WHAT ARE THEY WORTH?

An examination of Anglo-Saxon Mercian settlements incorporating the name-element Worth

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Introduction

This paper will argue that, at least within the territory of the early medieval kingdom of Mercia, *worth* place names signify specific functions and exhibit particular common characteristics within their landscape. The key argument presented here is that these settlement sites may have been of importance for military or civil defence, protecting the boundaries of an expanding Mercia and aiding in its early governance. Alternatively, they may be indicative of the consolidation of authority in later years under established and more powerful monarchies. Either way, these places exhibit sufficient common characteristics to justify detailed, specific scrutiny. My objective is to establish what the term *worth* actually meant, rather than simply defining and debating its translation; ultimately the aim is to understand these *worth* sites properly in their landscape context.

Overall, my research investigates the historical, onomastic, landscape and archaeological contexts of settlements incorporating the Anglo-Saxon name-element *worth*, and its associated and derivative forms (OE *worðe*, *worðig*, *worðign*), principally within the boundaries of greater Mercia. This area comprises central England, the approximate northern limit being a line between the Rivers Humber and Dee and to the south, the valley of the River Thames, extending to just south of Gloucester. The western boundary is, more or less, the present-day English–Welsh border, and to the east, the North Sea coast.

Some studies have covered settlements of this name-type, notably Costen (1992, 65–84), English (2002, 45–51), Faith (2006, 9–14), Faith *et al.* (2007, 57) and Coates (2012, 36–43), but these have generally concentrated on other geographical areas, chiefly in the south and south-west of England. From an onomastic viewpoint, Coates (2012) concentrates on a single version of the name element in Mercia: *worthig*, present-day *worthy*, arguing that a *worthy* had royal associations, placing it apart from the other *worth* name-types. Within my Mercian area of study that rendering is quite rare. The majority of instances of *worthy* in England occur in the southern counties, which were not generally part of Mercia, although at times they were notionally a part of or subject to it. As a rule, this study uses the onomastic evidence as a starting point, while not uncritically accepting the interpretations proposed. Other name-elements have been subjected to multi-disciplinary

study, over a broader landscape context, such as those by Cullen, Jones and Parsons (2011) and Bourne (2012, 260–83), with Baker *et al.* (2013) and Baker and Brookes (2013) including multiple discussions of and reference to the term *burh*.

There are sound reasons for limiting the geographical scope to the Kingdom of Mercia. There are significant numbers of *worth* settlements in the southern part of England, with an additional cluster in the West Riding of Yorkshire, the latter corresponding almost exactly to the limits of the ancient kingdom of Elmet (PNS[2] Wry). No early instances occur in the East Riding of Yorkshire; the only example is an imported family estate name of a later date. In the north of England, outside this study area, instances are few. By contrast, in the area south of the Thames valley the element is quite frequent.

The choice of the Thames Valley rather than the river itself is quite deliberate. The function of the Thames was more a route of Mercian commerce than a boundary and it would not have made sense to be both (Blair 1998, 56). To ensure safe passage, the same kingdom would need to hold both banks.

The *Survey of Place-Names for Gloucestershire* (Smith 1965) notes that in the south of the county, the *worth* element remained in use up to the 16th century as a term simply for a parcel of land. I would argue that this probably applied more widely across the south of England, given the instances of field-names simply as 'The Worth' or 'Le Worth' and some directional qualifications such as Norworth and Soworth. In addition, descriptive qualifiers which may be more representative of dry farming humour, such as Littleworth or Coldworth, can be discounted where little supportive evidence exists for an early date. These names do occur elsewhere and have not been omitted from my study where evidence of early use is available, generally from Domesday Book or other early documents – one example is Littleworth Common, where PNS (Buc) cites *Lytelinga-worþ*. Importantly, while my study is limited to Mercia, I do not contend that the common characteristics and similarities of the *worth* settlements it highlights are a purely Mercian phenomenon; the decision is based simply on the case that the volume of instances in the south, which are of questionable origins or insecure dates cloud the picture. Those within the boundary of Elmet in particular deserve a separate study to examine whether this is a genuine correlation or one that is more apparent than real.

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Worths in Mercia

Despite those reservations it can be argued that, within the boundaries of greater Mercia, *worth* settlements exhibit certain common characteristics. Perhaps most notable is the rarity of their occurrence in the historical record: Tamworth, Marden and *Northworthy* are cited as being of note, while others receive mere passing references. However, in the case of *Northworthy* (considered to be located in the environs of present-day Derby) it is debatable whether the reference corresponds directly to the town of Derby. Æthelweard's Chronicle (Campbell 1962, 37) records that Ealdorman Æðelwulf was buried there after his death at the hands of the Vikings in the Battle of Reading:

> *in locum qui Northworthige nuncupatur, juxta autem Danaam linguam Deoraby*
> [Northworthy, the place named in the Danish language Deoraby]

Tamworth (Stf) is the other *worth* surviving as a large town from the period. Marden (Hrf), identified as the site of the royal palace of King Offa, is now a moderately-sized village.

Most of the *worths* noted in Domesday still survive (in fact more successfully than settlements of other name types) but rarely do they appear to have developed into anything more than what is, to modern eyes, a moderate village. The majority pass into the background, with a few gaining some (often short-lived) notoriety in later years, only to return to obscurity, such as Market Bosworth or Kenilworth. Occasional mentions come in deeds or summonses but *worths* lack documentary reference during the existence of the Kingdom of Mercia. Perhaps everyone understood what a *worth* meant, and so no explanation was required. This is a similar argument to that deployed by Oosthuizen (2013, 162–8) in respect of the speed and ready acceptance of land measurements such as *hides* in the post-Roman period; normally considered Anglo-Saxon in origin, these categories may have been already in use by the general population, perhaps from the Iron Age, but as they were of no significance to the Roman administration, were left unrecorded.

What was a *worth*?

The earliest recorded mention of *worths* comes in the late 7th-century Laws of King Ine of Wessex (688–726), a lost document whose contents were included in the later Laws of King Alfred of Wessex. The responsibilities of a *ceorl*, a commoner, for keeping his *worth* properly fenced are specified:

> *Ceorles worðige sceal beon wintres ond summeres betyned. Gif he bid untyned ond recð his neahgbuies sceap in on his agen geat, neh he æt þam ceape nam wiht: adrite hie ut ond ðolie [þone] æfwerdlan.*
> [A commoner's premises shall be fenced both winter and summer. If they are not enclosed and a beast belonging to his neighbour strays through the opening he himself has left he shall have no claim on the beast [but] he shall drive it out and suffer the damage.]
> (Trans. Attenborough 1963, 48–9)

In effect, by this time the concept of a *worth* was so active and the disputes arising from it of such significance that a law was required to regularise the means by which those conflicts were resolved. Alternatively, this may have been just one element of a broader process, indicative of the 'formal articulation of the landscape' seen at the end of the sixth century (Blair 2005, 52) and crystallised in legislation.

The term *worth* is usually translated simply as 'enclosure.' Hooke (2012, 187) suggests that it specifically designated an enclosure with buildings, in contrast with *tun*, which was merely an enclosure. In the context of early medieval England *worth* is seen in the present-day forms: ~worth, ~worthy and ~wardine – for example, Bosworth, Hamworthy and Bredwardine – and usually rendered originally as *worðe*, *worðig* and *worðign*. It is important to note, however, that some places are called 'worth' but in fact derive from Old English or Old Norse terms *vurde* and *vath*, which relate to water and water crossings, as is the case for Rainworth (Ntt) and Susworth (Lin). Confusingly, there are instances where the 'w' element has been lost, such as Ufford (Hnt). This is common colloquially in the East Midlands to the present-day, where the 'w' is left unpronounced – such as 'Bagguth' for Bagworth (Lei) or 'Blidduth' for Blidworth (Ntt), although, in the former case, it seems to be restricted to the immediate locale and not applied to nearby Market Bosworth. Sometimes the whole *worth* element is lost completely, as in the case of Hillborough (Wrk), recorded as *Hildeburhwrthe* in AD 710 (PNS Wrk).

Name qualifiers

It is striking that of the qualifiers, that is, the second element of the settlement name attached to *worth*, almost 62% (167 of a total 271, see Table 1) are personal names. The second largest group at only 9% relates to what I have classified as 'Characteristic' – in other words, something specific or descriptive of the place. For example, Glentworth (PNS Lin), where Glent is translated as 'bright', 'shining' or 'lookout', with a third possibility offered relating to the bird of prey, the kite[3] (*Milvus milvus*). Similarly, Shrawardine (Shr) is suggested to be from *scraef* meaning a hollow or cave but could also possibly derive from *screawa* meaning shrew (PNS Shr). In both of these cases, the use of animal names, either as given or in hypocoristic form in Anglo-Saxon, could in fact be personal names. In the case of multiple choice, I have accepted the primary onomastic suggestions and in these cases classified them as 'Characteristic' but have included a further measure of secondary meanings, within a more detailed gazetteer. In this case a greater number are classified personal names but caution must be exercised given the number of 'previously unknown personal names' (Gelling and Cole 2000, xxi).

From the classifications listed in Table 1 the conclusion is clear that the bulk of these places are named after an individual. If some of the tribal or group names are included, for example Waddingworth (Lincs), usually

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[3] I am indebted to Dr John Baker of Nottingham University for clarification of this as the PNS Lincolnshire offers only 'Hawk'.

Table 1   Qualifier categories in the sample area

Category	Example	Number	Percentage
Personal	*Bucge, Winegar*	167	61.6%
Characteristic	*Cæg, Tæse*	23	8.5%
Landscape	*Hlutre, Har*	17	6.3%
Tribal/ Group	*Wælisc*	15	5.5%
Unknown/ not covered in PNS	Stormsworth (Lei) Nebsworth (Wrk)	11	4.1%
Animal	*Cealf, Fugol*	9	3.3%
Unqualified	*worth, le worth*	9	3.3%
Vegetal	*Holegn, Perth*	8	3.0%
Activity	*Cise, Penn*	7	2.6%
Relational	*Mid, Est*	5	1.8%
Total		271	100.0%

Table 2   List of worth settlements mentioned in the text with Ordnance Survey Grid references and elevation in metres above Ordnance Datum

Settlement name	County	Grid ref	m AOD
Bagworth	Leicestershire	SK445855	169
Bengeworth	Worcestershire	SP045436	27
Blidworth	Nottinghamshire	SK588556	140
Boxworth	Huntingdonshire	TL347644	40
Bredwardine	Herefordshire	SO332444	75
Charingworth	Warwickshire	SP200396	167
Charlesworth	Derbyshire	SK005929	206
Colsterworth	Lincolnshire	SK930242	102
Elsworth	Huntingdonshire	TL318635	20
Highworth	Wiltshire	SU201925	133
Hilborough	Warwickshire	SP123514	26
Hinxworth	Hertfordshire	TL237404	49
Hollingworth	Cheshire	SK045895	150
Isleworth	Middlesex	TQ164578	7
Kenilworth	Warwickshire	SP295715	75
Lolworth	Huntingdonshire	TL369461	40
Lutterworth	Leicestershire	SP543845	126
Marden	Herefordshire	SO521478	84
Market Bosworth	Leicestershire	SK408033	128
Nebsworth	Warwickshire	SP193426	229
Nettleworth	Nottinghamshire	SK550658	70
Northworthy (Derby)	Derbyshire	SK353362	47
Papworth Everard	Huntingdonshire	TL285628	50
Papworth St Agnes	Huntingdonshire	TL269645	22
Pebworth	Gloucestershire	SP129469	89
Rowarth	Derbyshire	SK013892	222
Stanwardine in the Fields	Shropshire	SJ414240	108
Tamworth	Warwickshire/ Staffordshire (the boundary ran through the town)	SK225035	120
Ufford	Huntingdonshire	TF093040	43
Waddingworth	Lincolnshire	TF185712	15
Wrockwardine	Shropshire	SJ625120	110

translated as '*Wadda's* people' or 'people associated with a person called *Wadda'*, then the number increases. I have adopted the most parsimonious view in this case, and classified them separately, although I accept that this decision may be subject to question.

'Landscape' covers those named after a distinct feature such as Lutterworth (Lei) which references the pre-Saxon name for the River Swift, *Hlutre*, meaning 'bright' or 'shining one' (certainly a feature no longer apparent from physical survey!) or Wrockwardine (Shr) which refers to the Wrekin – a prominent hill, visible from a wide area. A smaller percentage of locations relate to vegetation, such as Holly (presumably as the material forming the enclosure boundary), as in Hollingworth

(Che) and Nettleworth (Nott). The latter is of interest as a possible indicator of earlier settlement prior to Anglo-Saxon use (Cole 2013, 67). Some qualifiers refer to what may be termed a professional or economic group, such as Colsterworth (Lin) – 'charcoal makers' (PNS Lin). The use of animal names as hypocoristic substitutes for individual names during the period complicates matters, as for Hinxworth (Hrt) from *Hengest* meaning 'stallion' which is also used as a personal name. In this case again I favoured parsimony.

Within the corpus of personal names, there is a significant absence of female names. This is perhaps surprising, given that women held land in their own right and generally were granted a high degree of autonomy

Table 3 List of unqualified worth settlements or with qualifications of unknown origin

Name	County	Grid ref
La Worthe field name	Berkshire	SU744720
(Poynton with) Worth	Cheshire	SJ936835
Worthings	Essex	TL610310
Worthings	Lincolnshire	TA097242
Worthings	Norfolk	TF999200
Worthen	Shropshire	SJ329047
Wortham	Suffolk	TM082772
Highworth	Wiltshire	SU201925
Worthy Hill Farm	Wiltshire	SU014879
Cleworth Green	Berkshire	SU954771
Ratford	Cambridgeshire	TL551574
Burnt Hill	Cambridgeshire	TL479802
Innsworth	Gloucestershire	SO859213
Blanchworth	Gloucestershire	ST716981
Mateurdin	Herefordshire	SO261492
Carwardine	Herefordshire	SO403410
Pedwardine	Herefordshire	SO366707
Stormsworth	Leicestershire	SO366707
Stowford	Oxfordshire	SP559082
Nebsworth	Warwickshire	SP193426

in the period. This is attested in Domesday, for example by the number of lands held in Leicestershire by Countesses Godgifu and Ælgifu (e.g. Williams and Martin 2002, 632). Of the total, only Isleworth (Mdx), Kenilworth (Wrk) from *Cynehild*, Hillborough (Wrk) from *Hildeburg* or *Hild*, Warkworth (Nth) from *Weorca*, *Verce* or *Wærferce* feature. It seems to run against the grain of the time that only 2% of the total of personal names were female. This must indicate that there was something particular about worths that excluded women owners.

Two categories defy definition so far: these are ones for which I have uncovered no suitable detail, here classified as 'unknown', and those without qualification, such as *Wrðe*, the earliest mention of Highworth (Wlt) – the 'High' being added in the 13th century (PNS Wlt).

However, as noted, the most important factor in the qualifiers is the overwhelming preponderance of personal names. This would indicate that the person or group associated with the site and its role, were there by allocation or acquiescence. The authority, whoever they were, gave them the place or agreed they might take or keep it. From a place-name studies viewpoint, this is as much as can be deduced from the name and some of the names that are recognised are of questionable derivation (Gelling 1997, xiii).

Landscape context

Besides the qualifying name, the physical location of the place and how it sits in the landscape, the relationship to other features, man-made and natural, and any related archaeological evidence must be considered in discussing and interpreting these *worth* sites.

There are notable similarities in the landscape placement of *worths*. Most common is the fact that few are alone. I have taken a 10 km radius as an arbitrary measure to indicate proximity. Many groups fall well within this range, with 37% found within 10 km of three or more other *worths* and 53% within 10 km of two or

more. Of those only in pairs, there are 64 (24%). Clusters of three or more in close proximity are adjacent parishes in many cases. Furthermore, *worth* sites frequently located on or near present-day county boundaries and near to or at the intersections of communications links, such as ancient trackways[4]. These include the Icknield Way or the Ridgeway and major route-ways remaining from the Roman period, such as the Fosse Way, Rykneld, Ermine and Watling Streets. It is true that other name-types occur but not so obviously linked and are frequently distributed elsewhere in a given county: worths seem to form groups with this landscape placement. (Single instances of *worth* form another characteristic group but have not been included in this study).

If we adopt a military or civil defence viewpoint, as posited in Baker *et al*. (2013) or Baker and Brooks (2013), it is easy to define many *worths* as having 'strategic' or military importance. Certainly, many occupy what could be termed as dominant positions overlooking routeways and, in their groups, they could be said to 'control' areas of land. A viable case can be made for the group of settlements on the border between Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire comprising Bengeworth, Pebworth, Nebsworth and Charingworth (Fig. 1). Bengeworth occupies rising ground on the opposite Bank of the River Avon from Evesham, 9 km WSW of Pebworth. Its strategic position was significant enough for a castle to be constructed there during the reign of King Stephen in the mid-12th century (EH monument ref. 328415). During the middle to late Anglo-Saxon period, the next viable crossing of the Avon north of Evesham was Bidford-on-Avon at its crossing by Buckle Street (Margary 18a). Between Bidford and Evesham on the western bank of the Avon the land is low-lying and marshy; on the eastern bank flat land marsh is bounded by a steep scarp making an effective natural barrier.

Pebworth sits on a spur of land overlooking Buckle Street towards Bidford and west towards the River Avon. ESE of Pebworth by 5 km, the Iron Age Hillfort site of Meon Hill is a dominant feature in the area, on which evidence has been found of Anglo-Saxon activity, notably a burial (Wrk SMR ref. WA5461). Given the noted re-use of Iron Age sites in the Anglo-Saxon period, a case might be made for Meon Hill as a temporary or previously unknown *burh* – a hypothesis which would no doubt benefit from further investigation. Nebsworth lies 3.5 km SW of Meon Hill and a further 3.2 km SW of Nebsworth is Charingworth, both on high ground overlooking the Fosse Way (229 m and 167 m aOD, respectively). Nebsworth has wide views to Meon Hill and to the N and NW.

A similar group – although less elevated – lies south of Godmanchester, where Papworth St Agnes and Papworth Everard form a chain of parishes (Fig. 2) with Elsworth, Boxworth and Lolworth, between Ermine Street and Margary 24, the route of the modern A14, with another Roman road W of Papworth St Agnes, Margary 22. High ground is at a premium in this part of Cambridgeshire and all bar Papworth St Agnes sit

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[4] Statistical examination of other place-name types have so far failed to match the same criteria although other associations are evident (for a wider discussion see Cole, 2013).
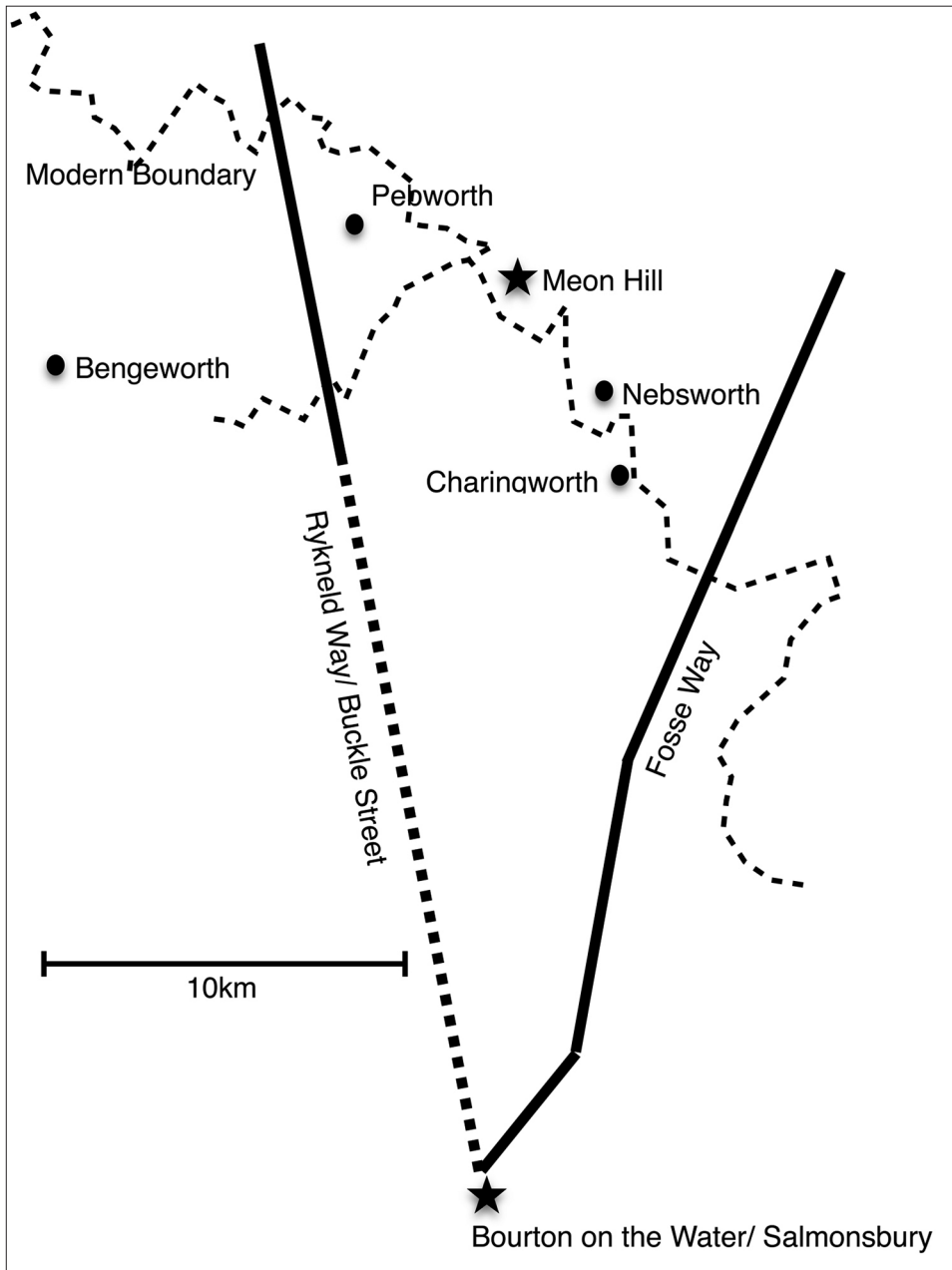
Figure 1   Worth settlements between Fosse Way and Buckle Street with relationship to Meon Hill and present day boundaries.

on higher ground looking northwards. All are linked by a single road apart from Papworth St Agnes; however, the extension of Rogues' Lane aligns with a short piece of road on which the church of Papworth St Agnes is located, perhaps indicating a link, now lost. A short distance to the south, completing a triangle is Margary 231. Hence in this case we see a cluster of these *worth* settlements, strung between these communications paths, close to the junctions of major routeways and crossings of the Great Ouse and its river valley. Certainly during wintertime and perhaps other seasons, these roads would have offered the only viable dry routes across the area.

The military-civil defence pattern related to *wardines* has been noted in relation to Offa's Dyke (Hill and Worthington 2003, 99), where in association with *burhs* they could have provided refuges for the local population in times of crisis. It is also argued that, given the entire length of the Dyke could not be regularly and fully manned, it was likely patrolled on horseback. If

so, these enclosed sites might have acted as staging and supply points. There is no doubt that there are a number of *worth / wardine* settlements along the whole stretch of the extant and undisputed length of Offa's Dyke and their frequency is surely significant. It is premature to speculate about the positioning of *worths* at critical and not simply nodal points in the landscape. Nonetheless, it is difficult to avoid the inference that they appear to be part of infrastructural and civil defence maintenance in some form. The pattern of these particular places are not dissimilar to one of the models of defence discussed by Baker and Brookes (2013, fig. 5). They fit the model of peripheral defence, located along the boundary of a territory, in contrast to the 'defence-in-depth' model, where larger defensive positions stand back from the border.

So far this paper has concentrated on the potential military/civil defence explanations of which there seems to be a growing number. However, it is fair to say that
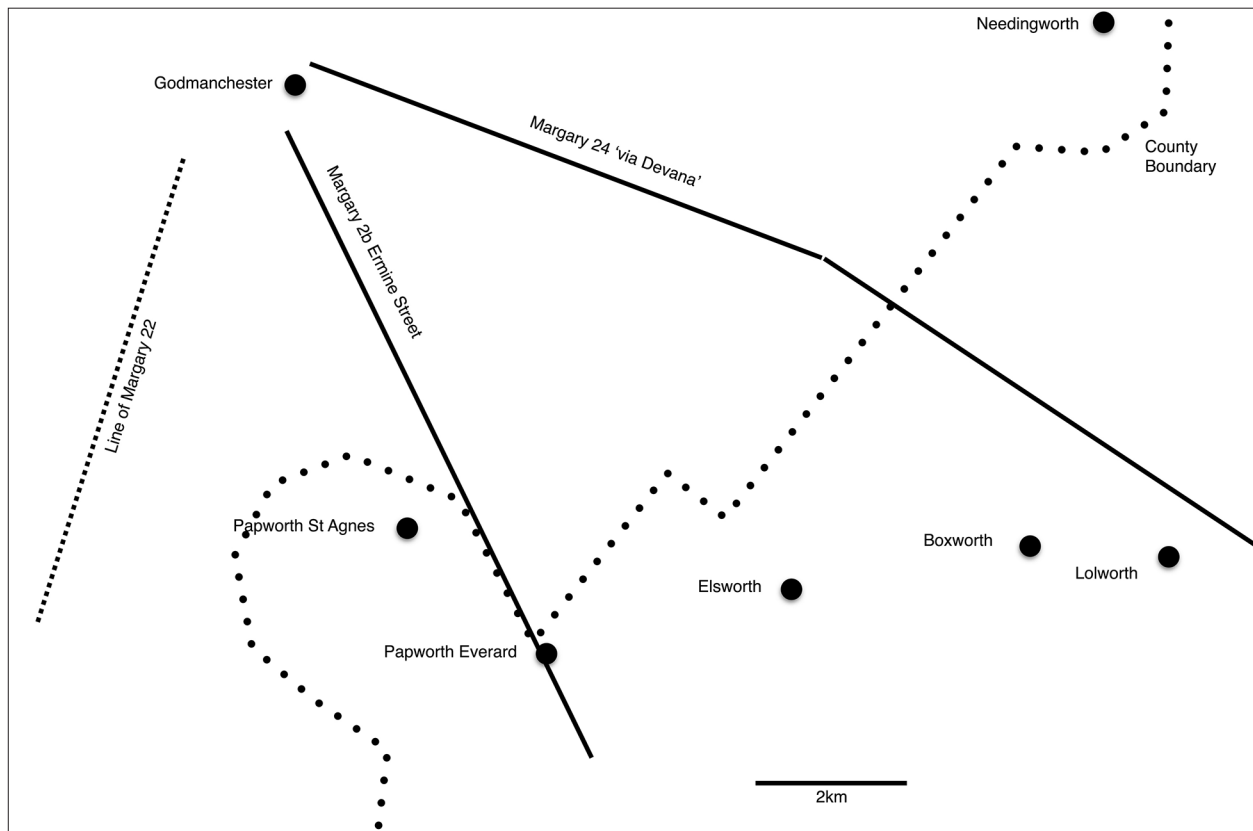
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Figure 2   Worth settlements between Margary 22,2b and 24 with relationship to present day boundaries.

the concept of civil defence may not be restricted to exclusively military activity. Though not explaining why and where they cluster, it may include the maintenance of roads and bridges or the routine administration of local activities, such as markets and their attendees from outside the area.

Alternative explanations

Some alternative explanations could be proposed for the location of *worths*, some a little more prosaic than military-orientated argument. One possibility relates to partible inheritance, whereby a landholding, on the death of its owner, would have been split equally between his offspring, each establishing their own *worth*. In other methods such as primogeniture and agnatic inheritance the fracturing of a large estate will have been more difficult and therefore less likely given the zero-sum nature of any consequent contest. This is a point viewed as a reasonable assumption by Williamson (2012, 123), who suggests that the increased instance of ~*worth* with ~*tons* and ~*steads* associated with personal names was a feature of diluted larger landholdings and increasing stratification of society in the 8th and 9th centuries AD in areas of insecurity such as the Marches.

This is a plausible explanation of the tendency to cluster and why they might all be related to named individuals: in order to differentiate the members of a family from the wider original estate. A small estate would occupy a limited area, perhaps with a few outliers. Splitting the estate to give a fair share of assets, the dwelling locations would be placed in the most convenient position in

relation both to resources and to each other. On the other hand, in uncertain times, it would have made sense that they might prefer proximity, in order to provide mutual defence. This does not explain, however, why *worth* sites appear so frequently on, or bordering, main roads and boundaries. If it is simply a matter of chance that they lie on the boundaries then why are they not also found scattered across a region, much like other name-types? It must be acknowledged that this may equally apply to other name-types. On the other hand, many of those alternative types *do* exhibit a more general distribution over any given area, whereas the tendency of *worths* in Mercian zones is, as observed, far less dispersed.

Another option, perhaps related distantly to the same principle, is the redistribution of confiscated lands. Bede, in a letter of 734 to Ecgberht the Bishop of York (Williams 2005, 104; Blair 2005, 101–2), bemoans the state of some alleged monastic landholdings and the behaviour of their inhabitants. He states that the king should only grant bookland as a reward to individuals whom he could trust to undertake their duties for the maintenance of roads and bridges and to offer military service in times of need. This suggests that landholders were capitalizing on the Church's exemption from these duties by the use of bogus religious houses, thus avoiding their obligations. Williams draws parallels with the development of bridge and fortress work with the expansion of bookland under *Æthelbald*. The clear implication from Bede's letter is this: how can a king reward loyal good servants, on whom he must rely for the maintenance and protection of the kingdom, if all the available bookland is taken up by landowners who

avoid their obligations by operating a 'scam' based on religious exemptions?

(Some) conclusions

What remains to be explored is a more detailed analysis of settlement type, morphology and spatial arrangement, in order to determine more securely if the nature of clusters and their placement is indeed peculiar. One key need is to establish a coherent chronology, not just from the few that are listed in title deeds and the acts of kings but some hard material evidence. Sadly, this is missing from many locations, since most of the remains of Anglo-Saxon villages are buried beneath the modern settlements whose names they share.

Unfortunately, the many scattered finds commonly reported in the HER are not a secure indication of the chronology of any location. Low numbers of background finds of Anglo-Saxon material are common in many locations (Beamish, pers. comm.) and single finds, devoid of context, indicate little. Burials and concentrations of finds are significant, given the difficulty in the identification of predominantly organic remains of structures or their discovery by geophysical techniques (Wallace, pers. comm.). Wide-area, detailed analyses of settlements and their remains, such as that by Bowman (2004, 105–36), are rare and so far as can be established, none directly relate to a *worth*.

Another crucial element is the strong need for more detailed physical surveys of the landscape context of *worths*. Of those surveyed, for example in north-eastern Derbyshire and eastern Cheshire, southern Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, northern Gloucestershire with Worcestershire and Warwickshire, southern Huntingdonshire with Cambridgeshire, north Nottinghamshire and south Yorkshire, most seem to occupy places from which much of the surrounding land can be viewed (see Fig. 3). The corollary, of course, is that they could be viewed from that landscape. Which viewpoint was more significant under different circumstances and at different times remains unclear.

It may have been that the move to higher ground in this period of Mercian history was a result of population pressure with opportunist pioneers being driven to the more marginal land (Faith 2006, 14). Perhaps those pioneers were presented with the opportunity of land as a reward. It might be coincidental that those areas of high ground were physical barriers, which only later became convenient political and administrative boundaries. This explanation would divorce the elements as having similar influences in their origins but having no direct influence on each other. It may be simply a proof that a correlation is not indicative of a directly causative relationship. More explicitly, the physical factors which created the boundary and influenced the decision to settle may have been similar but there was no direct relationship between the two decision-making processes. In the same way, artefacts from successive periods, in any single location, do not necessarily indicate continuity of occupation by the same group but that successive and unrelated groups found a location a good place to settle or exploit.

My ongoing research aims to employ a methodology which avoids according undue privilege to any single source of evidence; each element – historical record, physical survey, archaeology and onomastics – should be treated as an artefact in its own right. There is no reason to exclude local knowledge or tradition, for example, the similarities between Arthurian legends, committed to paper in the 15th century, with Bronze and Iron Age ritual practice related to water and artefact production (Pryor 2004, xix–xx; James 2005, 94–5, 167). Only when all the available evidence can be amassed as a whole can reasonable deductions be made. But, thus far, on the basis of the survey of the present

Figure 3   View from Charlesworth (Drb) overlooking the Cheshire Plain.

evidence, it can be argued that the placing of Anglo-Saxon *worths* was somewhat more than coincidental: boundaries, clusters and communications nodes stand out as common denominators which potentially add a new dimension to our understanding of Mercia, its control and its occupants.

Acknowledgements

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