1946, i, 99; Wood 1907).

Earlier, in AD 548, it is recorded that Ceawlin reached the Severn and fought the British at a place called *Fethanlea(g)* (ASC 1953, 20-1). Attempts have been made to establish the site of this battle close to Hereford, and the author of the Chronicle of Jeauvaulx and the unknown writer of the 12th century *Life of St Ethelbert* both agree in saying that *Fernlega* was an early name for Hereford and that it was the place of final burial of the saint. This could be a misunderstanding by later monastic writers of the sequence of events following the murder of St Ethelbert in AD 792. It may well be that *Fernlega* should be equated with Ferne which was held by William Fitz Norman as part of the King's Manor of Marden at the time of Domesday. This would accord with the tradition that Ethelbert was first buried at Marden (Wood 1917). Alternatively, it has been suggested that the name was used for the wooded lands which extended southwards from Hereford on both banks of the Wye (Phillimore 1906, 258), possibly as far as the Severn (Lloyd 1911, i, 282). The evidence is certainly insufficient to identify the 6th century battle site of *Fethanlea(g)* with the Hereford area.

It is suggested in Volume 1 that the origins of Hereford as a religious centre may pre-date the foundation of the diocese and that it may have been the site of one of the Welsh '*clas*' churches which later became St Guthlac's collegiate establishment. However, the archaeological evidence is only sufficient to indicate that the religious settlement on Castle Green was founded at some date probably before the beginning of the 8th century.

The foundation of the diocese is considered to date from AD 676 when Sexwulf, the Mercian bishop at Lichfield, granted a church and land to Putta, who had been bishop of Rochester until it was destroyed by the Mercian king Aethelred (Colgrave and Mynors 1969). Putta heads the list of bishops of the western Hecani in early manuscripts (eg Vespasion B VI: Hillaby 1976) and was succeeded in turn by Tyrhthel, Torhthere, Walhstod, and eventually Cuthbert.

Cuthbert, who was bishop from AD 736-40, and then became archbishop of Canterbury, is accredited with the completion of a fine cross at Hereford. This apparently commemorated the construction of a new burial place for the three prelates who had gone before him, together with Milfrith, a prince of the Western Hecani, his wife Cyneburh, and 'Oshelm, son of Osfrith' who is otherwise unknown (Hillaby 1976, 28). There is, perhaps significantly, no mention of the body of Putta being buried in this new *porticus* and indeed, there is no independent confirmation that the Putta who was bishop of Rochester was the first bishop of Hereford. It may have been that Tyrhthel was the first regular bishop and that Putta had a much less onerous position (Hillaby 1976, 33).

Even accepting this, there is no evidence to show that during the early years of the diocese the bishop's seat was situated at Hereford. Leominster, which was founded by Merewalh, the father of Milfrith, in *c* AD 660 (Finberg 1961), may have been a more logical situation until the cathedral at Hereford was built. This latter event may have been during the life of Walhstod who is recorded as the initiator of Cuthbert's cross. The cross could record the transfer of the bodies of the rulers and bishops of the Western Hecani from Leominster to Hereford or, as Whitehead suggests (Volume 1,3), from the original burial ground at Castle Green to the new minster church.

Merewalh, who is referred to as *Westan Hecanorum rex* by Florence of Worcester (Hart 1971, 139-41; Florence 1848-9, 635) was, according to Goscelin's *Life of St Mildburg*, the third son of Penda of Mercia. Milfrith, Merewalh's son, was described as king *(regulus)* on Cuthbert's cross (Lobel 1969). It is not possible to determine the area which the Western Hecani occupied but it apparently coincided approximately with the diocese of Hereford, comprising Herefordshire and southern Shropshire, with a fluctuating western boundary (VCH 1908, i, 348).

Merewalh *(ob c* AD 685) is said to have resided at Kingsland near Leominster *(op cit)* and was probably buried at Repton (Finberg 1961). It may be, as Lobel suggests, that Milfrith chose the site of Hereford as his capital city and the centre of the diocese (Lobel 1969) at some time before his death in *c* AD 690.

The death of Milfrith and his brother Merchelm towards the end of the 7th century may well indicate the demise of the sub-kingdom of the Western Hecani as a political unit (Hillaby 1976, 41). By the second half of the 8th century the people were described simply as the *Westerna* (Birch 1885-93, 297) and early in the 9th century they had apparently become the *Magonsaete* (Finberg 1961, 234).

Bede informs us that- in AD 731 Walhstod was 'bishop of the folk who live in the west beyond the River Severn' (Colgrave and Mynors 1969, v, 23), but it is not until *c* AD 800 that there is firm evidence for a bishop's see at Hereford when Wulfheard describes himself as *Herefordensis Ecclesiae Episcopus.*

The earliest settlement evidence from the excavated sites is of a restricted nature but can be used to give some indication of the extent of the original foundation. On the western side of the city, the earliest occupation features were the two grain drying ovens, found at the Victoria Street site (p 30). They were probably built during the latter half of the 7th century or during the 8th century. There is no evidence from the neighbouring sites to suggest that the ovens were associated with any buildings in the immediate area or with any road or other feature which would indicate that these features were part

of an urban development rather than being isolated structures in an otherwise rural scene.

Part of the early religious phase of occupation in Hereford is represented by the excavations on Castle Green (Vol 1). Here, a religious establishment, probably founded before the beginning of the 8th century, was surrounded by a cemetery containing burials of mixed sexes and ages, which was almost certainly in use during the latter part of the 7th century. It would seem likely that this cemetery was used by the inhabitants of Hereford from the time of the foundation of the city, as it fulfils the rubric of the early Church which forbade burials within the *parochia* of a Christian community.

The evidence indicates, with a reasonable degree of probability, that the dates of foundation of the religious settlement and of the cemetery on Castle Green are either earlier than the accepted date of the foundation of the diocese in AD 676 or within the half-century after this date. The evidence from the excavations also suggests that any other settlement at Hereford during the 7th and first half of the 8th centuries was of a restricted nature and did not extend as far west as the Herrington Street and Victoria Street sites.

If it is accepted that the cathedral was built at Hereford late in the 7th or early in the 8th century, we can therefore postulate that by the mid 8th century Hereford contained two religious establishments on the gravel terrace close to the Wye, one of which was surrounded by a cemetery; a north-south road which crossed the Wye close to the cathedral; possibly an east-west road immediately to the north of the cathedral and Castle Green, and probably a few houses close to the crossroads (Fig 141). The surrounding area was mainly agricultural with oats, wheat and barley being grown and artificially dried. The western side of the embryo town may have had some protection from a watercourse on the line of the King's Ditch (now Aubrey Street) and the associated marshy area (p 88), but nothing is known about any other defensive features to the north and east.

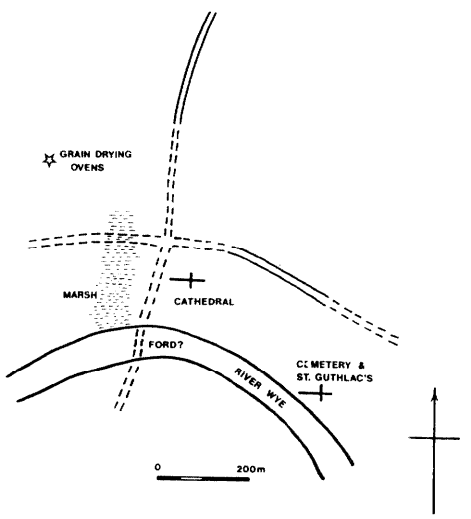

Fig 141 *The postulated form of Hereford in the early 8th century. The two religious settlements of St Mary's cathedral and St Guthlac's are seen as adjacent to a crossroads situated on the gravel terrace close to the-ford across the Wye*

The late Saxon period

The late 8th and early 9th centuries were apparently a period of growth for the city of Hereford. Either Offa, during his long reign as King of Mercia (AD 757-96), or possibly one of the minor kings who followed him, may have been responsible for this expansion of Hereford from a religious centre with perhaps a few houses, to a planned, royal town.

The beginning of Offa's reign was troubled, but in AD 760 the English defeated the Welsh at the battle of Hereford (Williams 1920, 10), and, possibly between AD 784-96, the line of the Welsh border was stabilized by the construction of the dyke which bears Offa's name (Fox 1955, 282). This event must have been of fundamental importance to Hereford for the dyke approaches the Wye from the north at Bridge Sollers, only 10km to the west of the town. The dyke's absence between this point and its second junction with the Wye near Monmouth has led to suggestions that the river itself was the border between Wales and Mercia (Fox 1955, 211) although the position of Hereford on the Wye makes this seem highly improbable. An alternative possibility: that the gap in the dyke accommodated the friendly but autonomous state of Ergning or Archenfield, between the Wye and the Black Mountains (Lloyd 1911, i, 280), would help to explain the mixture of both English and Welsh influence in this area, and, perhaps, the increasing importance of Hereford during the 8th and 9th centuries.

It is thought that Offa had a palace at Sutton, some 6km north of Hereford, and apparently it was here, in AD 794, that Offa murdered Ethelbert, king of the East Angles (James 1917). Miracles were performed at Ethelbert's first burial place at Marden and his remains were eventually moved to Hereford where he became the patron saint of the cathedral. Because of the murder, early tradition made Offa a lavish benefactor of Hereford Cathedral and possibly of the city (Lobel 1969).

The history of Hereford and indeed of the country as a whole is obscure during the century following Offa's death in AD 796, but it is suggested that Mercian power dwindled, and, although battles were still fought on the Welsh border, there is no indication that Hereford was of strategic importance.

It is within this framework that an expansion of the city occurred which shows some signs of being deliberately planned. The date for this expansion cannot, as yet, be accurately established, but in this report it is suggested that the growth of the city to the west of the cathedral and west of the postulated stream and marshy area on the line of Aubrey Street took place at some date between the middle of the 8th century and the middle of the 9th century.

The archaeological evidence for the proposed planned expansion comes from the Berrington Street and Victoria Street excavations (p 48 and 31). A street, partly sealed under the earliest known western defences, a second street on the line of Berrington Street, and a series of buildings oriented with these two streets (Fig 71) may be considered as evidence for an element of town planning in this previously sparsely settled area. Parallel streets to the east, including Aubrey Street, Broad Street, Church Street and St John Street (Fig 9), may belong to this pattern and together they form the grid pattern for which Hereford has long been known (Fig 142). A seventh street may be postulated between Broad Street and Church Street, where the property boundaries shown on the 18th century Taylor's Map (Fig 5) continue the line of Widemarsh

Link to next section