

# ANGLO-SAXON BIRMINGHAM

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Birmingham lies in the centre of the English midlands, traditionally regarded as a transitional region between the highland and lowland zones of Britain.<sup>1</sup> The city's geographical hinterland comprises the Birmingham Plateau and, surrounding it, those parts of the Severn-Avon and Trent river systems which drain the Plateau. Only a short distance to the west and south of modern Birmingham's urban sprawl is the main watershed of southern Britain, with land rising to over 1000 ft (c.300 m.) in the Clent Hills (Figure 1). Rivers drain westwards and southwards into the Severn-Avon river system and northwards and eastwards into the Trent basin.

The administrative geography of the modern city has been greatly influenced by its industrial origins. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries rapid growth absorbed many adjacent settlements, and has continued recently with the acquisition of Sutton Coldfield (1974) and Frankley (1996). Today the city of Birmingham straddles the boundaries of two kingdoms of the middle Anglo-Saxon period (the Mercians and the Hwicce), two Anglo-Saxon dioceses (Lichfield and Worcester), and three shires (Figures 2-3). In 1086, at the time of the Domesday survey, the manor of Birmingham (an area corresponding to the very heart of the city) was in Warwickshire, together with Edgbaston, Aston, Erdington, Witton and Sutton; Handsworth, Perry and Harborne were in Staffordshire; and Yardley, Moseley, Northfield and King's Norton were in Worcestershire. A place, therefore, which is now at the core of the English midlands and is Britain's second city was in a truly peripheral position in the Anglo-Saxon period.

Birmingham has virtually no recorded Anglo-Saxon history nor, it appears, any Anglo-Saxon archaeology. It is not first mentioned in written sources until 1086, and not a single Anglo-Saxon find, let alone a site, is recorded in the Sites and Monuments Records which cover modern Birmingham and its rural hinterland.<sup>2</sup> Is this because the entire area was woodland, penetrated in the early Roman period by the builders of Ryknield Street and a few other military roads, but lived in only briefly by the occupants of the Metchley fort,<sup>3</sup> a handful of potters<sup>4</sup> and some early Anglo-Saxon pagans<sup>5</sup> until, in the later Anglo-Saxon period, settlements began to be set up in isolated clearings? This is the account of Birmingham's pre-Conquest history which is still being taught in the city's primary schools, supported by reference to the many local

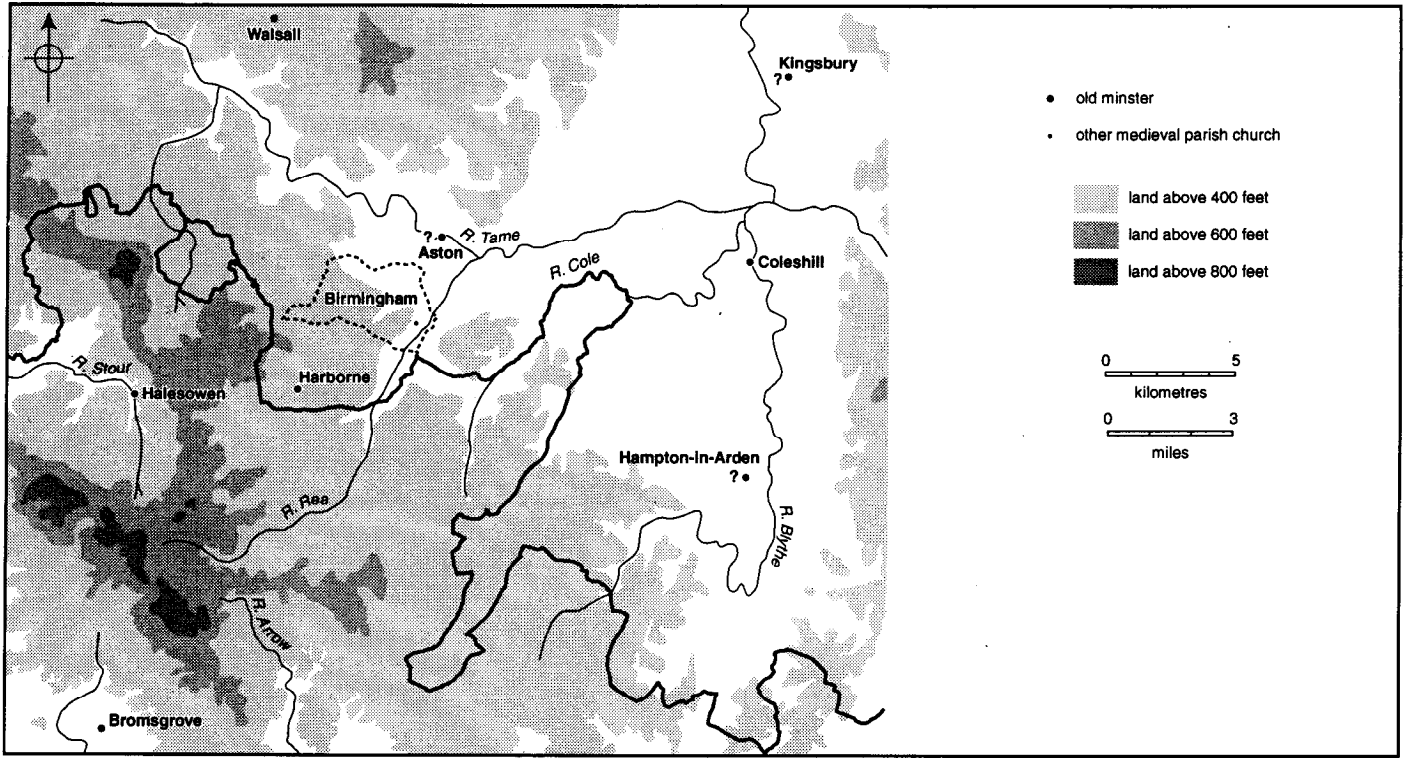


Figure 1. Relief and drainage in the vicinity of Birmingham. The area covered is identical to that in Figures 2-4. The ecclesiastical parish of Birmingham is shown.

placenames in Old English *lēah*.<sup>6</sup> Where many examples are found close together, a placename in *lēah* means 'woodland clearing' - although in some areas, such as the central part of northern Warwickshire, Margaret Gelling suggests the meaning 'settlement in a woodland environment', which is likely to be appropriate for other parts of the Birmingham area too.<sup>7</sup>

The city's children learn that the manors of the Birmingham area, most of which we first hear about in Domesday Book, were all of relatively recent origin in 1086. Their teachers routinely assure them that Birmingham's history began no earlier than, perhaps, the tenth century, with nothing of significance happening there until the 1160s, when Peter, the lord of the manor of Birmingham, founded a market settlement. Although Richard Holt was right in saying that in 1086 Birmingham was an 'insignificant agricultural settlement' which had 'no sign of any distinguishing characteristics, or any particular potential for growth',<sup>8</sup> the same was certainly not true of many of its neighbours. The popular view that the Birmingham area had little Anglo-Saxon history, and so can have had little or no significant Anglo-Saxon archaeology, is entirely unjustified.

We can do a lot better than that. But if the prevalent view of the early history (or, rather, non-history) of the Birmingham area is to be replaced by a much more accurate one, we shall need to use some unconventional and sometimes difficult sorts of evidence. Nor will a full, coherent picture emerge of the area from the fifth century to the late twelfth, when the market settlement was founded. The best we can hope for is an uneven, seriously incomplete sketch which suggests some of the more important aspects of the area's history and human landscape in the period. This paper will focus on one of them in particular - the origins of the medieval land-units of the Birmingham area.

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What we can say about them comes from several sorts of evidence. Much of it derives from what we find out about the area at a later date, but which we know or strongly suspect to be of pre-Conquest origin. For instance, parish boundaries were not mapped reliably and systematically in England until the early nineteenth century, but it can be shown that many ecclesiastical parishes of that time mirrored the extent of an Anglo-Saxon manor, or group of manors, which the parish church in question initially served. Evidence of this sort, although indirect, can throw light on important aspects of the Birmingham area's Anglo-Saxon history. Figure 3 shows the parish and township boundaries depicted on early nineteenth-century maps. The pattern of land-units is one which in its essentials is likely to mirror the area's territorial organisation in and before 1066.

Another substantial source of information are the area's many placenames of pre-Conquest origin - not only those of the Domesday manors, but many others too which contain Old English elements or even earlier ones. These names, undoubtedly coined by people living in the Birmingham area, contain valuable historical information. Unfortunately, it is usually impossible to tell when a placename was coined.<sup>9</sup> This means that we cannot say to which part

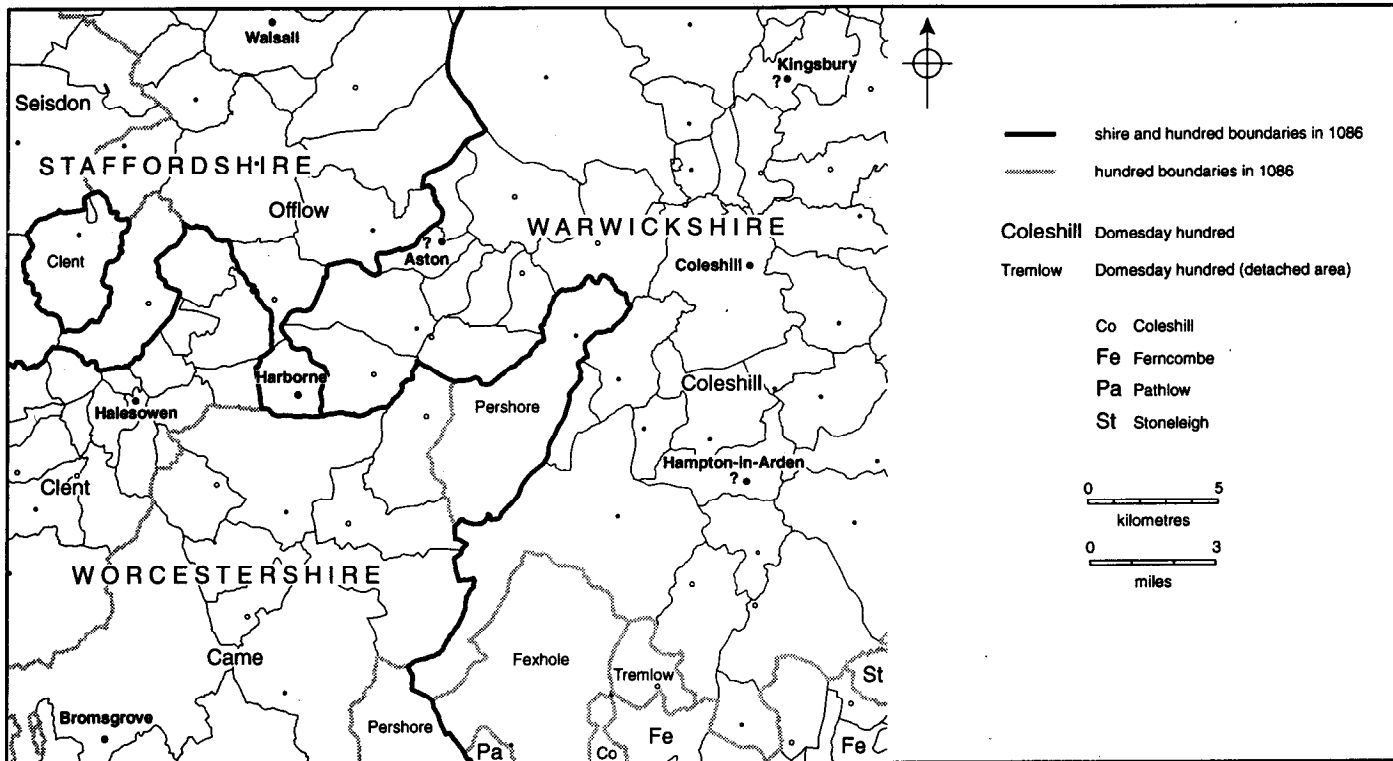


Figure 2. Shires and hundreds in the vicinity of Birmingham in 1086. Also shown are ecclesiastical parishes and townships at their early nineteenth-century extent (named on Figure 3).

of the Anglo-Saxon period each piece of historical data belongs. When were smiths first active in Smethwick? When was Moseley overrun with mice? It is also hard to be sure that we have correctly understood what the historical information means. Why, for instance, were Aston, Sutton [Coldfield] and [King's] Norton - respectively, 'eastern land-unit', 'southern land-unit' and 'northern land-unit' - named relative to somewhere else?<sup>10</sup> And where in each case was the other place? Names of this sort are telling us something important about territorial associations in the Birmingham area: it is reasonable to conclude that when, say, Aston was named, it belonged to a larger territory of which the most important part lay somewhere to the west of it. But not being able to say for certain when a name of this sort was formed (which would give us a date by when the association existed), not knowing why it was formed, not even being sure of the identity of the more important place or places to which such directional names point - these problems hamper us a lot in our efforts to throw light on the Birmingham area's Anglo-Saxon history.

Placenames, then, are potentially an invaluable source of direct evidence. So too would be contemporary written sources, if we only had a reasonable number of them. Domesday Book, though not compiled until twenty years after the Norman Conquest, provides an invaluable snapshot of aspects of the Birmingham area at the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. It could not have been assembled so quickly if it had not drawn on earlier surveys, and so we can feel confident about much of what it says about the area at the end of Edward the Confessor's reign. Sometimes we can safely project this picture back in time for several decades and occasionally for far longer. Earlier written material, however, is scarce. Birmingham itself is not mentioned in surviving pre-Conquest sources, and there are only seven Anglo-Saxon references to places close to it. These all occur in charters or leases, three of which are accompanied by a statement of the boundary of the land concerned.<sup>11</sup>

It will never be easy to get a clear impression of what was going on in the Birmingham area in the early medieval period. Were it not for its large number of Old English and even earlier placenames, it might be all but impossible to show that the area did not remain impenetrably wooded until the eighth or ninth century. Even with the help of placenames the argument is not easily made that as early as the fifth and sixth centuries many separate communities farmed where the city now sprawls. Since no trace has ever been recorded of their settlements or burials, it requires circumstantial evidence to prove their existence. It does not help matters that the entire west midlands has only a small amount of early Anglo-Saxon archaeology, almost all of which consists of burials located mainly in two major river valleys. We know that, from the late fifth century onwards, some of the people living in the Avon valley and in the Trent valley upstream of Repton (Derbyshire) were being buried with items similar to those found in graves in East Anglia and the east midlands as far south as Cambridgeshire. By the late sixth century the objects being put into graves in the Avon valley increasingly reveal contacts with the upper Thames valley. It is unclear, however, how many of those being buried with gravegoods in these two areas of the west midlands were immigrants

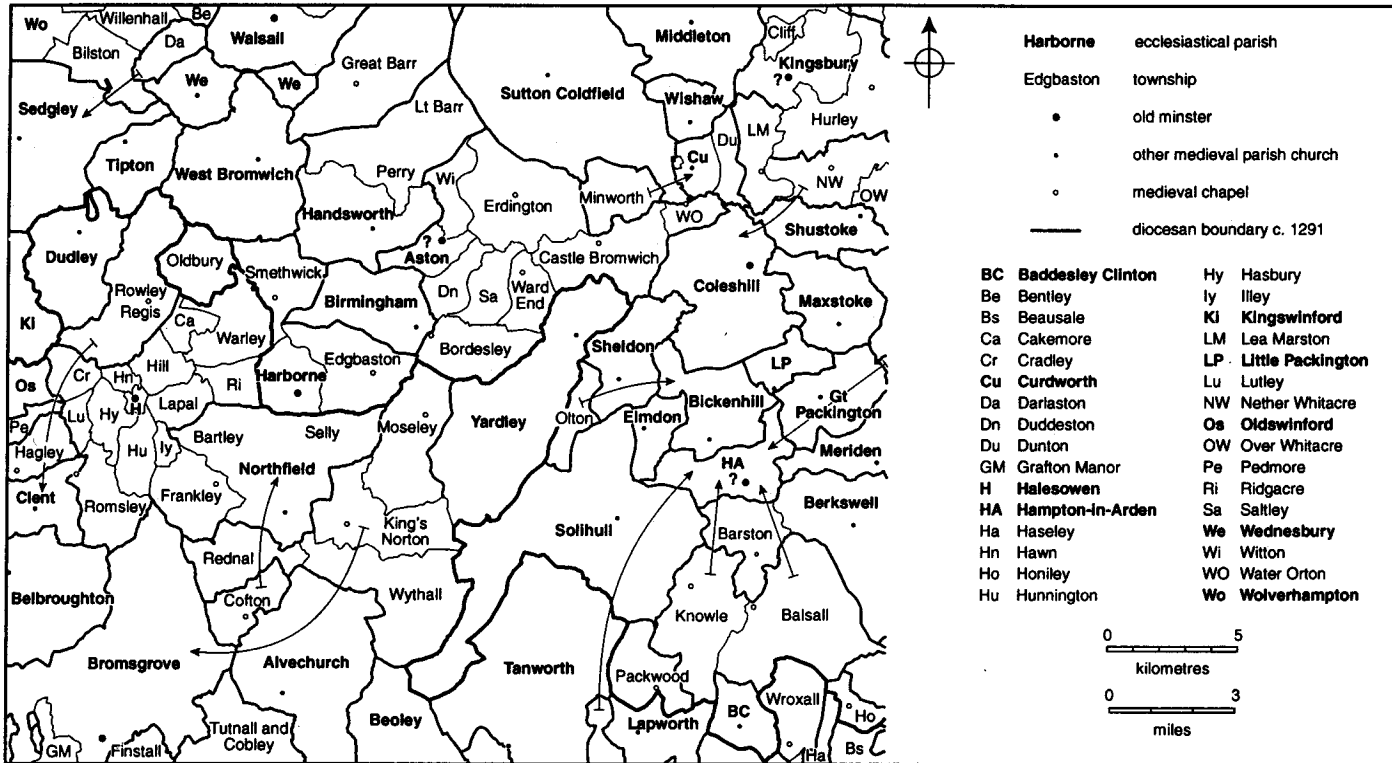


Figure 3. Ecclesiastical parishes and townships at their early nineteenth-century extent. Also shown is the boundary between the diocese of Worcester and the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield at its c.1291 extent. Oldbury was a detached portion of the diocese of Hereford.

from further east or south (or their descendents), and how many of them belonged to the region's indigenous population.<sup>12</sup>

The standard explanation of the appearance of burials accompanied by gravegoods from the late fifth century is that it represents the movement into the west midlands of people of Germanic stock who settled among the native Britons of the area, and whose descendents' mortuary practices were changed under the influence of British christianity. This takes account of the fact that there are few late sixth-century burials with gravegoods in the west midlands and no seventh-century ones, with virtually no burials with gravegoods of any date having been found west of the Severn.<sup>13</sup> Yet few, if any, of those buried in this way need have been immigrants or of Germanic stock. It is possible that the adoption of new mortuary practices in separate parts of the west midlands was the result, not of migration (or not only of migration), but of political and cultural influences being brought to bear on the native British population of the areas concerned by powerful neighbours in the east midlands and, increasingly, the upper Thames valley.<sup>14</sup>

The biological identity of those buried with gravegoods in the west midlands cannot be resolved at present. There can be no doubt, however, that they were not its only inhabitants. There is a great deal of evidence, both direct and circumstantial, that in the fifth and sixth centuries the region had a substantial population, the descendents of those who had inhabited it densely and farmed it intensively in the late Roman period.<sup>15</sup> The end of Roman Britain did not result in the catastrophic depopulation of the west midlands. On the contrary, rural society is likely to have continued to operate much as before, but now without a need to produce large agricultural surpluses to feed town-dwellers and satisfy the heavy demands of the Roman state. The population no doubt fell considerably in the early post-Roman period in the west midlands, as elsewhere, but organised agrarian life went on throughout the region.<sup>16</sup>

It would, then, be perverse to imagine that the Birmingham area was largely uninhabited or unexploited either in the Roman period or at any time thereafter. The total absence of known early Anglo-Saxon archaeological sites can no longer be taken as a reliable guide to the history of settlement and land-use there in the post-Roman period. That is not to say that the area was as thickly populated as, for example, the Trent or Avon valleys apparently were. It does mean, however, that we can accept that the names of the later medieval manors and parishes of the Birmingham area were in most cases coined in the early Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>17</sup> Nor need we suppose that they were always coined for *new* settlements. It has been suggested that at least some of the *leah* placenames in north-central Warwickshire represent a renaming of existing British settlements.<sup>18</sup> Those in the Birmingham area too are likely to do so.

In just a few cases it is self-evident that the Birmingham area's placenames are early ones. The name Weoley means 'woodland clearing, or woodland settlement, where there is a heathen shrine'.<sup>19</sup> On even the most pessimistic view of the average west midlander's religious nonconformity, the name is unlikely to have been coined after the early eighth century. For it to be both needed and perpetuated there had to be many other people nearby to whom

the inhabitants of Weoley must have seemed significantly out of step, since it is claimed that Old English names with pagan connotations are unlikely to have been coined until most people were Christians.<sup>20</sup>

Birmingham's own name, meaning 'land-unit of Beorma's people', is probably an even earlier one.<sup>21</sup> Placenames in *-ingahām* are very rare in the west Midlands; but where they occur in southern and eastern England they have been seen as belonging to an early stage in the Anglo-Saxon settlement process.<sup>22</sup> The *-inga-* element in the middle of the name suggests the presence of a clan, i.e. an extended family, in the area - in this case the *Beormingas*. It is sometimes possible to identify the probable extent of the land settled and farmed by a clan of this sort, as it is in, for example, west Essex in the area of the eight parishes called the Rodings.<sup>23</sup> In Birmingham's case the area may have been smaller, for Margaret Gelling has warned us not to view its name as being necessarily as historically important as the others in *-ingahām*.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, many of the names in *-inga-* are likely to represent internal colonisation of such early territories by cadet branches of an original clan; only a few of them may have the historical significance of names such as Roding or Hastings. Nevertheless, the possibility cannot be excluded that the Domesday manor of Birmingham lay in what had been, in the sixth century, a considerably larger territory occupied by the *Beormingas* clan.

One other potentially very early name, Witton (in the parish of Aston), needs to be highlighted. There are a lot of names in *-tūn* in the Birmingham area, many of them combined with a personal name (e.g. Erdington, Edgbaston), and most of them characteristically belonging to places of only secondary importance in the settlement hierarchy. Witton, however, may be significantly different, since its first element is the Old English word *wīc*. *wīc* is a common occurrence in placenames, but in all but a handful of cases it forms the second element (e.g. Bromwich, Smethwick). Where it occurs first, as it does in about thirty cases in England of the name *wīc-hām* (Wickham, etc.) and in a number of other names (e.g. Wickford in Essex and Weekley in Northamptonshire), it has been said that 'it might have been used by the earliest English-speaking people in Britain to refer to actual Romano-British settlements, or to Roman administrative units', since there is general agreement that *wīc* is a loan from the Latin word *vicus*.<sup>25</sup> Margaret Gelling also points out that over 75 per cent of *wīc-hām* placenames are on or very close to a major Roman road, and that more than 50 per cent of them can be shown to be probably at or close to the site of a Romano-British settlement.<sup>26</sup> The township of Witton in Aston parish lies next to Ryknield Street, and the Roman road forms part of its boundary at the point where, arguably joined by the road from *Pennocrucium*, it crosses the River Tame.<sup>27</sup> There is no direct archaeological evidence whatever for Roman occupation in Witton's vicinity; but by analogy with other examples of names with *wīc* as their first element,<sup>28</sup> it can be suggested that there was a Romano-British settlement somewhere in this area, possibly a minor trading centre. The Tame would have provided suitable transport for goods, no doubt including pottery from the Roman kiln found by chance in Perry Barr,<sup>29</sup> quite close to the river crossing.

Placenames apart, there is little tangible evidence of Anglo-Saxon settle-



ment in the Birmingham area. Among the seven pre-Conquest charters which relate to parts of it, one probably dates to the very beginning of the eighth century. It records a grant to Worcester cathedral of an area of land in what is called 'wooded countryside' (*rus silvaticum*).<sup>30</sup> The area's name, *Hellerelege*, is lost, but the accompanying boundary clause shows that it comprised, as a minimum, the western half of the township of King's Norton. Much later on, charters refer to land at Rednal, Cofton, and various places in the northern part of Alvechurch,<sup>31</sup> and probably also to Duddeston in Aston parish.<sup>32</sup> Yardley is named in a late tenth-century charter. A statement of its boundary suggests a close correlation between the late Anglo-Saxon manor and the early nineteenth-century parish.<sup>33</sup>

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Despite the difficulties which the lack of evidence presents, we may feel sure that there were plenty of people living in the Birmingham area in even the earlier part of the Anglo-Saxon period. There was a lot of woodland there, but settlements with their own names and fields were already occupying most of it in the seventh century.<sup>34</sup> Birmingham itself was on a frontier then. It lay in the kingdom of the Mercians but very close to its border with the kingdom of the Hwicce. It is impossible to know exactly where the boundary between them ran at that time; it is not even known if it was a fixed line, a fluid one, or a wide zone of woodland which neither kingdom could properly call its own. But by no more than a hundred years later it no longer mattered much where the border was, since by the late eighth century the Mercians had annexed the kingdom of the Hwicce and had reduced it to a province under their own direct rule.<sup>35</sup>

However, a fair indication of where it ran is provided by the boundary between the dioceses of Worcester and Lichfield. These were set up in the late seventh century to serve the two kingdoms - Worcester for the Hwicce and, a decade previously, Lichfield for the Mercians.<sup>36</sup> When they were created, the extents of the dioceses no doubt reflected the two kingdoms' contemporary extents. But it is not until the late thirteenth century that information is available to allow a reliable map of the dioceses of England to be drawn.<sup>37</sup> By c.1291 the border between the dioceses of Worcester and Lichfield (or Coventry and Lichfield, as the latter was by then) ran along the Bourn Brook (followed by the southern boundary of Harborne and Edgbaston) to the River Rea. It continued along the Rea to the north end of Balsall Heath, where it met the southern corner of the manor of Birmingham, and went over the watershed to the River Cole, which it followed around three sides of Yardley before continuing south-westwards.

But we must expect this diocesan boundary to have shifted to and fro at the local level during the six centuries and more between its creation and c.1291.<sup>38</sup> For example, it is almost certain (as will be shown later) that Yardley was initially in the diocese of Lichfield. Most, probably all, of the area called Selly - modern Weoley Castle, Selly Oak and Selly Park - and also Bartley Green may have been in the same diocese too, since until shortly before 1066

they were in the church of Lichfield's hands.<sup>39</sup> It may also be significant that the first element of the names Bordesley and Balsall Heath may be the same Old English word *bord*, 'board, plank'.<sup>40</sup> The two places lay to either side of the diocesan boundary c.1291, but their probable sharing of a first element hints that they may once have belonged to a single land-unit and therefore both have been in the same diocese. Finally, the Anglo-Saxon charter boundary clause relating to land at Cofton Hackett and in the northern part of Alvechurch proves that, at some time or other, land in Rednal belonged to Mercia.<sup>41</sup>

All this shows, as others have noted before, that the boundary between the Mercians and the Hwicce, and between their two dioceses, is likely to have been a flexible one, moving occasionally as changes to the local pattern of land control shunted pieces of land around among a number of influential holders - the king, various churches and secular nobles. Throughout this process Birmingham was always in a liminal situation, lying as it did near a major natural, political and ecclesiastical boundary, to either side of which were zones of valuable woodland. Competition for this increasingly scarce resource was sure to produce a fragmented tenurial pattern, which in turn would be mirrored in the administrative and parochial geography of the Birmingham area.

That was certainly true in 1086. By then there had been a united kingdom of England for well over a century, so that even the kingdom of Mercia was no more than a distant memory, and the west midland region was divided up into shires and hundreds. Domesday Book is the earliest consistent record of the geography of these administrative land-units. It shows Worcestershire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire meeting in the immediate vicinity of Birmingham, with the boundary between Worcestershire on the one hand and Staffordshire and Warwickshire on the other lying, with only a few exceptions, on the same line as the boundary of c.1291 between the diocese of Worcester and that of Coventry and Lichfield (Figures 2-3). The shires, then, perpetuated Birmingham's marginal position. The hundredal pattern fragmented the area even further. The land situated closest to Birmingham in Warwickshire was undivided, with all of it belonging to Coleshill hundred; but the nearest land in Staffordshire was split between Seisdon and Offlow hundreds, and the nearest in Worcestershire between Clent and Came hundreds, with Yardley, Tanworth and Packwood forming distant outliers of hundreds in the Avon valley and beyond.

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Yardley provides a very good example of the way in which much can be learnt about the Birmingham area in the Anglo-Saxon period by paying close attention to recorded relationships between separate secular and ecclesiastical land-units. In 1066 it was held by the important Benedictine abbey at Pershore, and so was Beoley, a few miles south-west of Yardley, to which the latter was attached manorially.<sup>42</sup> It is not known for how long Pershore abbey had been holding Yardley by 1086, but an apparently reliable charter issued by

king Edgar in 972 lists it among the lands which were then being restored to the monks.<sup>43</sup> So it is likely that Pershore had owned it for some time before the late tenth century. This looks like one example among many of a major church in the arable lowlands to the south of the Birmingham Plateau having had a royal grant, possibly as early as the seventh or eighth century, of a tract of the extensive woodland in the vicinity of the boundary between the Hwicce and the Mercians.

Because of Pershore's firm ownership of Yardley and Beoley, they became parts of its hundred. This was in keeping with the trend in the late Anglo-Saxon period for cathedrals and some other major churches in the west midlands, as elsewhere, to have most or all of their lands under their own administrative control rather than that of the crown's leading secular officials.<sup>44</sup> Worcester and Evesham, for example, had private hundredal jurisdiction which, along with Pershore's, produced the fragmented hundredal geography in the area of the former kingdom of the Hwicce which Domesday Book first allows us to map. This, then, is the background to a complex but revealing dispute which arose in the thirteenth century, when both Beoley and Yardley had been in the hands of lay sub-tenants, the Limesi family, for some time. The object of the dispute was the church of Yardley.

At some time in the late twelfth century Gervase Paynel, the lord of the manor of Aston, founded a priory at Tickford (Bucks.), *alias* Newport Pagnell. He then made a gift to it of the church of Aston, together with the latter's chapels at Castle Bromwich, Water Orton and Yardley. At some time between 1194 and 1220 Gervase's nephew and successor confirmed the grant.<sup>45</sup> Also before 1220, he enfeoffed the Erdington family in Aston, and they began presenting priests to the church as if it were their right to do so rather than that of the prior of Tickford.<sup>46</sup> This meant that the Erdingtons were claiming to be the rightful owners of the income, not only of Aston church itself, but also of all its chapels and the whole area which they served between them. In 1220 the prior of Tickford seems suddenly to have noticed what was going on; however, he was not the only person to make a fuss. The abbot of Alcester (Warwicks.) did so too, producing charters which allegedly showed that the church at Yardley, far from being subject to Aston, was in fact a chapel which belonged to the church of Beoley. He claimed that because the latter had been given to Alcester in the late twelfth century by the Limesi family, his abbey was the rightful owner of Yardley's church.<sup>47</sup>

This dispute dragged on for a total of 130 years, but for present purposes the key stages came in the middle decades of the thirteenth century. On three separate occasions (1237, 1263 and 1274) judgement was given in Aston's favour.<sup>48</sup> As a result there can be no doubt that the manor of Yardley lay in the parish of Aston, and that its church genuinely was a chapel of Aston's. However, before the implications of this for Birmingham's early history are considered, it needs to be said that the claim which the abbot of Alcester made in 1220 was a perfectly respectable one. His abbey had been given Beoley's church in the late twelfth century, when Yardley had been manorially subject to Beoley for centuries as a result of both areas belonging to Pershore abbey. It is often found that in situations of this kind a manorial dependency, such

as Yardley was, was eventually held to belong to the parish of the main manor's church - in this case Beoley's - even when, as here, the two places lay some distance apart. But this sort of situation would arise only if the true mother church of the area in question had lost the will to hold on to what was rightfully its own, or perhaps had even forgotten that it was the other church's mother. However, in Yardley's case this did not happen, since the church of Aston had never relaxed its grip on Yardley; and so, when the need arose, its maternal status was firmly enforced.

But when had this mother-daughter relationship been formed? It is highly significant that nowhere in the thirteenth-century records of the dispute about Yardley church are the grounds of Aston's claim ever reported, other than a flat statement that Aston was the mother church. Beoley's counter-claim was based on the manorial link which had existed between Beoley and Yardley since before 1066 as a result of their both belonging to Pershore abbey. But there had been no manorial or administrative relationship whatever between Aston and Yardley since the latter had been restored to Pershore in the late tenth century, and therefore there had been no opportunity for the church of Aston to gain its parochial control of Yardley since well back in the pre-Conquest period. It is more than likely that its claim was based on its having been the mother church of Yardley even before the latter was granted to Pershore.

This important observation is one of several good reasons for concluding that Aston's church was in origin one of the sort which Anglo-Saxons themselves called a minster.<sup>49</sup> Among the other reasons is the size of its parish. Even without Yardley, Aston's parish was one of the largest in the region. It contained at least eight manors by 1300, and at the end of the middle ages Aston had at least six chapels subject to it - at Erdington, Little Bromwich *alias* Ward End, Castle Bromwich, Deritend (in Bordesley), Water Orton and Yardley (Figure 4).<sup>50</sup> It was certainly one of the most important churches in the Birmingham area. Yet it stood surprisingly close to the western edge of its parish; and it was of course the church of an area named Aston, 'eastern land-unit'. Of what even larger territory, then, was Anglo-Saxon Aston only the eastern part?

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It will be useful at this point to comment on the organisation of the Anglo-Saxon church in the west midlands. The English parochial system of late medieval and modern times developed mainly between the tenth century and the twelfth. The question of what preceded it is hotly debated, but there is persuasive evidence that in the west midlands, as in some other parts of England, it evolved out of an earlier ecclesiastical system which is widely known as 'the minster system'.<sup>51</sup> Its transformation into the parochial system which is still in use today was a very long drawn out business which left many fragments of valuable evidence scattered about in late medieval sources. As the example of Yardley showed, this evidence can be used to form a picture of what the ecclesiastical geography of the west midlands was like, arguably

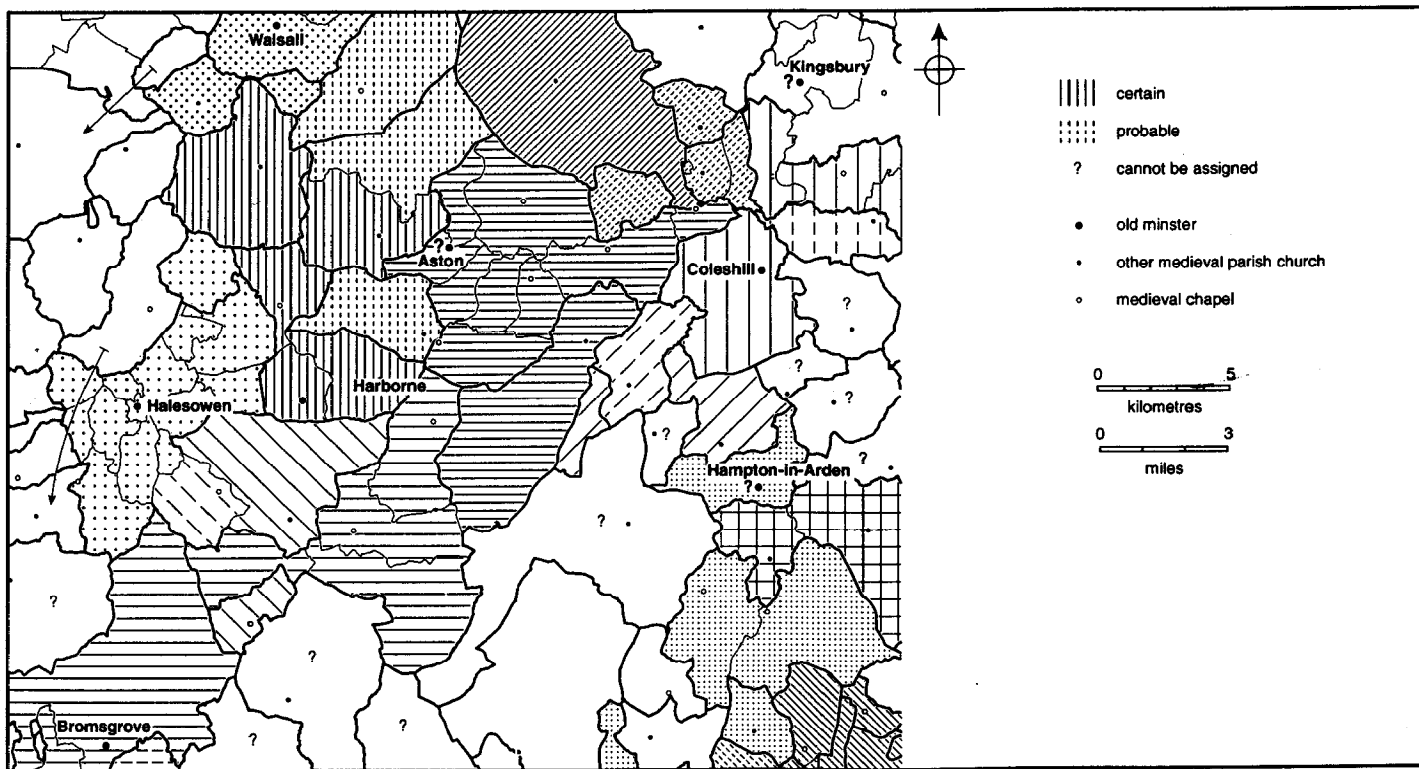


Figure 4. Former parochial affiliations in the vicinity of Birmingham, as alluded to in mainly late medieval sources. The map shows links between mother churches and those parts of their parishes which sooner or later became parochially independent. It is not an attempt to recreate the area's parochial geography at any one specific point in time.

even as early as the seventh century. It reveals that, just as there was a direct correlation between manors and parishes from the tenth century onwards, so also previously, as far back as the seventh century, minsters had served the secular land-units of the day in the west midlands. These, however, tended to be far larger than the manors referred to in late Anglo-Saxon charters and leases, Domesday Book and later sources.

This means that where evidence can be found of how the many late medieval churches in the Birmingham area were related to one another in terms of their original status, real progress can be made towards an understanding of the area's Anglo-Saxon history. Fortunately, there is enough of the right sorts of evidence available to make the attempt worthwhile, although there is nowhere near enough of it to allow the full story to emerge.

In the seventh and early eighth centuries minsters were set up in most, perhaps all, of the Anglo-Saxon dioceses. In the west midlands and elsewhere they acted as, among other things, centres from which local populations were converted and subsequently received whatever pastoral care was to be had. What most of these 'old minsters'<sup>52</sup> had in common was a very large parish - what for convenience we may call a minster parish, so as to distinguish it from the far smaller ecclesiastical parishes of later medieval and modern England. Other, less important churches were set up from the eighth century onwards by the bishop or the community of an existing minster, or sometimes by lay people. Referred to in different contexts as sub-minsters, lesser minsters or parochial chapels, they inevitably stood in the parishes of old minsters. Most were founded to supplement the latter in the provision of pastoral care and so became responsible for a sizeable part of the minster parish, which usually contained several manors. Some sub-minsters had more than one priest and land assessed at a hide or more, and therefore are sometimes hard to tell apart from the old minsters. But they are easily distinguished from yet another sort of church of which large numbers are found in the area, the manorial or private chapels. A great many of these were built by land holders on their manors during the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, usually close to the hall, and at first had no public role. However, many became parish churches sooner or later by being adopted by the diocese and given a priest, and they served the area of the manor on which they had been founded.

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A detailed study of the Birmingham area reveals a number of old minsters of probable seventh- or early eighth-century foundation and has shown the likely extents of their minster parishes. It also enables the latter's break-up to be traced, as sub-minsters and then large numbers of manorial chapels were set up at different times in different parts of each one. This lengthy process produced by c.1200 a parochial geography which stayed largely unchanged until the mid nineteenth century (Figure 4). The evidence and arguments on which the study's conclusions are based unfortunately need far more space for full presentation than is available here and so only its conclusions can be presented in many instances.<sup>53</sup>

Bromsgrove was a major royal centre, and its church, like Aston's, had a very large parish in the late medieval period. To the north it was very oddly shaped, containing the whole of what in 1846 became the independent ecclesiastical parish of King's Norton. Until then King's Norton church, notwithstanding its size and architectural merit, had been no more than a chapel of Bromsgrove's church. To the south, it can be argued that Tardebigge, Stoke Prior and possibly Alvechurch were all once served by Bromsgrove church and therefore belonged to its parish.<sup>54</sup>

There was an important minster at Halesowen. Two priests were recorded there in Domesday Book,<sup>55</sup> a clear indication of a superior church. Until the nineteenth century it retained control of a large parish containing many townships. Frankley was said to lie in it from the mid thirteenth century, but it had probably been 'captured' from Northfield church.<sup>56</sup> A case can be made for Halesowen's parish having at first extended further to the west and north, with Clent and its chapelry Rowley Regis once being in it and perhaps other, adjacent areas too.

To the north-west and north of Birmingham there were minsters at Wolverhampton and Walsall. Their relationship with each other and with the even more important minster at Tettenhall, a few miles to the west of Wolverhampton, is a complex and revealing one but has no particular relevance here.<sup>57</sup> To the east of them, Sutton Coldfield was probably in the very large minster parish of St Michael's, Lichfield; and if Sutton was, so were Curdworth and its parochial outlier Minworth, and probably Wishaw.<sup>58</sup> Beyond them the church of Kingsbury was evidently a minster, but it may have been only a sub-minster, perhaps of Coleshill.

The picture is not so clear on the eastern side of the area around Birmingham. Coleshill's church was an old minster with a parish which originally extended a long way to the north and east.<sup>59</sup> To the west it had an easily ascertained border with the large parish of Aston; but it is very hard to establish how far it stretched southwards. Two churches in the upper Blythe valley, Hampton-in-Arden and Berkswell, were definitely of minster status, and Solihull may also have been.<sup>60</sup> They may all have been sub-minsters; but if so, no evidence has yet emerged to show to which old minster each was originally subordinate. However, the church of Hampton-in-Arden is a candidate for recognition as an old minster. Its parish and Berkswell's and their various chapelries interlock in a way which strongly suggests that if Hampton-in-Arden was an old minster, Berkswell originated as a sub-minster in its parish. However, it is conceivable that both places originally lay in the minster parish of Coleshill.

Neither Solihull nor Sheldon is named in Domesday Book, but it is clear that the 8 hide manor of Ulverley (where there was a priest in 1086) was later divided between these two parishes and the detached area of Bickenhill parish known today as Olton.<sup>61</sup> The way in which these parishes interlock suggests that they may once have belonged to the same, much larger, land-unit; but the identity of its mother church - whether Coleshill or Hampton-in-Arden - is unknown. Further south a group of parishes including Wroxall, Honiley and Beausale was once served by a minster at Hatton, which may itself have

been a sub-minster in the original parish of an old minster at Warwick.<sup>62</sup>

Only the area to the south and south-east of Birmingham remains to be examined. This is where the great watershed between the Severn-Avon and Trent drainage basins lies. In places the parish boundaries follow it very closely, such as the northern ones of Cofton Hackett, Alvechurch and Beoley, which together form the southern boundary of the parishes of King's Norton and Solihull. Further east, however, the watershed passes through the heart of Tanworth and Lapworth and leaves Packwood wholly to the north of it. It resumes its role as a major line of territorial division in the vicinity of the original parishes of Hatton and its probable mother church at Warwick. It is notable that almost all of the parishes and chapelries named above were in the diocese of Worcester c.1291, as was the large parish of Northfield to the north-west of King's Norton.<sup>63</sup> They and some of their immediate neighbours - in particular Alvechurch and Solihull - yield far fewer clues to their early manorial and parochial history than do any of the other land-units in the region around Birmingham which has been surveyed here. This is because they occupied an area to either side of the watershed which contained a substantial amount of woodland lying, it seems, outside the regular territorial framework in existence elsewhere.

We can deduce this from a number of sources. Placenames indicative of woodland resources and exploitation figure prominently there. The Anglo-Saxon charters which record royal grants of land in the area underline the importance of woodland and reveal in one instance that it was external to the manors situated there.<sup>64</sup> And these and other sources show that blocks of the woodland were given to major Anglo-Saxon churches in distant low-lying arable areas. For instance, two sizeable pieces of 'wooded countryside' at *Hellerelege* (in King's Norton parish) and *Hnuthyrst* (Nuthurst and perhaps also Lapworth and Bushwood) were given to the church of Worcester in 699x709; Tanworth was attached to the manor of Brailes in the Feldon area of south-eastern Warwickshire, as was Packwood to Wasperton in the Avon valley; and Yardley was granted to Pershore abbey.<sup>65</sup>

But the recipients were not always distant. The few charters which we do have for this area and the evidence of Domesday Book highlight how complex its manorial history was. This accounts for the area's tortuous parochial geography but rarely throws adequate light on its origins. We shall probably never know why, for instance, Cofton Hackett became a chapelry of Northfield, or how Nuthurst, given to Worcester at the start of the seventh century, eventually became an outlier of the parish of Hampton-in-Arden. As in other districts which were still marginal in the middle Anglo-Saxon period, the land in the Birmingham area lying astride the most important watershed in southern Britain was carved up, dealt out and then often reshuffled over several centuries with only a few signs of the process being left in the surviving records. The royal manor of Bromsgrove was an obvious beneficiary; so too on a lesser scale were numbers of minsters in the two adjoining kingdoms. But it is rarely possible to do more than make an educated guess at how the geography of the district's manors and parishes evolved to the stage at which we find it in, respectively, 1086 and c.1291.



\* \* \*

This returns us to where we started. All that remains is Birmingham itself and the area in its immediate vicinity. We have already seen that the church of Aston had a very large parish and was undoubtedly a minster. To the west of it lay an area defined on its other sides by the minster parishes of Bromsgrove, Halesowen, Wolverhampton and Walsall. By far the most important church there is Harborne's. In the early nineteenth century its parish, which included Smethwick, was of only average size for the area, but it had originally been an extensive one.

The first time we hear of Edgbaston's church, in the 1270s, it was a chapel subject to the church of Harborne, and so it remained until it gained a measure of parochial independence around the end of the middle ages.<sup>66</sup> Handsworth's church also originated as Harborne's chapel. In 1247 it was said that the rector of Harborne was entitled to £2 13s 4d from the endowment of Handsworth parish. After a brief dispute (only twenty-two years long), the matter was resolved: the rector of Handsworth agreed to pay the rector of Harborne £1 6s 8d per year.<sup>67</sup> It is conceivable that this dispute and the way in which it was resolved throw no useful light on the original relationship between the two churches. But if that were so, we should expect Lichfield's register to report the basis of Harborne's claim. Lichfield itself owned the church of Harborne, and so it was in its interest to keep full and accurate records. The fact that it gives no details on this occasion makes the dispute sound like many others which occurred in the late medieval period. Lichfield was asserting its ownership of Handsworth and its income by virtue of its own status as Harborne's mother.<sup>68</sup> Handsworth had plainly slipped out of Harborne's control, come under the local lord's, and begun behaving as if it were an independent parish church - not just for the manor of Handsworth but for Perry and Little Barr too. The settlement of 1269 was a common sense one. The clock was not to be turned back; but the church of Handsworth had to buy its independence by making annual payments to Harborne in compensation for the latter's lost revenues from it.

West Bromwich too was once part of Harborne's parish. Early in the 1140s its lord granted the church to Worcester cathedral priory. The grant was challenged by Handsworth on the grounds that it was the mother church of West Bromwich. A synod at Lichfield soon afterwards ruled against Handsworth, saying that West Bromwich was not subject to it, 'but was itself free and anciently a mother church'.<sup>69</sup> When a generation later a priest of Handsworth revived his church's claim, the pope placed the matter in the hands of the bishop of London. He decreed in 1181 that the current rector of Handsworth should hold West Bromwich for life in return for an annual pension of 5s to be paid to Worcester.<sup>70</sup> The records of the dispute regrettably give no details, and so it is not known what the decision really meant - but it sounds like the final settlement of a genuine but lapsed claim by a mother church over one of its daughters. If West Bromwich was once in Handsworth's parish, then it must originally have been subject to Harborne.

The same may be true of Great Barr. Handsworth's parish contains Perry and Little Barr, the latter being one of two Domesday manors called Barr.<sup>71</sup> The other, Great Barr, was a chapelry of Aldridge, to the north of it, in and after the late medieval period;<sup>72</sup> but it is very probable that, since (as their name shows) they were created by the fission of a single land-unit, they were once served by the same mother church. It is impossible to say if this role was fulfilled by Handsworth or by Aldridge (or its mother). The manorial history of the Barr manors explains why they were served by different churches. In 1086 Aldridge and Great Barr were both held of William fitz Ansculf by a sub-tenant called Robert, but thereafter they became a single unit.<sup>73</sup> This would have made it possible for Aldridge's church to 'capture' Great Barr, with their manorial association allowing it to enjoy the latter's tithes and, once a chapel had been founded, to gain control of it. Similarly, the manors of Handsworth, Perry and Little Barr were held of William fitz Ansculf by a sub-tenant named Drogo.<sup>74</sup> This would have allowed Handsworth's church to 'capture' Little Barr and Perry. Without other evidence, therefore (and none has come to light so far), the question of which church originally served Barr is unanswerable.

Finally, Northfield must be discussed. Its parish lies immediately south of Harborne, with much of it occupying the same valley. In its northernmost part were the two manors of Selly (including the modern districts of Weoley Castle, Selly Oak and Selly Park), together with Bartley, the berewick of the larger one. An unusually helpful remark in Domesday Book states that most of Selly (a four hide manor and its berewick) had belonged to the church of Lichfield until just before 1066, and would soon have returned to it if the Norman conquest had not intervened. It is possible that the other Selly manor (assessed at only 1 hide) had once belonged to it too.<sup>75</sup> Since Harborne's church was also in Lichfield's hands in the late Anglo-Saxon period, as it was throughout the late medieval period, it is highly likely that it would have served manors in Selly, either directly or indirectly (i.e. through a sub-minster), which also belonged to Lichfield.

There was a priest at Northfield in 1086 and therefore a church;<sup>76</sup> and as its original parish contained at least five Domesday manors, it was almost certainly a sub-minster. However, the identity of its mother church is unknown: Harborne and Bromsgrove are equally strong candidates. Selly's dependence on Northfield's church may have come about through a 'capture' from Harborne's, for in 1086 William fitz Ansculf held all four manors in the main body of Northfield's parish.<sup>77</sup> If so, Bromsgrove was probably Northfield's mother church, and the latter may always have been in the diocese of Worcester. Alternatively, if Northfield's church was founded as a sub-minster of Harborne, it may have served the Selly area from an early date. If so, the parish of Northfield may have ended up in Worcestershire and the diocese of Worcester as a result of the manors in it having become attached, at an unknown date in the Anglo-Saxon period, to an important centre to the south of the watershed (probably Bromsgrove or Alvechurch); but there are many problems with this hypothesis. Northfield is an abiding puzzle: none of the rational ways of accounting for its church's origins is problem-free.

The one safe conclusion which can be drawn is that Selly was originally in the parish of Harborne.

Only Birmingham itself remains to be considered. Sandwiched as it is between the original parishes of Harborne and Aston, it must at first have been in one or other of them. The available sources offer no hint as to which church was its mother. However, Harborne looks much the likelier on simple topographical grounds, since its parish wraps itself round Birmingham in a proprietary fashion.

The reason why we know nothing about the origins of St Martin's, Birmingham may be because it became the church of a successful town. It may have been founded in the late twelfth century to serve Peter de Birmingham's new market settlement: its location, in the triangular market-place near its head, is a classic one for a chapel of this sort. The settlement's achievement of burghal status and its rapid economic growth saw it transformed in less than a century into 'a prosperous manufacturing and market town'.<sup>78</sup> In the mid thirteenth century this success was reflected in the rebuilding of St Martin's on a much grander scale. Not every borough chapel was able to break free of its mother early on and become a parish church in its own right. The one at Stratford-upon-Avon, for example, never did, and St John's, Henley-in-Arden was unable to do so until 1914. But St Martin's freed itself early and fully enough for there to be no surviving evidence of whether Harborne or Aston was its mother.<sup>79</sup>

It is, however, unusual to find a chapel of this sort serving not only the borough itself but the whole manor in which it stood, as St Martin's did. This may mean that there was a church on the manor of Birmingham before the market settlement's creation. If so, there can be little doubt that it stood elsewhere. We have no idea at present where the hall of the twelfth-century and earlier manor was located, but it is unlikely to have been in the immediate vicinity of the site on which Peter de Birmingham laid out a market-place. The latter was doubtless chosen for the commercial opportunities offered by the convergence of long-distance roads on an important crossing of the Rea. If there was already a church at Birmingham then, it was presumably of manorial origin and may have been transferred from its original site to one within the market-place in or after the late twelfth century. If so, it would eventually have been eclipsed by St Martin's and then disappeared, as happened in almost identical circumstances at, for example, Chelmsford in Essex.<sup>80</sup>

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Like Aston's, Harborne's church evidently had a very large parish which must already have existed before the conquest, for there was no chance of new parochial relationships being imposed by 'capture' on most of its constituent manors after 1066, as they were never in Lichfield's hands in the late middle ages. This means, then, that there were two substantial minster parishes occupying the space between the others in the area. It is important to ask what relationship there was, if any, between the churches of Aston and Harborne. Were they of equal status? or was one the other's mother church? Almost all

the reliable evidence has been examined, and there is no rabbit to be pulled from a hat. A few clues allow two hypotheses to be formed but leave us unable to decide between them.

Arguments can be advanced both for and against the suggestion that both churches were old minsters. Harborne is the easier to accept as one, chiefly (but perhaps perversely) because of Aston's name, which conventionally suggests its dependence on a more important place to the west of it. Where the latter was situated is unclear, if it must lie more or less west of Aston; but the name may simply mean 'land-unit in the eastern part of the territory'. In either case there is an unavoidable implication that Aston and its parochial hinterland lay in a larger territory in which the most important place was situated elsewhere. This means that only one old minster is needed in the immediate vicinity of Birmingham, with Harborne being the obvious candidate. No instance comes to mind of an Anglo-Saxon minster of proven seventh- or early eighth-century foundation at a place with a directional placename. However, there are many such places with a church which is recognisable as a sub-minster, some of which, such as King's Sutton (Northants.), may have been given considerably enlarged pastoral responsibilities in the late Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>81</sup>

This is the least difficult explanation to sustain of the origins of Aston's church. However, an alternative one needs to be mentioned briefly. It is that neither Harborne nor Aston originated as an old minster, but that both were sub-minsters of St Michael's, Lichfield. This hypothesis is built on the unusual relations which the churches at Shenstone, Walsall and Aston (all minsters) had with Lichfield. Whereas the manor and church of Harborne were the latter's property and so were inevitably closely dependent on it, these other churches belonged to laymen who in each case chose to give them to a monastic house. The reports of the ensuing disputes and other matters suggest that Lichfield had a significant proprietary interest in them which is best explained as that of their original mother church.

Aston must suffice as an example. There is very little evidence to hand about its church. It was a very valuable one, worth £40 c.1291, of which £13 6s 4d was a yearly pension paid to the dean and chapter because of its appropriation to Tickford priory in 1254.<sup>82</sup> It was not uncommon for a levy to be made in such cases, but such a large sum indicates that Lichfield had rights in the church beyond its regular diocesan ones. It is notable that for many years in the thirteenth century the rector of Aston was William de Kilkenny who, as holder of Lichfield's prebend of Gaia Minor, was at the same time rector of Harborne. It was in his incumbency that a vicarage was established at Aston on Tickford priory's behalf and an annual pension assigned to the dean and chapter.<sup>83</sup> His incumbency of both Harborne and Aston might be a mere coincidence, but if so, it is a remarkable one. Tickford had been allowed to appropriate the church of Aston once before, in the late twelfth century, but then plainly lost its grasp on it.<sup>84</sup> The re-establishment of the vicarage came at a considerable price, and one which strongly suggests that Lichfield was able to make good a claim to be Aston's mother church. Something similar happened in regard to Shenstone, which can be proved once

to have been in the parish of St Michael's, Lichfield (the cathedral's parish church).<sup>85</sup> At Walsall too (another church, like Aston, of undoubted minster status), there is evidence pointing to the same conclusion.<sup>86</sup>

It is possible, then, that St Michael's, Lichfield originally had a huge parish which stretched northwards to the Trent and southwards to the border of the kingdom of the Mercians at or just north of the watershed between the Severn-Avon and Trent systems. If so, it would have comprised at its southern end the original parishes of Walsall, Harborne and Aston. (There is no evidence to suggest that any of the others discussed here might also have been included.) Such a parish would have an analogue in the equally large territory which was the original parish of St Helen's, Worcester - which, like St Michael's, may have been the seat of a British bishop before ecclesiastical organisation in the west midlands came under Canterbury's control.<sup>87</sup> It too included a number of important churches, such as Martley's, which were clearly of minster status but which recognised St Helen's as their mother church and were presumably only sub-minsters.

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In the course of its medieval history Birmingham moved from being in a frontier zone, on the very edge of the kingdom of the Mercians, to a position in the mid thirteenth century where in the context of the west midlands it was already becoming an important manufacturing and marketing centre. The manor of Birmingham looks unimportant in 1086, but the area in which it was located was no remote forest glade. The complex layout of the Domesday shires and hundreds in Birmingham's vicinity plainly reflects the strong vested interests of the crown and a number of the region's most important churches. The Birmingham area was surrounded on all sides by extensive minster parishes; and although the problem of the origins of the churches of Harborne and Aston cannot be fully resolved, they too were certainly minsters.

The model which best explains how land-units developed in midland and southern England in the course of the early medieval period is certainly appropriate for the lower-lying areas which impinge on the western and southern flanks of the Birmingham Plateau. On the Plateau itself the influence of atypical factors requires the model to be modified. One such factor was the proximity of the church of Lichfield. Its landed resources in the area were considerable in 1086;<sup>88</sup> but there are hints that, as had undoubtedly happened to the church of Worcester (for which in marked contrast we have excellent evidence), it had lost a lot of land there in the century or so before the Norman conquest. Lichfield's loss of the see - moved to Chester (1075) and then to Coventry (1102), and shared with the latter after 1228 - further weakened its temporal hold on the Birmingham area.<sup>89</sup> Yet its regular successes in disputes with the crown and assorted monastic houses about its rights in the area's minsters, especially but not exclusively after 1228, suggest the extent of its original temporal pre-eminence there.

Another atypical factor is the woodland in the area, or rather the possibility of some of it having at first lain outside 'the minster system'. Domesday Book

shows varying amounts of woodland (*silva*) on the manors there, with some having a large amount and others not. It does not point to the situation being different from other, adjacent districts or even from ones further away; and analogy with better documented places suggests that the amounts of woodland in the area several centuries earlier might not have differed greatly from those of 1086. It is very likely that much of the woodland in the Birmingham area at the latter date was wood pasture (in which trees competed with grazing animals and where areas of grassland were also found), and that the rest was subject to regular coppicing. Both practices can produce an airy, open landscape supporting a thriving mixed-farming or mainly pastoral economy, with an important role in it for timber for building and other purposes.<sup>90</sup> But as we have seen, it was not one which had been created in the last century or two before 1086 (although that is not to say that it was as old as landscapes beyond the Plateau in which arable farming predominated).

Like the Weald of south-eastern England - of which the Birmingham Plateau is in many respects a microcosm in the Anglo-Saxon period - the area was at the margins of the region's kingdoms.<sup>91</sup> Some of it may have been thinly populated and underexploited in the seventh and early eighth centuries when old minsters were being set up in the west midland dioceses. Unlike lower-lying areas where there had been no break in cultivation and settlement since the late Roman period, the poorest or least accessible lands may have fallen out of normal agrarian use for several generations. It would not be surprising, then, if the inhabitants of relatively remote 'wooded countryside', such as Northfield, King's Norton, Tanworth and much of Solihull, were brought into 'the minster system' more slowly than were other people. In addition, some of the woodland on the highest ground appears to have stayed in royal hands for much of the Anglo-Saxon period, excluded from the normal territorial structures of the west midlands until allocated in carefully defined amounts to major landowners (including the kings themselves).

It is partly for these reasons and partly for lack of information of the sorts which are plentiful in other areas that it has not been possible to produce a more coherent account of the Birmingham area. The suggestion that the parish of St Michael's, Lichfield might at first have included the Birmingham area rests on only a small amount of circumstantial evidence and is made very tentatively. Were it not for much more substantial evidence of a similar territory around Worcester of probable pre-Anglo-Saxon date of origin, the suggestion would not have been made. If it is correct, it helps to explain why Aston's church looks as important as Harborne's in many respects. If it is not correct, an alternative explanation of these two churches' origins gives Harborne the role of an old minster and Aston that of a sub-minster founded in the part of Harborne's minster parish where manors belonging to the earldom of Mercia were concentrated in 1066, and where it is likely, therefore, that the crown had itself held lands for a long time, as at Duddeston in 963.<sup>92</sup> A church on a large royal manor is likely to have been well endowed, as Aston's was, and its parish could grow by the addition of the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of extra-parochial land (as Bromsgrove's probably did in a similar way). None of this can be proved true of the minster at Aston, but there is

enough evidence to make the hypothesis a viable one.

It is unclear, therefore, if there was a single discrete territory surrounding Birmingham in the early Anglo-Saxon period which an old minster - probably situated at Harborne - was set up to serve in the seventh or early eighth century. Even if it had been possible to show beyond reasonable doubt that there had been such a territory, it would not have told us the full significance of Birmingham's name, 'land-unit of Beorma's people'. We can never hope to find out if this *hām* was significantly larger than the Domesday manor of Birmingham, or if it was of much the same size. We cannot discover if the *Beormingas*, 'Beorma's people', were merely people living in the part of the Rea valley where the manor would be formed, or if they were a clan whose name was associated (by analogy with the people who gave their name to the Rodings of Essex) with a far larger part of the area served later by the minsters at Harborne and Aston (and perhaps originally by one at Harborne alone).<sup>93</sup> One day we may find out if the area for which the name Birmingham was coined adjoined, or even contained, a late Roman settlement site of some importance, as many other places named in *-ingahām* did.<sup>94</sup> Witton's name suggests that it did, but it will need new archaeological finds to establish this.

Although light has been thrown on the early medieval history of the Birmingham area by the approach used here, some questions will never be answered and others will require an input of archaeological data on a scale which may no longer be possible in the conurbation. The important discovery made here is that we can trace and begin to understand the Anglo-Saxon origins of a landscape in which, among many other important developments, a market settlement planted on the edge of an apparently insignificant manor in the 1160s could evolve into Britain's second city.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A much shorter version of this paper was read to the Birmingham & Warwickshire Archaeological Society on 8 April 1997. It could not have been written without the active help and encouragement of Dr Sarah Wager, whose 'Early Medieval Land-units in the Birmingham Area: A Historical Study' (University of Birmingham M.Phil. thesis, 1988), was an essential starting-point, and with whom I have had several discussions to my great advantage.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to the following for information from the Sites and Monuments Records concerned (in March 1997): Dr Michael Hodder (Birmingham City Council); Ms Hilary White (West Midlands County Council).

<sup>3</sup> The fort lies in the grounds of the University of Birmingham: J.K. St Joseph and F.W. Shotton, 'The Roman camps at Metchley, Birmingham', *Trans. of the Birmingham Arch. Soc.*, LVIII (1937), 68-83; A. Jones, *Roman Birmingham. Volume 1: Excavations 1963-4, 1967-9 and 1997* (forthcoming).

<sup>4</sup> Debris from a Romano-British pottery kiln of late second-century or perhaps later date was found in Perry Barr (SP 0654 9083): H.V. Hughes, 'A Romano-British kiln site at Perry Barr, Birmingham', *Trans. of the Birmingham Arch. Soc.*, LXXVII (1959), 33-9.

<sup>5</sup> Whose presence is shown by a cluster of placenames, e.g. Weoley, Wednesbury and Wednesfield: M. Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 3rd edn (Chichester, 1997), 158-61.

<sup>6</sup> These include Bartley [Green], Billesley, Bordesley (twice), Broadhidley [Hall], Frankley, Lea [Green], Metchley, Moseley, Moundsley [Hall], Saltley, Selly [Oak, Park], Shelly [Farm], Shirley, Stirchley, Streetly, Tyseley, Ulverley [Green], Walmley, Weoley [Castle] and Yardley.

<sup>7</sup> M. Gelling, 'Some notes on Warwickshire place-names', *Trans. of the Birmingham and*

*Warwicks. Arch. Soc.*, LXXXVI (1974), 59-79, at 66-8; *eadem*, *Place-Names in the Landscape* (London, 1984), 199; *eadem*, *Signposts*, 128, 130.

<sup>8</sup> R. Holt, *The Early History of the Town of Birmingham 1166 to 1600* (Dugdale Soc. Occas. Papers, XXX, 1985), 3. For the entry for Birmingham: A. Farley (ed.), *Domesday Book seu Liber Censualis Willelmi Primi Regis Angliae* (1783) [hereafter DB], fol. 243; for an English translation: J. Plaister (ed.), *Domesday Book 23: Warwickshire* [hereafter *DB Warwick[s.]*] (Chichester, 1976), 27, 5. For the need to refer to Peter's foundation as a market settlement rather than a borough: Holt, *Birmingham*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Other, that is, than to the period during which the relevant language was being spoken. The formation of an individual name can, however, be given an earlier *terminus post quem* when it is found in an authentic dated source written in that period.

<sup>10</sup> I prefer to translate both *tūn* and *hām* as 'land-unit', rather than as 'estate' or 'settlement' as others do, because its lack of economic and/or social specificity seems appropriate for two words which are known to have changed meaning during the course of the period in which Old English was spoken. Most names in *hām* were probably coined early in that period, before the advent of manors. Some *tūn* names too are known to be early and others, including directional ones, are also likely to be.

<sup>11</sup> P.H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* (Royal Hist. Soc., London, 1968), nos [hereafter S] 64, 117, 1272 and 199, 428, 720, 786.

<sup>12</sup> K.B. Pretty, 'The Severn Basin in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries AD' (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1975); M. Gelling, *The West Midlands in the Early Middle Ages* (Leicester, 1992), ch. 3; W.J. Ford, 'Anglo-Saxon cemeteries along the Avon valley', *Trans. of the Birmingham and Warwick. Arch. Soc.*, C (1996), 59-98; S. Bassett, 'How the west was won: the Anglo-Saxon takeover of the west midlands', *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History*, XI (2000).

<sup>13</sup> P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800* (Cambridge, 1990), ch. 3; S. Bassett, 'Church and diocese in the west midlands: the transition from British to Anglo-Saxon control', in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), 15-40.

<sup>14</sup> Bassett, 'How the west was won'. For a north midlands analogue: C. Loveluck, 'Acculturation, migration and exchange: the formation of an Anglo-Saxon society in the English Peak District, 400-700 AD', in J. Bintliff and H. Hamerow (eds), *Europe between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (British Arch. Reports, Internat. Ser. 617, 1995), 84-98.

<sup>15</sup> Bassett, 'How the west was won'.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Or, if not then, they were names coined later on in the Anglo-Saxon period (e.g. ones formed with a personal name and *tūn*), which replaced names of much earlier date.

<sup>18</sup> Gelling, 'Some notes', 68; *eadem*, *Place-Names*, 199.

<sup>19</sup> For early forms: A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Worcestershire* (Engl. Place-Name Soc., vol. IV, Cambridge, 1927), 350.

<sup>20</sup> Gelling, *Signposts*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> J.E.B. Gover, A. Mawer and F.M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Warwickshire* (Engl. Place-Name Soc., vol. XIII, Cambridge, 1936), 34-6; M. Gelling, 'The place-name volumes for Worcestershire and Warwickshire: a new look', in T.R. Slater and P.J. Jarvis (eds), *Field and Forest. An Historical Geography of Warwickshire and Worcestershire* (Norwich, 1982), 59-78, at 68; *eadem*, 'Place-names', in D. Hey (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), 350-7, at 352. Dr Gelling says that she gave up the idea that the name's final element might be *hamm* because the local topography did not allow it (pers. comm., March 1997).

<sup>22</sup> B. Cox, 'The significance of the distribution of English place-names in *-ham* in the Midlands and East Anglia', *Jnl. of the Engl. Place-Name Soc.*, V (1973), 15-73, at 47-8; Gelling, 'Place-names', 354-5.

<sup>23</sup> S. Bassett, 'Continuity and fission in the Anglo-Saxon landscape: the origins of the Rodings (Essex)', *Landscape History*, XIX (1998), 31-49.

<sup>24</sup> Pers. comm.; G. Fellows-Jensen, 'The light thrown by the early place-names of southern Scandinavia and England on population movement in the Migration Period', *Nordwestgermanisch*, vol. XIII (Berlin, 1995), 57-75, at 69.



<sup>25</sup> M. Gelling, 'English place-names derived from the compound *wīcġām*', *Medieval Archaeology*, XI (1967), 87-104, at 98; Wager, 'Birmingham Area', 75, 183-4.

<sup>26</sup> Gelling, *Signposts*, 68.

<sup>27</sup> Wager, 'Birmingham Area', 183-4.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Wycomb near Andoversford (Gloucs.), Wickham Market (Suffolk): Gelling, *Signposts*, 69.

<sup>29</sup> See n. 4.

<sup>30</sup> S64; D. Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter-Bounds* (Woodbridge, 1990), 58-61.

<sup>31</sup> S117, S1271 and S199, S428.

<sup>32</sup> S720.

<sup>33</sup> S786; Hooke, *Worcs. Charter-Bounds*, 222-5.

<sup>34</sup> Gelling, 'Some notes', 68; S.J. Wager, *Woods, Wolds and Groves. The Woodland of Medieval Warwickshire* (British Arch. Reports, British Ser. 269, 1998), 189-90, 193.

<sup>35</sup> S. Bassett, 'In search of the origins of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms' in *idem* (ed.), *The Origins of Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms* (Leicester, 1989), 3-27, at 6-17. On its extent: D. Hooke, *The Anglo-Saxon Landscape. The Kingdom of the Hwicce* (Manchester, 1985), 12-20.

<sup>36</sup> E.B. Fryde, D.E. Greenway, S. Porter and I. Roy (eds), *Handbook of British Chronology*, 3rd edn (Royal Hist. Soc., London, 1986), 218, 223.

<sup>37</sup> *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae Auctoritate P. Nicholai IV circa AD 1291* (Record Comm., London, 1802).

<sup>38</sup> Hooke, *Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, 12-20; P.W. King, 'The minster at Stur in Husmere and the northern boundary of the Hwicce', *Trans. Worcs. Arch. Soc.*, 3rd ser. XV (1996), 73-91.

<sup>39</sup> For Yardley: below, 10-12. For Selly: *DB*, fol. 177; F. Thorn and C. Thorn (eds), *Domesday Book 16: Worcestershire* [hereafter *DB Worcs.*] (Chichester, 1982), 23.1, 23.5.

<sup>40</sup> Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Worcs.*, 351; Gover, Mawer and Stenton, *Place-Names of Warwick.*, 29; Gelling, *Place-Names*, 205, 264. Since the earliest forms of Balsall's name are identical with Bordesley's (and those of Bordesley in *Worcs.*: *ibid.*), it is probable that it too has Old English *bord* as its first element.

<sup>41</sup> S1272. The boundary clause begins, 'First the boundary of the *Tomsætan* and the *Pencersætan*', i.e. 'of the people of Tamworth and the people of Penkridge' (both of which places are in the diocese of Lichfield). For this landmark's location: Hooke, *Worcs. Charter-Bounds*, 135-42.

<sup>42</sup> *DB*, fol. 175; *DB Worcs.*, 9.2.

<sup>43</sup> S786.

<sup>44</sup> S. Bassett, 'The administrative landscape of the diocese of Worcester', in N. Brooks and C. Cubitt (eds), *St Oswald of Worcester. Life and Influence* (1996), 147-73, at 160-8.

<sup>45</sup> *V.C.H. Warwick.*, VII, 374 and refs cited there.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *V.C.H. Worcs.*, III, 242 and ref. cited there.

<sup>48</sup> *Curia Regis Rolls ...4 and 5 Henry III* (London, 1952), 48-9; F.W. Maitland (ed.), *Bracton's Note Book*, 3 vols (London, 1887), III, 347-9.

<sup>49</sup> For the use of the Old English word *mynster*, 'minster', in late Anglo-Saxon law codes: F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (1903), 196 (II Edgar, §1.1, 2.2), 264 (VIII Æthelred, §5.1).

<sup>50</sup> W. Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2nd edn (2 vols, London, 1730), II, 882; *V.C.H. Warwick.*, VII, 374-5.

<sup>51</sup> C.N.L. Brooke, 'Rural ecclesiastical institutions in England: the search for their origins', *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi Sull' alto Medioevo*, XXVIII (1982), 685-711; J. Blair, 'Introduction: from minster to parish church', in *idem* (ed.), *Minsters and Parish Churches. The Local Church in Transition, 950-1200* (1988), 1-19; E. Cambridge and D. Rollason, 'The pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon church: a review of the "minster hypothesis"', *Early Medieval Europe*, IV (1995), 87-104; J. Blair, 'Ecclesiastical organization and pastoral care in Anglo-Saxon England', *ibid.*, 193-212. For a west midland case study which tries to move the debate on: S. Bassett, *The Origins of the Parishes of the Deerpurton Area* (The Deerpurton Lecture for 1997, 1998).

<sup>52</sup> See n. 49.

<sup>53</sup> A book is in preparation, provisionally entitled 'The Making of the English Administrative Landscape. A West Midland Study'.

<sup>54</sup> *DB*, fol. 172; *DB Worcs.*, 1,1a; *Taxatio*, 217; *V.C.H. Worcs.*, III, 31.

<sup>55</sup> *DB*, fol. 176; *DB Worcs.*, 14,1.

<sup>56</sup> I.H. Jeayes, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Charters and Muniments of the Lyttelton Family in the Possession of the Rt Hon. Viscount Cobham at Hagley Hall, Worcestershire* (London, 1893), 5 (no. 13), 116-17. The case for its having formerly been dependent on Northfield rests in part on a late thirteenth-century dispute about Frankley's church between Dudley priory (which held the church of Northfield) and Halesowen abbey: *ibid.*, 14 (no. 43).

<sup>57</sup> Wolverhampton: *DB*, fol. 247b; A. Hawkins and A. Rumble, *Domesday Book, 24: Staffordshire* [hereafter *DB Staffs.*] (Chichester, 1976), 7, 1-16; *Taxatio*, 243b; *V.C.H. Staffs.*, III (1970), 321-2. Walsall: S. Shaw, *The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* (2 vols, London, 1798-1801), II, 76; Jeayes, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 5-6 (no. 14); H.E. Savage (ed.), *The Great Register of Lichfield Cathedral known as the Magnum Registrum Album* (Staffs. Hist. Coll., 1924-5 (1926)), 287-8 (no. 597). Tettenhall: *DB*, fol. 247b; *DB Staffs.*, 1,2-3, 7,5; *Taxatio*, 243b; *V.C.H. Staffs.*, III, 315-17; *ibid.*, XX (1984), 1, 39.

<sup>58</sup> Bassett, 'Church and diocese', 29-35. Lands in the southern part of Sutton Coldfield's parish and in Curdworth, Minworth (a detached area of Curdworth's parish) and Wishaw formerly interlocked, both manorially and ecclesiastically, to an extent which suggests that they once belonged to a single land-unit.

<sup>59</sup> S154; *DB*, fol. 238; *DB Warwick*, 1,5; *Taxatio*, 242; *V.C.H. Warwick*, IV (1965), 56.

<sup>60</sup> *Taxatio*, 242; *V.C.H. Warwick*, IV, 33, 81, 85-6, 228.

<sup>61</sup> *DB*, fol. 244; *DB Warwick*, 42,1; V. Skipp, *The Origins of Solihull*, 2nd edn (Birmingham, 1984), 8-10.

<sup>62</sup> Bassett, 'Administrative landscape', 163-4 and figs 15-16.

<sup>63</sup> *Taxatio*, 217-218b, 226b. Only Solihull was in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield: *ibid.*, 242.

<sup>64</sup> S117: 'cum silua quae eisdem terris adiacet'.

<sup>65</sup> S64, S786; *Taxatio*, 226b; Dugdale, *Warwickshire*, II, 775, 784; *V.C.H. Warwick*, V, 132, 174.

<sup>66</sup> Savage (ed.), *Great Register*, 24 (nos 52, 54); *Valor Ecclesiasticus Temp. Henr. VIII Auctoritate Regia Institutus*, 6 vols (Record Comm., London, 1810-34), III, 132b, where it is listed separately from Harborne, as a chapel in receipt of spiritualities.

<sup>67</sup> Savage (ed.), *Great Register*, 138 (no. 285), 166 (no. 339).

<sup>68</sup> *DB*, fol. 247; *DB Staffs.*, 2,22. The first reference to the church of Harborne is c.1226; *V.C.H. Warwick*, VII, 373, citing (n. 71) B.M. Cott. Ch. v. 66 (for a grant of its advowson to Halesowen abbey). It is not mentioned in the *Taxatio*, almost certainly because of, not poverty (*V.C.H. Warwick*, VII, 373), but deliberate omission. In 1260x1279 it was termed a *matrix ecclesia*, 'mother church': Savage (ed.), *Great Register*, 24 (no. 54); and in 1279 Henry de Geynes was awarded an annual pension of 30 marks (£20) for the rest of his life to compensate him for losing his claim to Harborne church, which thereafter belonged to Lichfield's common fund: *ibid.*, 23 (no. 50).

<sup>69</sup> R.R. Darlington (ed.), *The Cartulary of Worcester Cathedral Priory (Register 1)* (Pipe Roll Soc., new ser., 38, 1968), 101-3 (nos 190-2). This form of words is regularly used in such cases and (to judge by their outcomes) cannot safely be taken at face value. It is best treated as a rhetorical device rather than as the statement of fact which it appears to be.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 104 (no. 194).

<sup>71</sup> *DB*, fol. 250; *DB Staffs.*, 12,25, 12,28.

<sup>72</sup> Shaw, *Staffordshire*, II, 100.

<sup>73</sup> *DB*, fol. 250; *DB Staffs.*, 12,24-25; Shaw, *Staffordshire*, I, xvii (Offlow hundred roll of 1255).

<sup>74</sup> *DB*, fol. 250; *DB Staffs.*, 12,27-29.

<sup>75</sup> See n. 39.

<sup>76</sup> *DB*, fol. 177; *DB Worcs.*, 23,2.

<sup>77</sup> I.e. Northfield, both Sellys and Frankley: *DB*, fol. 177; *DB Worcs.*, 23,1-3, 23,5. For Frankley's former membership of Northfield's parish see n.56.

<sup>78</sup> Holt, *Birmingham*, 4. The evidence of a twelfth-century church is restricted to the discovery, built into the fabric of St Martin's, of five worked stones, three of which had 'chevron ornament': J.R. Holliday, 'Notices on St Martin's church and the discoveries made during its restoration', *Trans. Birmingham Arch. Soc.*, vol. for 1873 (1874), 43-73, at 50.

<sup>79</sup> *V.C.H. Warwick*, III, 211, 276, 278; *ibid.*, VII, 365, 367 and refs cited there in n.41.

<sup>80</sup> For Chelmsford: M.W. Beresford and J.K.S. St Joseph, *Medieval England: An Aerial Survey*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, 1979), 222-6. There is no evidence that the moated site close to Birmingham's market-place predates its creation: L. Watts, 'Birmingham Moat: its history, topography and destruction', *Trans. of the Birmingham and Warwick Arch. Soc.*, LXXXIX (1978-9), 1-77, at 62. Dugdale's assertion that it did rests solely on his assumption that it was the *castrum* ('castle') of Henry II's market charter of 1166 to Peter and his heirs ('quod habeant mercatum. . . apud Castrum suum de Burmingeham'): Dugdale, *Warwickshire*, II, 897; J.C. Davies, *The Cartae Antiquae Rolls 11-20* (Pipe Roll Soc., new ser., 33, London, 1957), 191-2 (no. 163); Watts, 'Birmingham Moat', 27, 31-32).

<sup>81</sup> M.J. Franklin, 'The identification of minsters in the midlands', *Anglo-Norman Studies*, VII (1985), 69-88, at 81-3.

<sup>82</sup> *Taxatio*, 242.

<sup>83</sup> V. Skipp, *Medieval Yardley* (London and Chichester, 1970), 52, citing (n. 7) W.B. Bickley, 'Collections for Yardley' (Birmingham Ref. Lib. 392220), vol. IV, fol. 300; Savage (ed.), *Great Register*, 11 (no. 24), 166 (no. 339) and n.4 there; G. Wrottesley (ed.), *Plea Rolls temp. Henry III. Suits affecting Staffordshire Tenants, taken from the Plea Rolls of the Reign of Henry III* (Staffs. Hist. Coll., IV, 1883), 77; Dugdale, *Warwickshire*, II, 873-4.

<sup>84</sup> *V.C.H. Warwick*, VII, 374 at n. 91.

<sup>85</sup> Bassett, 'Church and diocese', 31 and n. 57 there.

<sup>86</sup> The strength of Lichfield's claim to its church's patronage is revealed in thirteenth-century wrangles over it between Lichfield, Halesowen abbey and the crown: *V.C.H. Staffs.*, XVII, 226; Jeayes, *Descriptive Catalogue*, 5-6 (no. 14); Savage (ed.), *Great Register*, 11-12 (no. 24), 81-2 (no. 177), 286-9 (nos 597-600), 344 (no. 721).

<sup>87</sup> Bassett, 'Church and diocese', 29-35; S. Bassett, 'Churches in Worcester before and after the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons', *Antiquaries Jnl.*, LXIX (1989), 225-56, at 238-43.

<sup>88</sup> *DB*, fol. 247; *DB Staffs.*, 2, 16, 2, 22.

<sup>89</sup> *Handbook of British Chronology*, 253.

<sup>90</sup> Wager, *Woods, Wolds and Groves*, *passim*, and pers. comm. I am very grateful to Dr Wager for the information about the area's woodland and its exploitation with which she supplied me and for her most helpful comments on its historical significance, on which I have drawn heavily in this paragraph.

<sup>91</sup> A. Everitt, *Continuity and Colonization. The Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester, 1986); M. Gardiner, 'The colonisation of the Weald of south-east England', *Medieval Settlement Research Group Annual Report*, XII (1997), 6-8.

<sup>92</sup> S720.

<sup>93</sup> Bassett, 'Origins of the Rodings'.

<sup>94</sup> Cox, 'English place-names in *hām*'; J. Kuurman, 'An examination of the *-ingas*, *-inga-* place-names in the East Midlands', *Jnl of the Engl. Place-Name Soc.*, VII (1975), 11-44; G. Fellows-Jensen, 'Hastings, Nottingham, Mucking and Donnington', *Namn och Bygd*, LXXXIV (1996), 43-60, at 50-4.