

Parish and Township in Cheshire and North-East Wales

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UNTIL the Local Government Act of 1894 when the civil parishes were created, the smallest units of local administration were the township, the parish, and the manor. Originating probably in that order, the township and the parish were to become closely interrelated though the township was primarily a socio-economic entity, the parish ecclesiastical. The township goes back to unknown origins, but there was almost certainly a parallel functional unit from the early Iron Age if not from the Bronze Age, and although its name derives from the Anglo-Saxon *tun*, the Welsh *tref* was identical in basic meaning despite later divergences in development. The manor nominally replaced the township after the Norman Conquest, and though occasional *vills*¹ are mentioned in the Domesday Book they are few in number and it is clear that the Norman manor was then dominant. Some new manors were formed in the less well populated parts of England, but the bulk represented the old townships forced into new moulds, many identical in area, some subdivided, and others formed from two or more former townships. It says much for the vigour of the old English and British communities that within a few centuries they had re-emerged over much of the country and the township had once again taken precedence of the manor in the majority of cases. The term "manor" continued to be used, but its meaning was increasingly linked with the estate of a lord, while the community and its lands once again became identified with the more democratic concept of the township.

Though not entirely new as an institution,² the manor gained in prestige and importance after the Norman Conquest. Inherent in the Norman concept of government was the link between the state, army, church and land, and vast amounts of land changed hands. Where there was not previously a church, the new landholder almost always founded one. Many originated as private chapels, but a considerable number achieved parochial status after a century or more. Others were actually founded as parish churches, or as chantries which later might become parochial. The extension of the parochial system was a policy of the early Roman Church in Britain and the parishes formed after the Norman Conquest became coincident with the manor in no small number of cases.

The term parish derives from the Greek *paroikia* through the Latin *parochia* and its original meaning was a primary unit of Christians living in one place.

¹ The Domesday Book term for a township.

² The Welsh *maenor* had many similar features and there were arrangements in many villages in Old English times which might be compared with the later Norman manorial set-up.

In time, it acquired a territorial connotation: an institution which extended as the Roman Church spread its influence. Its origination with the Roman and not with the Celtic Church is fundamental in relation to later parish geography, for the Celtic Church, of which the history in Britain goes back to the fifth century, was primarily interested in the community and it was the cure of souls only and not territorial definition which was its main concern. Its missionaries and hermits set up their primitive cells and tiny churches to serve a congregation rather than an area. Although the Roman Church from the time of St. Augustine's landing in A.D. 597 was equally concerned with conversions, it initiated the territorial organization of the entire country without delay. Augustine's tenure of Canterbury lasted until A.D. 668. By 660, all southern England was converted up to the Thames valley, and within his lifetime Canterbury, St. Paul's, Rochester, Lichfield, and Dorchester³ dioceses were created and Paulinus, sent north by Augustine, had baptized Edwin, king of Northumbria, at York which Augustine had nominated as the seat of a second metropolitan. Augustine's work was continued by his successor Theodore of Tarsus (second archbishop of Canterbury A.D. 668-90), but although the twelve dioceses of the southern province came into existence comparatively early, the twelve which Augustine had envisaged as subdivisions of the province of York failed to materialize. By the ninth century only York, Hexham, Lindisfarne, and Whithorn had come into being.

The first phase of parish formation is thought to go back to Theodore but the datable evidence is negligible. The dating of many early churches is difficult enough, but it is more reliable than any attempt to fix the origin of the parish. It is clear that from the first, churches and those hermit cells which later were succeeded by churches were geographically sited with some purpose in mind. In southern and eastern England the vast majority were placed in, or soon became, the centres of villages. But in the Celtic north and west, the village was rare or non-existent outside areas of Anglian penetration or prior to their incursions, so that the early Celtic churches were generally built on isolated sites, partly of necessity because of the lack of a focal centre and partly because the stranger-priest was "not of the blood", that is, not one of the tribesmen of which Celtic society was largely made up. Where missionary activity was intense, as it was in many parts of Wales, churches were numerous as is reflected in the multiplicity of *llan* settlement names. But today, many *llan* settlements no longer have churches, and others, too closely located to justify their continued independence as parishes, are being merged in united parishes.

It is generally known that the largest parishes lie in the north and west of England and in parts of Wales, but the more specific distribution of large and small parishes, and their relationship to the settlement pattern both of the whole of England and Wales and of their own small areas has not previously been investigated. It was on discovering that the dividing line between the multi-township parish and the single-township parish lay midway across the

³ Dorchester near Oxford.

Welsh Borderland and not parallel to it that I pursued the matter further and mapped parish structure by county for the entire area of southern Britain.⁴ Briefly, these maps revealed a distinctive northern area which in the east includes Northumberland and Co. Durham with an average of more than 3 townships per parish and an area of over 6 square miles, and the North Riding of Yorkshire with a rather lower average of 2.6 townships per parish. In the west, however, the large parishes extend through Cumberland, Westmorland, Lancashire, Cheshire, north Shropshire, Flintshire, Denbighshire, and Montgomeryshire, while in Staffordshire and Derbyshire the average is between 2 and 2.5 townships per parish. The southern limit of this area, which I have termed for convenience the *Parish Line*, divides it from the rest of England and Wales in which the average number of townships per parish is everywhere less than 1.75. In Devon and Cornwall and in the remaining Welsh counties except Anglesey and Pembroke, their average size is over 6 square miles, but in the rest of southern and eastern England and in Anglesey and Pembrokeshire it is under 4.5 square miles.⁵

No simple, and certainly no single, explanation can be proffered for this curious feature of British ecclesiastical geography. Upland areas with a thin economy and a sparse population were undoubtedly associated with much of the multi-township area of northern England and north-eastern Wales and with the greater average size of the parish in south-western England and most of west and south Wales, but this affords only a very general background to a picture which, in detail, displays so many anomalies. Attempted correlations with, *inter alia*, the area of nucleated and dispersed settlement, the extent of Anglo-Saxon or Norman occupation, population density at any given period, or the areas first converted to the Roman or to the Celtic Church, all break down at some point though each offers a partial explanation. There is, however, a very evident link with the early dioceses and with the history of the Church in the Dark Ages and the early Middle Ages. Llandaff accepted the authority of Canterbury in 1107, St. David's in 1115, Bangor in 1120, and St. Asaph in 1125, thus bringing the Welsh dioceses into the Roman fold, at least nominally. But at this date the diocese of St. Asaph was in abeyance, and the tension between York and Canterbury resulted in the suggestion that Bangor and St. Asaph be transferred to York.

Cheshire and north-east Wales have been included in three dioceses. The diocese of Chester, now very nearly coincident with the county, had a brief existence from 1075 to 1095 and was re-formed at the Reformation by Henry VIII in 1541, its area at that time largely corresponding with the much greater Domesday county which embraced south Lancashire and parts of nearby Wales.

⁴ This is discussed fully and the maps reproduced in my book *The Rural Landscape of the Welsh Borderland*, to be published by Macmillan, 1969.

⁵ The period to which these facts refer is 1811, prior to the changes which the rapidly increasing population of the Industrial Period brought about in the geography of British settlements and in the parishes themselves. The present tense is used for convenience.

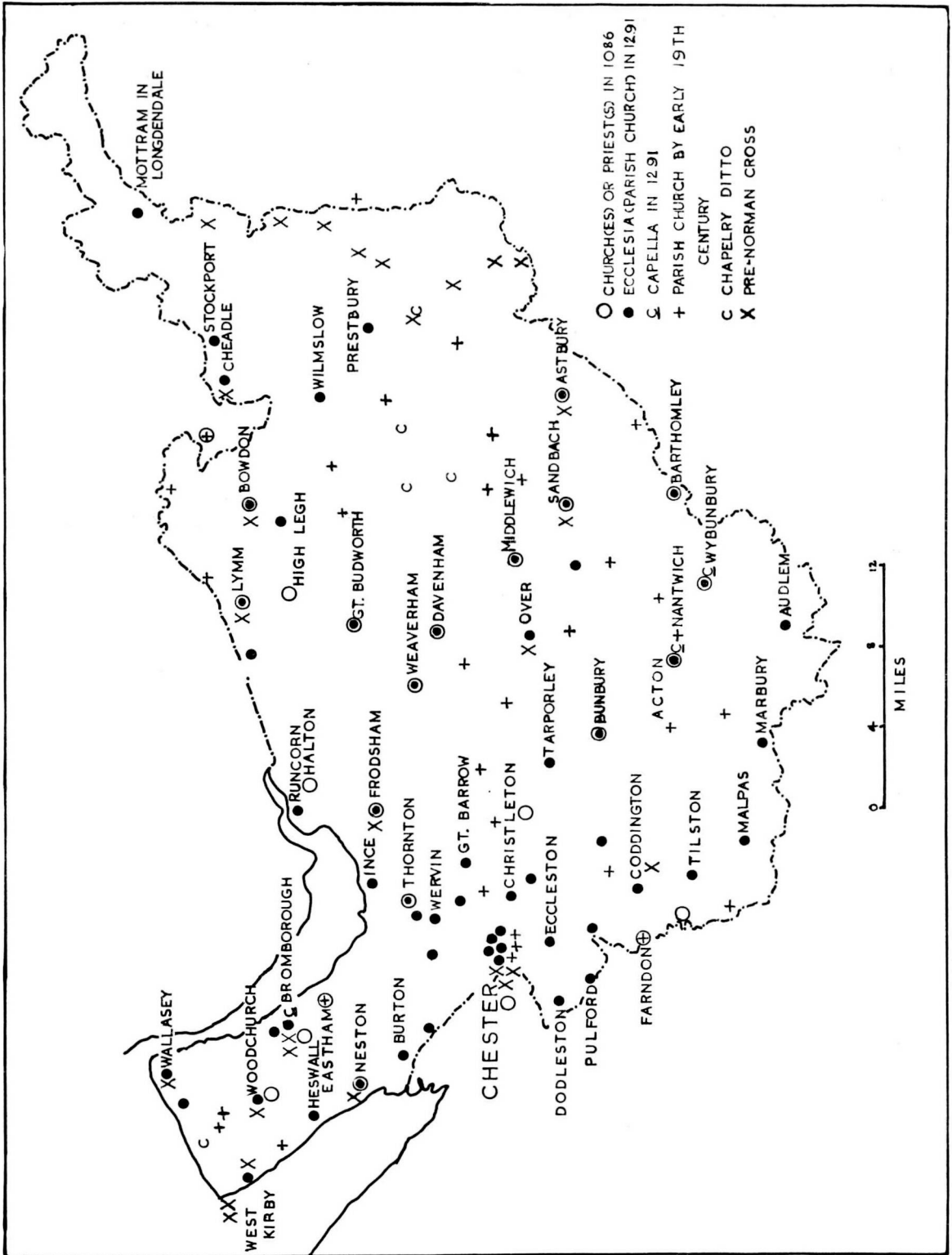


Fig. 1. The ancient parish churches of Cheshire.

By that time, however, the parish pattern was well advanced and it is the other two dioceses of which the history is relevant to the present theme. Between 1095 and 1541, Cheshire was again included in Lichfield and Coventry which had been the diocese of northern Mercia. The third diocese, St. Asaph, embraced most of Flintshire together with Denbighshire and Montgomeryshire. Both Lichfield and St. Asaph had strong historic and traditional links with the northern divisions of the Celtic Church. Although its historicity is disputed,⁶ the origin of the ancient monastery of St. Asaph is generally attributed to the mission of Cyndeyrn or St. Kentigern who is reputed to have travelled from his seat in Glasgow⁷ by the then all-British route from Cumbria to the Elwy valley. The early Northumbrian Church, a branch of the Celtic Church, also sent missions to central England and there are four ancient dedications to St. Oswald in Cheshire, one in Lancashire, one in Shropshire, and one in Herefordshire; four to St. Wilfred in Cheshire, five in Lancashire; four to St. Chad in Cheshire, five in Lancashire, six in Shropshire, one in Maelor Saesneg, one in Denbighshire (the cathedral of Lichfield itself bearing the same dedication); and one to St. Cuthbert in Shropshire (possibly a second also) and one in Herefordshire. Lichfield's early links with the Celtic Church were strong, with Canterbury weak, and for a brief period in the late eighth century the divergence from Canterbury took more active form when Lichfield claimed an archbishop's pallium. The geographical extent of these two sees and their northern links becomes of heightened significance when it is realised that only in the old diocese of Lichfield and in that of St. Asaph does the large multi-township parish extend so far south or invade the territory of the metropolitan of Canterbury, and it is only against this historico-geographical background that the parish-township structure of Cheshire and north-east Wales can be seen in correct perspective.

Within the multi-township parish area of northern England, that is, north of the Parish Line, the two major centres of this type of parish are Northumberland on the one side and Lancashire, Cheshire and north Shropshire with extensions into Flintshire and Denbighshire on the other. In the early nineteenth century, the parishes containing the largest number of townships in England and Wales were (in order) Whalley (Lancs.) with 44, Great Budworth (Ches.) with 35, and Prestbury (Ches.) with 32. The relative position of Lancashire, Cheshire, and the north-eastern Welsh counties in the matter of parish structure is summarized in table I and the Cambridgeshire figures have been added to give a comparison with a typical south English county.

Although the average number of townships per parish in the three north-eastern Welsh counties was less than in Lancashire and Cheshire, the figures were still high. Similarly their largest parishes contained fewer townships than

⁶ Kenneth Jackson, "The Sources for the Life of St. Kentigern" in *Studies in the Early British Church*, Cambridge, 1958.

⁷ His Gaelic name was Mungo, hence the dedication in the church which he founded in Glasgow.

TABLE I

	Lancs.	Ches.	Flints.	Denbs.	Mont.	Cambs.
Area in square miles, 1811	1,766	1,052	244	633	839	857
Number of parishes*	74	84	28	60	53	149
Average area of parish in square miles	23.2	11.6	8.7	10.5	15.8	5.2
Population in oos, 1811	828	227	46	64	51	101.1
Average population per parish*	10,898	2,522	1,660	1,070	979	612
Percentage of single-township parishes	31	20	18	18	10	95.3
Average number of townships per parish	6.4	6	5.1	4.6	4.5	1.06
Percentage of parishes with over 7 townships	31	27	26	21	26	0

* Excluding towns with more than one parish.

the biggest in Lancashire and Cheshire, but they were none the less impressive as compared with those of the south English counties, and their place is clearly north of the Parish Line. Their character and their historical geography are equally distinctive and the lists which follow (table II) introduce the more detailed examination of the parochial structure of Cheshire and the north-eastern Welsh counties.

R. H. Hodgkin postulated three methods of parish formation, first by subdivision of the diocese or the lesser territories of the minsters under the jurisdiction of the dioceses; secondly, their creation by monasteries or collegiate churches; and thirdly, by landowners building what in the first instance were private chapels.⁸ There is some difficulty here, for Sir Frank Stenton⁹ and G. W. O. Addleshaw¹⁰ consider minster and monastery to be identical. Stenton and Hunter Blair¹¹ taken together name four "ranks" of church in the Old English period. These were the head minster or cathedral, the ordinary or old minster, the lesser church with a graveyard, and the field church with no graveyard. This is strongly suggestive of dioceses divided into minster territories (compare the present rural deaneries), in turn divided into parishes, these last of different ages, some with the older "mother churches", others with newer churches. The early dioceses in England compared closely with the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in area, and in some cases such as Wessex, were divided in time into dioceses corresponding to the shires of the late Old English period. It seems reasonable to suppose that the conversion and territorial organization of the country should then have been carried on through lesser subdivisions or the "minster territories". Some of the minster churches are known historically or because of the survival of the element *minster* as a place name.¹² Unfortunately, records or other traces of the ancient minsters are in most cases lost or difficult to come by, and this is especially true in Cheshire and north-eastern

⁸ *History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 3rd ed., 1953, chap. X.

⁹ *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1943, pp. 147-52.

¹⁰ *The beginnings of the Parochial System*, St. Anthony's Hall Pubns., no. 3.

¹¹ *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, 1959, pp. 156-7.

¹² Dorothy Sylvester, "The Church and the Geographer", in *Liverpool Essays in Geography: a Jubilee Collection*, London, 1967. This essay contains a list of minster place-names in England.

TABLE II
The Largest Parishes in Cheshire and the three north-eastern Welsh Counties

No. of townships and name of parish	Dedication, etc.
CHESHIRE	
35 Great Budworth	St. Mary & All Saints.
32 Prestbury	St. Peter. Elevated site <i>-burh</i> suffix
24 Malpas	St. Oswald. Elevated site
19 Runcorn	V. Mary & St. Bartholomew
18 Wybunbury	St. Chad. Elevated site. <i>-burh</i> suffix
17 Acton	St. Mary.
15 Middlewich	St. Michael. Elevated site
14 Stockport	Patron saint unknown
13 Sandbach	St. Mary. Anglian crosses. Elevated site
12 Astbury	St. Mary. <i>-burh</i> suffix
12 Bunbury	St. Boniface. Elevated site. <i>-burh</i> suffix
12 Davenham	St. Wilfred.
12 Frodsham	St. Lawrence. Elevated site
11 Bowdon	St. Mary. Celtic <i>dun</i>
11 St. Oswald (Chester)	St. Oswald
11 Tarvin	St. Andrew. Tarvin a Celtic name
FLINTSHIRE	
16 Hawarden	St. Deiniol. Head of former marcher lordship
15 Mold	St. Mary. Head of former marcher lordship
13 St. Asaph	SS. Kentigern & Asa. Cathedral
8 Llanasa	SS. Asa & Kentigern
8 Hope	St. Cyngar or Cynfarch
8 Rhuddlan	St. Mary. Head of former marcher lordship
8 Whitford	Originally St. Beuno
DENBIGHSHIRE	
15 Gresford	All Saints. Name thought to be derived from Croesfordd
14 Llanarmon yn Ial	St. Garmon. Lesser <i>clas</i> church
14 Wrexham	St. Giles
13 Llansannan	St. Sannan
12 Llanfair Talhaiarn	St. Mary
11 Abergele	St. Michael. <i>Clas</i> church
11 Llanrhaeadr yn Cinmerch	St. Defynog
10 Llangerniew	St. Digain
10 Llanrhaeadr ym Mochnant	St. Dogfan. <i>Clas</i> church
10 Llansilin	St. Silin
MONTGOMERYSHIRE	
19 Kerry	St. Michael
15 Berriew	St. Beuno
15 Llanfair Caereinion	St. Mary
12 Llanfihangel yng Gwynfa	St. Michael
12 Llanfyllin	St. Myllin
11 Guilsfield	St. Aelhaiarn
11 Churchstoke	St. Nicholas. On Offa's Dyke
10 Castle Caereinion	St. Garmon
10 Forden	St. Michael. On Roman road
10 Meifod	St. Mary. Ancient <i>clas</i> church. Formerly three churches in same churchyard
10 Welshpool	St. Mary. Elevated site

Wales. St. John's, Chester, before and after it ranked as a cathedral in the eleventh century was probably an "ordinary minster", but for the rest of the county one is left guessing. In Shropshire, the position is a shade clearer. There were Blancminster (Whitchurch), Blancminster (Oswestry), Minsterley, and the parish church of Much Wenlock (associated with the Cluniac priory) which are believed to have been early minsters.

Before the coming of St. Augustine, however, the Celtic Church covered western and northern Britain, and no one can accurately define its eastern limits. It seems highly probable that it extended some way across the border counties. The *llan* names of southern Herefordshire and Monmouthshire leave little doubt that Celtic Christianity was firmly established as far as the middle and lower Wye,¹³ but the last belt of paganism, indicated by pagan Anglo-Saxon burials¹⁴ and by such place-names as Wednesbury and Wednesfield extended only to the present-day Shropshire-Staffordshire boundary and it is difficult to imagine a hiatus between this longitude and that of the edge of the Welsh plateau in the northern Borderland. Names such as Landican (*Llan* of St. Tegan or Tecwyn) in Wirral, Eccleston in the Dee Valley, Eccles in Lancashire, and Eccleshall in north-west Staffordshire, support this assumption as do occasional dedications like those to St. Bridget at Chester and at West Kirby, and to St. Hilary at Wallasey. The extension of the Celtic Church eastwards across Shropshire and Cheshire was no doubt linked with the missionary activity of both St. Asaph and Bangor-on-Dee.¹⁵ A Celtic "corridor" allowing free movement from the south-west of Scotland and Cumbria to Dumnonia survived until *circa* A.D. 600 and, among other things, allowed the spread of the Celtic Church eastwards to the fringe of the pagan Anglo-Saxon settlement.¹⁶ Much of the evidence of this presumed easterly limit of Celtic Christianity in about A.D. 600 has, unfortunately, been eroded, but place-names as well as the other forms of evidence quoted make clear the close Celtic occupation of the English Borderland counties.¹⁷ Although there were probably no parishes in the sense that there were clear-cut local areas associated with the Celtic churches, the Celtic "saints" paved the way for the later activities of the Roman Church. The number of *burh* settlements which became parochial centres, the number with Celtic place-names or place-name elements, and those with churches occupying elevated sites lend support to the assumption that the Anglo-Saxons after the Conversion took over many of the old Celtic centres and later established their parishes round them.¹⁸

There were two main periods of parish formation prior to the nineteenth century: the seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries or the period of establishment of the dioceses and of the early Church of Rome in Britain; and the Norman

¹³ E. G. Bowen, *Settlements of the Celtic Saints in Wales*, 1954.

¹⁴ E. Thurlow Leeds, *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, 1913.

¹⁵ Dorothy Sylvester, "Cheshire in the Dark Ages", *L.C.H.S.*, CXIV, 1962, p. 7.

¹⁶ Dorothy Sylvester, *Rural Landscape of the Welsh Borderland*, Chaps. 4 and 8.

¹⁷ *ibid.* chap. 4 and figs. 6, 7, 8.

¹⁸ Dorothy Sylvester, *L.C.H.S.*, 1962, p. 15.

period when the strengthening of the Church under Norman rule and the widespread initiation of manors were alike associated with the founding of new churches and the extension of the parochial system, especially into Wales where it had formerly been unknown. During the latter period, many of the older Celtic and Anglo-Saxon dedications were replaced by others from the Roman Calendar so obliterating much of the evidence of Celtic foundations. St Mary and St. Michael dedications were particularly numerous in Wales, hence the many Llanfair and Llanfihangel place-names. Direct records of foundations were rarely made, and the Domesday book is notably sparing in its references to late eleventh-century churches, but by 1291 when the *Taxation of Pope Nicholas IV* was compiled¹⁹, full lists of churches and chapels become available. For the southern area, that is south of the Parish Line, nearly all the churches to be found in the early nineteenth century were already in existence, but for the north the proportion was appreciably lower. For example, in Herefordshire 93.8 per cent of its rural parishes can be traced back to the 1291 lists, but only 64.3 per cent of those of Cheshire (fig. 1). The process of parochial formation by further subdivision continued slowly in the districts north of the Parish Line. In Cheshire, Sir Peter Leycester's lists add 19 new ones²⁰ to the 1291 figure, and by the tithe commutation period it had risen to 84. In 1254, the earlier *Taxation of Pope Innocent IV*²¹ listed, according to D. R. Thomas,²² 79 *ecclesiae* or parish churches in the dioceses of St. Asaph and at least 19 *capellae*. By 1811, there were 141 parishes in Flintshire, Denbighshire, and Montgomeryshire in a roughly comparable area,²³ showing the same process at work. The rapid changes which followed the nineteenth-century development of the Flintshire-Denbighshire coalfield resulted in a sharp acceleration of church building and associated parish formation and Thomas says that, under the auspices of the Diocesan Church Building Society formed in 1834, 58 new churches were built and 26 rebuilt. Some of these were given parochial status with the result that by 1861 there were 187 benefices in the diocese, and by 1888, 207.²⁴ Thus it may be seen that not only the size of parishes, their population, and the number of townships were different in the south but the entire history of their evolution. It also happened that, apart from the London area and a limited number of the larger towns (mainly seaports), the nineteenth century brought few changes in the economic structure or in the population of southern England so that south of the Parish Line the parochial patterns of the thirteenth century have remained almost unaltered in the rural areas for six hundred years and, indeed, in most cases until the present day.

¹⁹ *Taxatio Ecclesiastica Angliae et Walliae Auctoritate P. Nicholai IV circa A.D. 1291*, Record Commission, 1802.

²⁰ *Historical Antiquities, Book II, Particular Remarks concerning Cheshire*, 1673.

²¹ *Vetus Valor*, Cottonian Coll, Vitellius CX.

²² *St. Asaph*, Diocesan Histories Series, S.P.C.K., 1888.

²³ Thomas gives the figure of 131 for the diocese in 1835. The difference is due to the differences in county and diocesan boundaries. *ibid.*, p. 109.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 109.

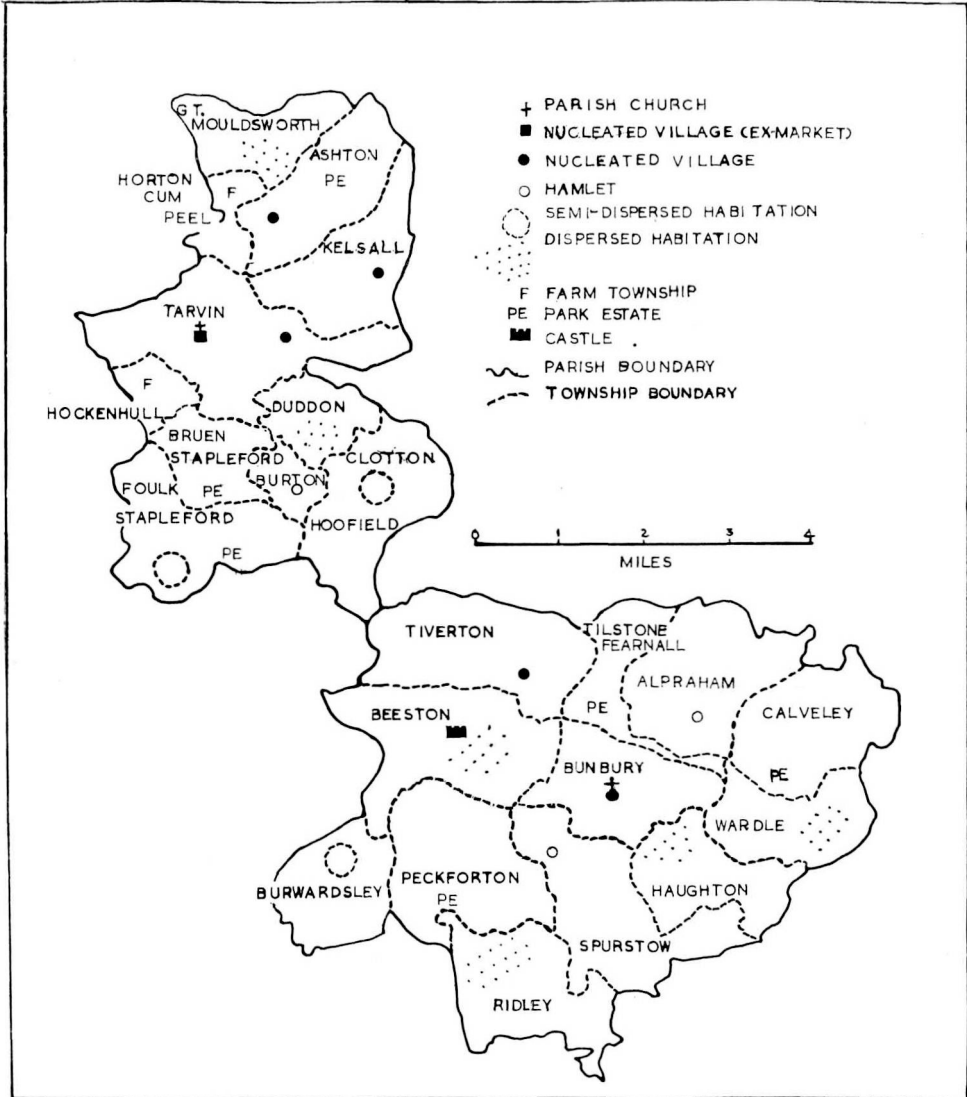


FIG. 2. The parishes of Tarvin and Bunbury, Cheshire, in the early nineteenth century.

Lastly, there is the question of the significance of the multi-township parish in the more detailed geography of the areas concerned and, in particular, of Cheshire and north-east Wales. It is impossible to sort out cause and effect beyond a point or to make generalizations which hold good for, say, the entire area north of the Parish Line. But in north-west England and north-east Wales there is a widely traceable relationship between the satellite type of settlement pattern and the multi-township parish. The centre of such a system is usually the parochial village, and around it are grouped the dependent townships of which few contain any settlement larger than a hamlet, and in many cases there are to be found only a group of scattered dwellings, a few farmhouses, a manor house and its estate cottages, or a mixture of these. All their inhabitants come to the central church for the benefit of its rites—or did so in times past—and with the passage of the centuries the central village has in many cases built up services such as are associated with a school, shops, and agencies. In formerly Celtic areas it is by no means always possible to date the growth of the central nucleation, and no small number may owe their present size to eighteenth-century and later development. It is also probable that where, as in Cheshire, the Anglian settlement was late and sparse their selection of what they deemed a suitable focal point was soon converted into a nucleated village amid the hamlets and dispersed dwellings of the nearby British. The significance of the choice of sites like Dunham on the Hill and the *burh* villages is not lost. Whatever the origin, this satellite structure can be illustrated time and again in Cheshire, though there are naturally individual variations. In Bunbury, for example, the original parochial village was grouped around the hill-sited church, with its town fields below. The non-parochial village of Tiverton, the hamlets of Alpraham and Spurstow, the semi-dispersed township of Burwardsley, the dispersed townships of Haughton and Wardle, the farm township of Ridley, and the park-estate townships of Beeston, Peckforton, Calveley, and Tilstone Fearnall made up the total of its eleven dependent townships. A comparable twelve-township parish was Tarvin where, grouped around the central village²⁵ were the large nucleated non-parochial hamlets of Ashton and Kelsall, the hamlet of Burton, the semi-dispersed township of Clotton Hoofield, the dispersed township of Duddon, and the two Staplefords, Horton-cum-Peel, and Mouldsworth in which the estate element or the succeeding farms dominated the plan (fig. 2). The pattern recurs all over central and east Cheshire, but gives place in the western lowlands to smaller multi-township parishes. This was the former “metropolitan” zone of Celtic, Roman, and probably of early Mercian Cheshire and continued to be the best developed agriculturally and to carry the densest population in Norman times. It seems very possible that the dividing line between the larger and the lesser parishes²⁶

²⁵ This was also important because it was near a Roman road and later had a market. It is highly probable that it was an original Celtic place.

²⁶ See the map of ancient parishes by the writer in *The Historical Atlas of Cheshire*, ed. Dorothy Sylvester and Geoffrey Nulty, p. 37.

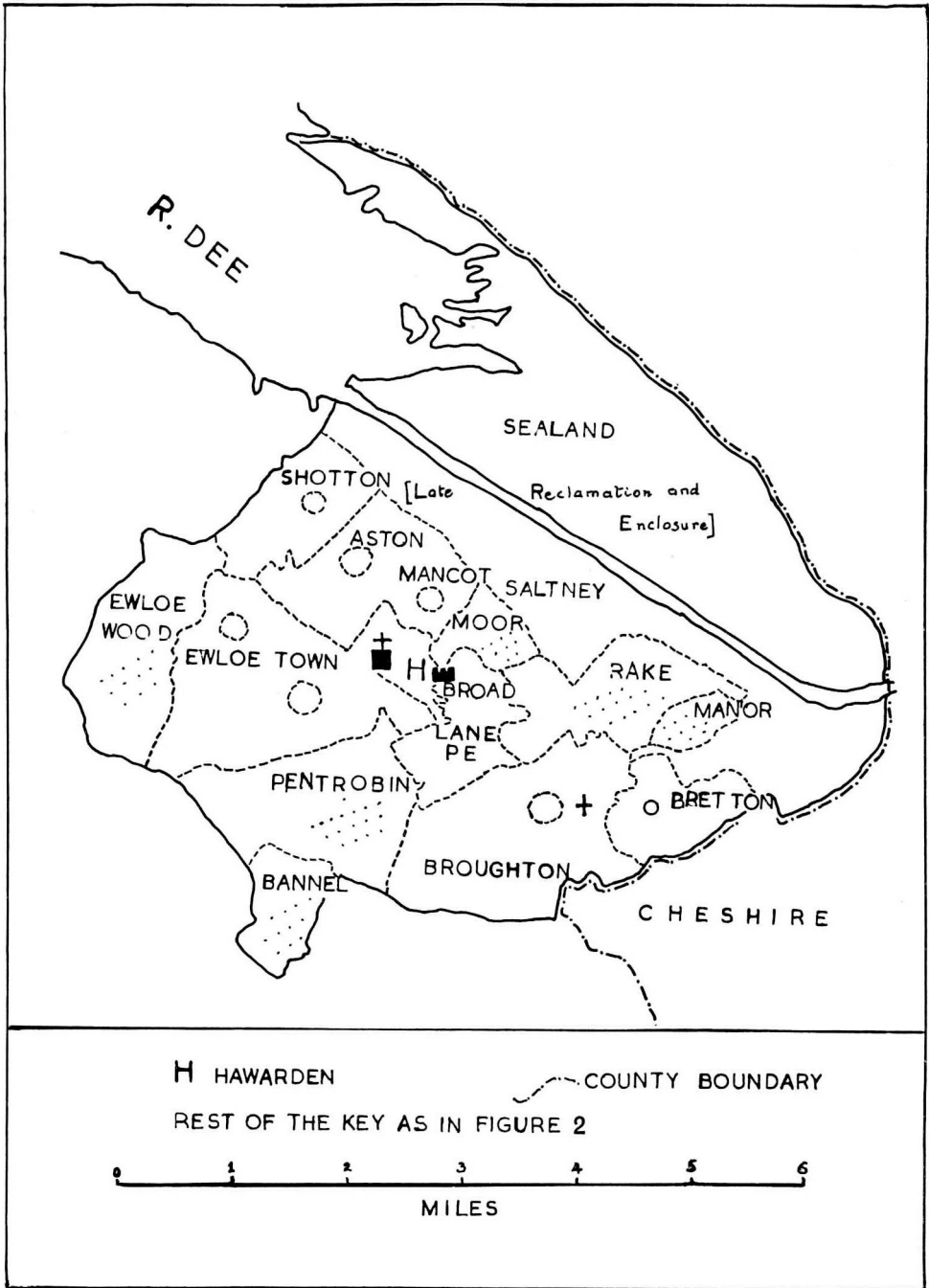


FIG. 3. The parish of Hawarden, Flintshire in the early nineteenth century.

represents the boundary of an ancient Celtic province.²⁷ One major anomaly must be mentioned in the parochial pattern in Cheshire and that is the number of cases in which the ancient parochial village has been superseded in size and importance by a medieval market town, thus we have Nantwich in Acton parish until the eighteenth century, Congleton in Astbury, and Macclesfield in Prestbury, while Frodsham grew in somewhat comparable fashion at the foot of the hill on which stood the old village and the parish church of Overton.

In north-east Wales the English-type nucleated village is rare or absent except along the eastern fringes, and in the typical large parish the parish township itself is one of scattered dwellings or at best hamletted, and such central nucleations as do occur are usually small as at Berriew and Northop and many of them relatively modern. There is also, however, a second type of satellite structure related not to an old village but to a Norman castle and the little town which grew at its foot. Diserth, Flint, Mold, Hawarden, and Rhuddlan illustrate this type in Flintshire where it is best developed, and Chirk and Ruabon in Denbighshire. In Hawarden, lordship and parish were coterminous, and the resulting settlement pattern was so similar to that of the larger Cheshire parishes that one cannot but wonder whether in fact the process of taking over a central settlement point and developing its functions in relation to a group of lesser satellites was not simply a repetition by the Anglo-Normans of what the Anglo-Saxons had done earlier but without the emphasis on the castle or the manor (fig. 3). Another important distinction between the Welsh parishes and the English, even north of the Parish Line and in adjacent areas, is the comparative fluidity of boundaries and administrative entities in Wales. Although the *tref* as an institution was very similar in many ways to the English township, the real units were the tribe and the *tyddyn*.²⁸ The tribe was made up of family groups or *gwelyau*, and landholding, in so far as it was personal at all, was vested in the *gwely*²⁹ and represented in the landscape by the *tyddynod* scattered among their *priodolder*³⁰ holdings. Territorially, the tribal lands were represented by ill-defined grazing rights which all its members shared over a traditional area. It was thus comparatively easy for boundaries to be ignored or non-existent in any precise sense, and lists of constituent townships and even their names in a given parish could and did vary widely from century to century.

In the last resort, it would seem that any area gets the number of churches it can afford or continue to maintain, but in the complex history of the parish, this has become interwoven with diocesan policies, with the differential growth of communities, with the character of the associated peoples, and with their overlords, and the Church through the centuries has played a major role not only in the spiritual life of the country, but in social and economic developments and in the very pattern of our rural landscape.

²⁷ Dorothy Sylvester, *L.C.H.S.*, 1962, p. 19.

²⁸ The *tyddyn*, literally "the homestead", symbolized the family holding.

²⁹ Literally "a bed", the *gwely* implied the family group.

³⁰ *Priodolder* rights were based on claims of several generations in the land which they held but, under Welsh tribal law, did not own. They were rights of occupancy only.

