

Saxon and Medieval Leicester: The Making of an Urban Landscape

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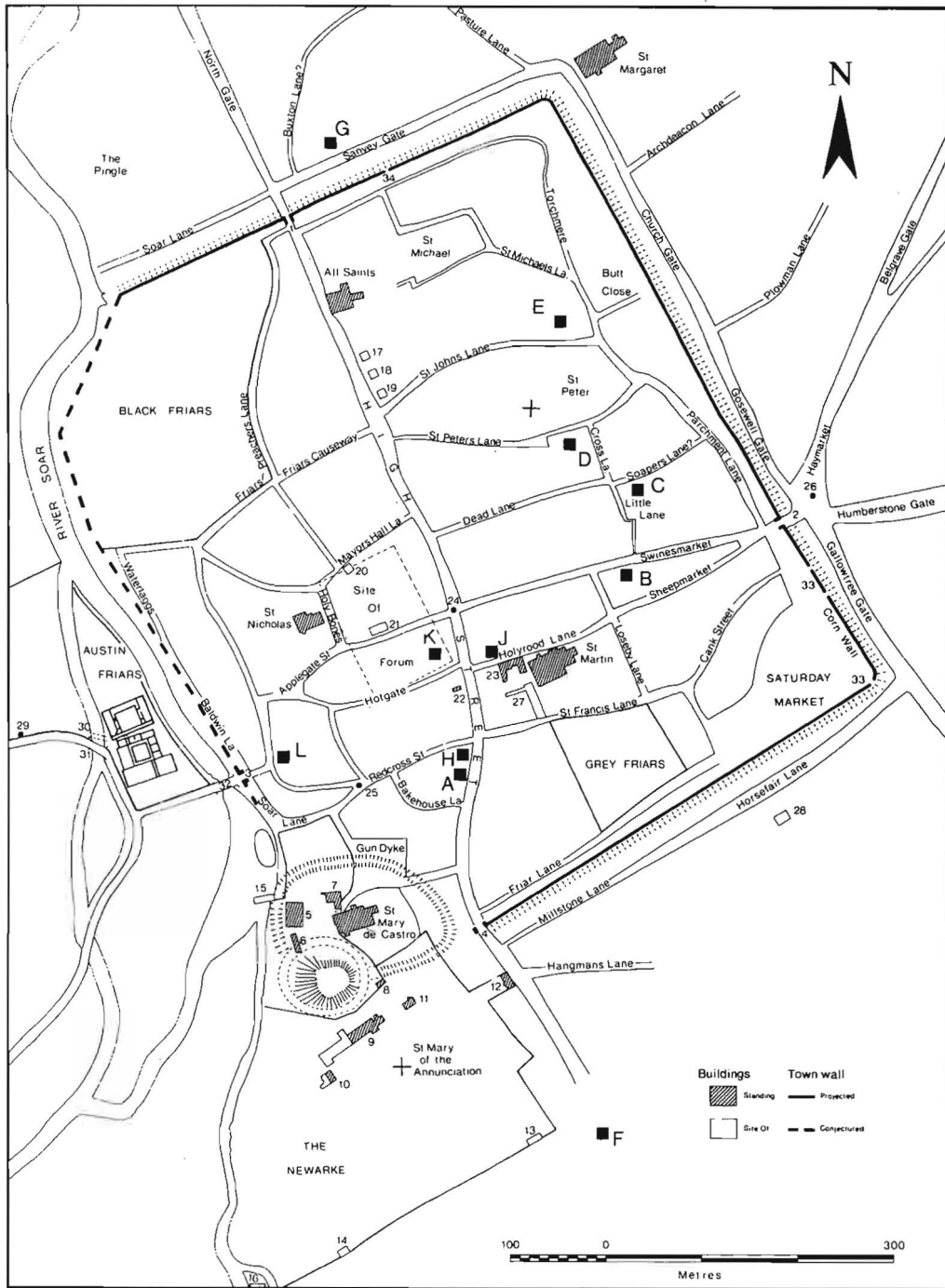
This article takes an interdisciplinary approach to the Saxon and medieval evolution of Leicester's landscape. Documentary, archaeological and architectural evidence is combined with comparative material from other N.W. European towns to propose a model of topographic organisation and development.

The present study of Leicester's urban topography arose out of documentary research on the Shires excavation project and the need to place its topography in a wider context. The main aim is to provide a starting point for debate on Leicester's topographic development and a theoretical framework for interpreting past and future archaeological finds. It is essential that the detailed interpretation of individual sites be placed in a wider context if archaeology is to add to our understanding of Leicester's evolution. Hohenberg and Lees (1985) chose Leicester to illustrate a typical north European medieval town in their influential overview of European urbanism over the last millennium. Certainly it is the contention of this current study that the processes that led to Leicester's current topographic form can be widely paralleled not only in other English urban centres but across north-western Europe.

The starting point for any research on Leicester is the body of material collected by John Nichols in volume 1 (part ii) of his county history published in 1815. The publication of the first volume of the borough records in 1899, edited by the notable urban historian Mary Bateson, began the modern phase of research into Leicester's history. This and the subsequent volumes, along with Nichols, were extensively used by Billson in his useful topographical account of 1920. In 1958, volume 4 of the Victoria County History provided the first modern historical account of the history of the town, though its purpose was to be a reliable source of reference rather than an interpretative history. Subsequent important summaries of the town's development include those by Brown (ed. 1972), Martin (1972), Simmons (1974) and Chinnery (1986a).

Origins

A Middle Anglian diocese was created out of the see of Lichfield in the 680s. Certainly from 737, and possibly from the beginning, it was located in Leicester. The bishopric of Leicester disappeared with the Viking invasion of the 870s and was replaced by a new see at Dorchester on Thames (Oxfordshire). In the reign of William the Conqueror the cathedral moved from Dorchester to Lincoln (Kirby 1966 and Bailey 1980). It is unclear to what extent Leicester was occupied in the two centuries before the see was created. Pagan-Saxon burials have been found outside the Roman walls at Westcotes, Rowley Fields, Churchgate and Belgrave Gate and further out at Glen Parva, Wigston, Oadby, Thurmaston and Birstall. This led Bailey (1980, 10) to suggest that the town was a focus of early Anglo-Saxon settlement. However, the significance of any such distribution is distorted by the fact that most of



1. Medieval Leicester (after Buckley and Lucas 1987, fig. 27)

Key to illus. 1 (Medieval Leicester).

Excavations (LM site code in brackets)

- A. Saxo-Norman pottery kiln, 1964 (A479).
- B. Cameo Cinema excavation, 1992 (A14).
- C. Shires excavation (Little Lane), 1988-9 (A39).
- D. Shires excavation (St Peter's Lane), 1988-9 (A40).
- E. Causeway Lane excavations, 1980 (A475) & 1991 (A1).
- F. Oxford St. excavation, 1993-4 (A168) and 1997 (A54).
- G. 71-95 Sanvey Gate excavation, 1992 (A61).
- H. Shakespeares Head excavation, Southgate St., 1968 (A138).
- J. Guildhall Lane undercroft, 1989 (A18).
- K. Forum excavations, 1971 (A302) and 1973 (A295).
- L. St. Nicholas Circle excavation, 1969 (A163).

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| 1. North Gate | 21. Common Ovens and Shambles |
| 2. East Gate | 22. Wygston's House |
| 3. West Gate | 23. Guildhall |
| 4. South Gate | 24. Highcross |
| 5. Castle Hall | 25. Red Cross |
| 6. John of Gaunt's Cellar | 26. Berehill Cross |
| 7. Castle House | 27. Wygston's Hospital |
| 8. Turret Gateway | 28. Old Barn |
| 9. Trinity Hospital | 29. St. Augustine's Well |
| 10. Chantry | 30. Little Bow Bridge |
| 11. Wygston's Chantry House | 31. Bow Bridge |
| 12. Newark Gate (Magazine) | 32. West Bridge |
| 13. Rupert's Tower | 33. Possible openings across the town wall:
market place |
| 14. Angular Tower | 34. Possible openings across the town wall: City
Wall Street |
| 15. Castle Mill | |
| 16. Newark Mill | |
| 17. Shire Hall | |
| 18. Gaol | |
| 19. St. John's Hospital | |
| 20. Old Guildhall (Mayor's Hall) | |

Note. The sites of St. Martins and St. Peter's churches are approximate. See Martin 1990 and LRO 1D63/23 for respective locations.

these sites would not have been found but for the 19th- and 20th-century expansion of Leicester and its commuter satellites. Nevertheless, there are several finds of early-Saxon objects from within Leicester's walls (Rutland 1975, 54-62 and Liddle 1982, 5). Two sunken feature buildings of early/middle-Saxon date have been excavated recently at sites on Oxford Street (Finn 1994; Gossip, this vol. below p.160). However, their situation (illus. 1: F) to the south of the town walls, may suggest a relationship with rural rather than proto-urban patterns of settlement. Recent excavations have also produced early/middle-Saxon pottery from the Little Lane (c. 29 sherds), St. Peter's Lane (c. 55 sherds) and Causeway Lane (c. 13 sherds) sites (illus. 1: C-E). On the St. Peter's Lane site a bone comb of late 5th- to early 6th-century date was also found (R. Buckley, pers. comm.). It is unclear if this evidence indicates a concentration of activity in the north-east area of the town as the stratigraphy is shallow and the excavations relatively large in area compared with many other parts of Leicester.

The urban location of the Leicester bishopric followed a common pattern. There has been marked controversy, notably with reference to Winchester, over whether or not such ecclesiastical centres were located next to pre-existing Anglo-Saxon royal centres. Biddle (1972) suggested that Winchester's cathedral of the 7th and 8th centuries was linked to an adjacent royal palace, though he admitted a lack of positive evidence. More recently, Yorke (1982) has argued firmly against an early royal presence at Winchester

and points to Southampton as the nearest royal centre. Deserted former Roman towns may have been attractive as unused land in the gift of kings and princes, and would have also offered ample building stone as well as symbolic links to the past. Another factor may have been the canons issued by early councils of the Christian church in 320 and 343 which ordered that bishops should have their seats in *urbes* or *civitates* (Hill 1977, 300). There are certainly indications of some post-Roman activity within the walls of Leicester. Indeed Hall (1989, 165-6) has noted, even before the recent Shires and Causeway Lane excavations, that the number of early-Saxon finds exceeds those in others of the later Five Boroughs (Lincoln, Stamford, Nottingham and Derby). Nevertheless, even if these finds constitute evidence for occupation this is far from indicating the presence of a site of high status. The geographic dispersal of 'urban' functions appears to be not uncommon in early Saxon England. A case can be made that the intimate association of bishopric and royalty was to a great extent a development of the late 8th century onwards, perhaps reflecting increasing Carolingian influence on the ideology of English kingship (Hodges 1989, 117-8 and 121-2).

Another possibility is that the early bishopric at Leicester was linked to a nearby rural royal site. Cain (1990, 20-1) has argued that Leicester may once have formed part of a royal estate centred on Ratby or Groby. In 1066 Ratby and Groby were held by Ulf and in 1086 were in the hands of Hugh Grandmesnil, castellan of Leicester. Among Ratby's sokelands were two carucates in Bromkinthorpe within the parish of St. Mary de Castro. Cain has suggested that this may indicate that Leicester split off from a royal manor based on Ratby or Groby. This must be considered a possibility but fission was not the only process at work in the evolution of estates. It is just as likely that Bromkinthorpe, or rather part of it, was an addition to Ratby which lay on the other side of Leicester Forest. It is also possible that Bromkinthorpe, whether or not once part of a Ratby estate, was only gradually encroached upon by the influence of the borough. Certainly the burgesses did not have common rights in the West Field from at least the 12th century onward (*RBL, passim*). The name 'Bromkinthorpe' is also suggestive of a separate (now lost) settlement nucleus. It is possible therefore that its connection to the borough did not originate in a great primary estate but instead derived from the later seigneurial interests of its lords, and may not pre-date the English reconquest of the Danelaw in the 10th century.

The presence of a *wic* (undefended trading centre) at middle-Saxon Leicester, at least before the reign of Offa (757-796), seems unlikely given the lack of evidence for this kind of settlement in Mercia. Certainly the *sceattas* of Aethelbald's reign (716-57) mostly occur not in the Mercian heartland, but widely scattered in a frontier zone between Middle Anglia and Essex, possibly indicating inter-tribal exchange via periodic fairs (Metcalf 1977). The laws of Offa's reign clearly indicate the presence of fortified *burhs* in Mercia (Brooks 1971), and archaeological evidence suggests that one phase of the town defences of Hereford dates to this general period. More controversially, Haslam (1987) has argued that Offa's reign saw the creation of a systematic defence system against the Vikings comprising *burhs* with attached markets. However, Hodges (1989, 143) has noted the lack of evidence for craft production in the Mercian *burhs* comparable with London or Ipswich. He argues that Mercia was more likely to have been served by periodic markets, whether or not controlled by *burhs*. The distribution of pennies of Offa's reign suggests that regular circulation was restricted to S.E. England and emphasises the importance of London as a Mercian *wic* (Hinton 1990, 62-3). In view of Leicester's ecclesiastical significance it should be noted that Sawyer (1981) has suggested that some early markets and fairs arose to serve the gatherings attracted by religious sites.

Williams (1984, 133) has suggested that it was the Danish occupation which gave a major stimulant to urbanism in Northampton at the beginning of the tenth century. He has drawn special attention to the finds of ten St. Edmund memorial coins from the town. These coins were minted by Danish settlers *c.* 880-910. A single St. Edmunds coin has recently been found in a residual context on the Little Lane (Shires) excavation (illus. 1: C) in Leicester, on the modern High St. (Courtney, forthcoming b). Both Leicester and Northampton are recorded together as centres of Danish armies by the *ASC* in 914 and 917. Leicester was recovered from the Danish when it surrendered peacefully to Aethelflaed in 918 (*ASC*), who died that summer. In *Domesday Book* (I, f.230a) the name of Leicester Forest was *Hereswood*, 'the army's wood' which presumably dates to the period of Danish occupation. Nevertheless, despite Leicester's military importance, it cannot be assumed that it had acquired an urban character by this period. Leicester temporarily fell to the Viking, Olaf Guthfrithsson, in 940 but the borough was recovered by Edmund in 942.

Many coins before Edgar's reform of 973 cannot be assigned to a mint as they often lack a mint name on the reverse. However, a mint was certainly established at Leicester in the reign of Athelstan (925-39) and was well established from the reign of Edgar (959-75) (Blunt et al 1989, 256 & 261). A recent study by Freeman (1985, 299-307) suggests there were four established moneymen at Leicester for much of the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042-66). Apart from the St. Edmund memorial penny from the Shires, only one 9th- to 11th-century coin has been reported from Leicester, a penny of Aethelred (Metcalf 1980, 43). However, this latter coin would appear to be an attribution in error for a find from South Croxton, subsequently published by Clough (1986). For comparison, Hinton (1986, 16) noted that 32 coins of the period 800-1100 had been recovered from Lincoln and 13 from Northampton in excavations since 1960. However, this difference probably largely reflects the lack of Saxo-Norman stratigraphy encountered in Leicester in contrast to the other two boroughs.

Settlement and topography

A feature interpreted as the stoke-pit of a Saxo-Norman pottery kiln, was excavated in 1964, on the west side of Southgate St. (Hebditch 1967-8). The kiln was sited on the edge of the modern street frontage but overlaid a Roman street surface (illus. 1: A). It produced wheel-thrown (reduced, sandy) wares akin to the Thetford products. Eight comparable vessels, which may be products of the Leicester kiln, have been found on the Flaxengate site in Lincoln in late 9th- to early 11th-century contexts (Gilmour 1988, 157). Other vessels, which may also be from Leicester, have been recovered from early 10th-century contexts at Northampton (McCarthy 1979, 163-4 and Gryspeerdt 1981, 118: fabric W36). A date-range within the late 9th to mid 10th centuries seems likely for the Leicester kiln by analogy with the locally-produced Northampton and Lincoln sandy wares. The location of the Leicester kiln on a main thoroughfare is intriguing. Potting in many towns, for example Thetford and Norwich, seems to be confined to the periphery, perhaps because of fire risk (Hinton 1990, 90). The Leicester kiln, however, was situated on the main street frontage of the town, though perhaps there were groups of buildings rather than a continuously built-up frontage. A kiln of approximately 7th- to early 10th-century date has been excavated in Horsemarket Street, Northampton. It also lies on the main N-S axial street within the presumed late-Saxon defences and is within 200m. of the middle-Saxon minster/palace

complex (Williams 1974). Tenth-century kiln wasters have also been found in Westgate St. (another axial street), in Gloucester, near the centre of the town (Vince 1979).

Only seven sherds tentatively identified as late-Saxon 'Leicester ware' have been excavated in Leicester. One came from a residual context from St. Nicholas Circle (Sawday 1994, 118 and table 17). Six sherds have been also noted from possible 10th-century contexts on the 1968 Shakespeare's Head site in Southgate St. (the medieval High St.), though this was only a short distance from the site of the Saxo-Norman kiln (illus. 1: H). Eighteen shell-tempered sherds of Lincoln origin have also recently been identified by Jane Young from excavations of medieval tenements on the site of the Roman forum (illus. 1: K) along the medieval High St. (A302 1971: 17 sherds and A295 1973: 1 sherd). These wares (Lincoln fabrics LKT and LSNS) date to the period between the late 9th and early 11th centuries (Gilmour 1988, 83 and 93; D. Sawday, *pers. comm.*). Mention should also be made of a rich group of Anglo-Scandinavian bonework found in Highcross St. (the medieval High Street) in 1864 (Cottrill 1946 nos. 18 and 200-3, Fox 1933 and Rutland 1975, no. 49c). This collection includes a late 11th-century beast-head terminal and a late 10th-/early 11th-century strap-end (Backhouse *et al.* 1984, nos. 133 and 274). There was also a beast-head knife handle, a double-ended bone pin and another possible knife handle. These finds were found 7ft deep, possibly at no. 25, Highcross St. It looks highly likely that Saxo-Norman occupation levels were disturbed by cellar construction. In the same street a bronze pendant with openwork animal ornament of 10th/11th century date was found during the demolition of St. John's Hospital (illus. 1: 19) in 1859 (Rutland 1975, no. 49b and Cottrill 1946, no. 199). Ring-headed pins of Viking type have been found in Cank St. and on the Jewry Wall excavation (Rutland 1975, nos. 45 and 52b; Kenyon 1948, 262 & fig.89: 14).

At the moment there is little pottery which can be assigned to the 11th century in Leicester other than a proportion of the small amounts of excavated Lincoln wares, Torksey/Thetford-type ware, and Stamford ware (D. Sawday, *pers. comm.*). An 11th-century pit has been recently excavated on the Cameo Cinema site on the Swinesmarket (modern High St.). However, it is probable that the useage of ceramics markedly increased in Leicester with the emergence of a local production centre at Potters Marston in the late 11th or early 12th centuries (Sawday 1991). Such a development may have been encouraged by the increasing commercialisation of the general economy (Britnell 1993; Britnell and Campbell 1995). Overall there does seem to be a concentration of late-Saxon archaeological finds on the medieval High St. (illus. 1). It is possible that the tenth century saw both growth and reorganisation of settlement associated with the emergence of a truly urban economy.

The documentary evidence also sheds some light on the much discussed location of the Anglo-Scandinavian borough. An inquest in 1253 inquired into the origin of *gafolpence* and *pontage*, both payments to the earl, in Leicester (RBL i, 39-43). The explanation given, almost certainly apocryphal, states that *gafolpence* of 3d a year was due from every house with a gable looking onto High Street (*alta strata*). The *alta strata* certainly refers to the entire length of the N-S axial road (modern Highcross and Southgate Streets). The primacy of this street is also suggested by its width, it clearly stands out as still Leicester's widest street on the 1888 OS map. It seems likely that it was the *magnus vicus* (great street) in which a house (*mansura*), held in burgage, was granted to Nuneaton Priory in the 12th century (Stenton 1920, nos. 246 and 259). However, by the 13th century the plural-term 'high streets' may also have covered the four axial streets

of the town leading to the gates, as it clearly did in an order of 1355 forbidding the wandering of pigs. The other roads in 1355 were described as lanes (*RBL* ii, 103).

The collection of *gafolpence* or *landgavel* represents an archaic payment of Saxon origin which was originally one of the chief features of burgage tenure (Tait 1936, 90-1). Its limited application in Leicester suggests that at some point it became fossilized and new urban properties did not pay the tax. Similar fossilization is evident at Cambridge, where the tax remained constant after 1086 (*ibid*, 91). Langton (1977, 268) has suggested that *landgavel* in Gloucester was applied at the creation of the borough in the tenth century and not extended thereafter to new properties, except through fragmentation. However, Heighway (1984a, 45) has noted that unlike other towns it was a variable tax, suggesting a late origin and that its distribution accords better with the archaeological evidence for 11th and 12th century settlement. Unfortunately we do not know at what point in the Saxo-Norman period in Leicester the geographical extent of *gafolpence* collection was fossilised though a pre-Norman date seems highly likely. It certainly suggests a primary zone of settlement in Leicester along the north-south axial street.

The lack of late-Saxon archaeology from Leicester itself is not altogether surprising. The geographic spread of the town until at least the 11th century was probably very restricted. The axial streets have been badly destroyed by development including the 1902 widening of the north side of High Street and the construction of Southgates underpass of the 1960s. Damage to Saxon layers by later medieval occupation may have been considerable, but 19th century cellaring has probably been the most damaging (cf. Lucas 1980-1, fig.7). Most importantly it should be noted that much of the excavation in Leicester has concentrated on the areas beyond the axial frontages. Even in Gloucester and Hereford where late-Saxon features have been excavated, the amount of tenth-century pottery is not large. Late-Saxon pits occur in both towns but are relatively rare (Shoemith 1982; Heighway 1984a and 1984b). Recent work at Lincoln suggests an 11th century date for the inception of widespread pit digging (Gilmour 1988) while the 12th century seems to herald the same phenomenon in Leicester (D. Sawday, pers. comm.)

Ethno-archaeological research, for instance that carried out in Central America by Hayden and Cannon (1983) suggests that the prime purpose for dumping rubbish in pits is to prevent inorganic items, notably ceramic sherds and bones, from interfering with gardening activities. A number of factors including the increasing density of urban population, decreasing accessibility of the town fields and rising ceramic usage may have led to the increasing use of rubbish pits. However, Hayden and Cannon's research also noted that rubbish might be dumped in pits dug initially for other purposes. This is an area clearly deserving more detailed analysis. It is uncertain if a perceived decline of pit digging after the 13th century in Leicester (R. Buckley, pers. comm.) is an indication of demographic contraction or changing patterns of rubbish disposal. In 1467 a borough ordinance obliged householders to keep the street clean in front of their house. A further ordinance of 1508 forbade the dumping of rubbish on the streets both within the walls and in the suburbs. It also ordered that rubbish be disposed of at four communal dumps on the urban periphery: at the end of Belgrave Gate, in the field beyond Gallowtree Gate end, beyond the Horse Fair and on the banks of the River Soar by the communal privy (*RBL* ii, 290-1 and 380). It is uncertain to what extent these references record earlier practices.

It has been often suggested that there is an element of planning in the layout of Leicester's streets with evidence of a rudimentary grid and at least remnants of an outer road following the inside of the defences (e.g. Buckley and Lucas 1987, 56-7). The main determining feature of this pattern, the Roman defences and gates, may well have

given rise to it through organic growth and/or piecemeal planning. It will be necessary to show archaeologically that the elements ancillary to the main axial streets date to a common period to confirm the theory of planning (cf. Hall 1989, 168 and Williams 1979, 140). It should be remembered, however, that the pattern of non-axial streets could predate any occupation along them. There are distinct similarities between the early plans of Leicester and Gloucester. The latter's regular, rectilinear street-plan, though limited to its eastern side, does, however, offer a sharp contrast to Leicester. Nevertheless a lack of overall planning does not rule out the possibility of smaller, planned blocks of properties having been laid out within parts of Leicester.

Buckley and Lucas (1987, 56) have suggested that the N-S axial street skirts the site of the forum suggesting it was still standing as a ruin perhaps even into the late-Saxon period. Lucas (1980-1) in his survey of urban deposition has noted a thinning of deposits over the forum. Certainly excavations on the forum site suggest that the structure remained standing, at least in part, well into the post-Norman period (R. Buckley and J. Lucas, pers. comm.). On the other hand the western half of the main E-W axial street crosses the forum, which may suggest a later date for this street. It was certainly the least significant of the axial streets and topographically cannot be differentiated from the adjacent lanes. One peculiarity of plan is the way the E-W street curves south to the West Bridge. One possibility is that a bridge originally lay further north and was moved when the Austin Friary was established, though no evidence for this was found during the Friary excavations (Mellor and Pearce 1981). If there was such a bridge and a street leading to it, it would result in a better E-W symmetry of the town's street plan, with only the non-axial streets curving north and south from the West Bridge and East Gate towards the N-S axial road. However, it seems a great expense to have built a new bridge when there was presumably plenty of space to site the friary on the south end of its island. Possibly the bridge was sited where it is because this was the easiest crossing-point, or because it post-dated the development of the street pattern around the church of St. Nicholas. A ferry or ford may formerly have sufficed. Perhaps more likely is that the site of the medieval west gate respects the position of its Roman predecessor. (cf. Buckley and Lucas 1986, figs. 24 and 26). The E-W axial street could then be seen as heading from the east gate in a fairly direct line towards St. Nicholas and then curving round to the Roman gate. Alternatively, the St. Nicholas area street-plan may have developed at a time when the western route out of the town was insignificant. The focus of settlement in this area may thus have been the church itself.

The curvilinear aspect of the non-axial streets has also been noted by Lilley (1991) in a recent plan-unit analysis of Leicester based on the 1888 Ordnance Survey map. No clear pattern of burgage size variation is apparent as may be discerned in many other old county towns (Baker 1992). Lilley instead relies upon 'seams' in the pattern of street and property bounds to delineate plan-units. It is argued that these reflect units of urban growth. He suggests three main plan units centred on St. Nicholas, the High Cross and St. Martin's. This is indeed the area of most concentrated urban development. However, it is not at all clear that such blocks represent either planned units or phases of expansion. The arguments made above in the present article would instead suggest that the street and plot pattern arose only as the end result of a complex evolutionary process based on an earlier axial street system. The choice of some of Lilley's seams also appears to be arbitrary, nor does he take sufficiently into account amalgamation of medieval plots. For instance, why choose Dead Lane rather than the All Saints/St. Peter's parish boundary or even St. Peter's Lane as a seam (see Courtney, *forthcoming a*).

on this area). Lilley's main argument, though, is that the curvilinear bounds to these units imply an earlier intra-mural defensive circuit. Certainly a curvilinear aspect to the non-axial streets exists but this does not necessarily imply a defensive enclosure.

There are undoubtedly greater difficulties in applying plan-unit analysis to large towns with complex 'organic' histories and active land-markets than to the small planned towns in which the method was developed (Baker 1992). It is of course possible that the non-axial streets existed long before they were developed for housing. Potentially, therefore, they could still fossilise an early defensive circuit. The suggested primacy of the north-south and possibly east-west axial roads, combined with the funnelling effects of the gates, might also tend to give rise to curvilinear backlanes without their necessarily indicating a defensive barrier. This would be the case especially if the street layout was unplanned. In particular it should also be remembered that Leicester was not flat but that the ground sloped to the north as well as to the east and west of an approximately central north-south axis (Lucas 1980-1, figs.2-4). Furthermore, curvilinear features can be seen in the lanes (e.g. Friars Preachers Lane, Torchemere and St. John's Lane: illus. 1) to the north of Lilley's postulated defence, which cannot be explained by its existence.

The concept of intra-mural enceintes cannot be discounted though the suggested circuit poses several military problems. It might be thought that it would have been more efficient to utilise a corner of the existing defences, especially as Lilley's enclosure constitutes nearly half the later town. However, more alarming is that the line of the suggested eastern enceinte (alongside Parchment Lane) was within a stone's throw of the Roman walls which would have considerably weakened its military effectiveness by providing a ready-made siegework. It is possible that there was a Viking defence of some sort dating from the period of English reconquest, but so far there is a lack of archaeological evidence for such urban defences elsewhere in the Danelaw. It is possible that Leicester's eroded Roman defences continued to serve as the bounds of whatever urban settlement had developed at Leicester. It is more certain that the town was a military meeting-place, and Phythian-Adams (1986, 10) suggests that the Skeyth (O.Danish, 'race-track' or 'boundary road'), later Sanvey Gate, possibly served as the site for both races and communal gatherings (see also Cox 1971, 129-30).

Martin (1972, 268) has argued that the concentration of churches in the northern part of the town indicates a concentration of population. However, the distribution of urban churches may be more a reflection of the distribution of urban estates or fees rather than demography. We can postulate a phase when urban development was largely confined to the axial streets and possibly only the north-south axis, the medieval High Street. Subsequently the outer quarters would have been infilled. Of the borough's intra-mural churches, St. Nicholas and All Saints lie on the primary axial core but St. Michael's, St. Peter's and St. Martin's all lie in back streets. Recent excavations at the Shires and Causeway Lane (illus. 1: C-E) have produced 12th- to early 13th-century pit groups containing Potters Marston ware and other fabrics, such as Nottingham and Leicester splashed wares (D. Sawday, pers. comm.). Material of a similar date is also associated with the earliest traces of medieval settlement recently uncovered in Sanvey Gate, outside the north wall (Finn 1992). A late 12th-century stone undercroft (cellar) has recently been rediscovered and surveyed by the archaeology unit in Guildhall Lane (illus. 1: J) and indicates a high status, stone-built house with a hall over an undercroft (Hagar and Buckley 1990). A second stone hall (*aula lapidea*), belonging to Leicester Abbey, is recorded by Charyte's rental as being situated on the south side of St. Peter's cemetery. (Laud 625, fos.97v, 178v and 189r). A deed of 1725 locates the cemetery about 30 yards south of St. John's Lane (LRO 1D63/23). The hall was therefore

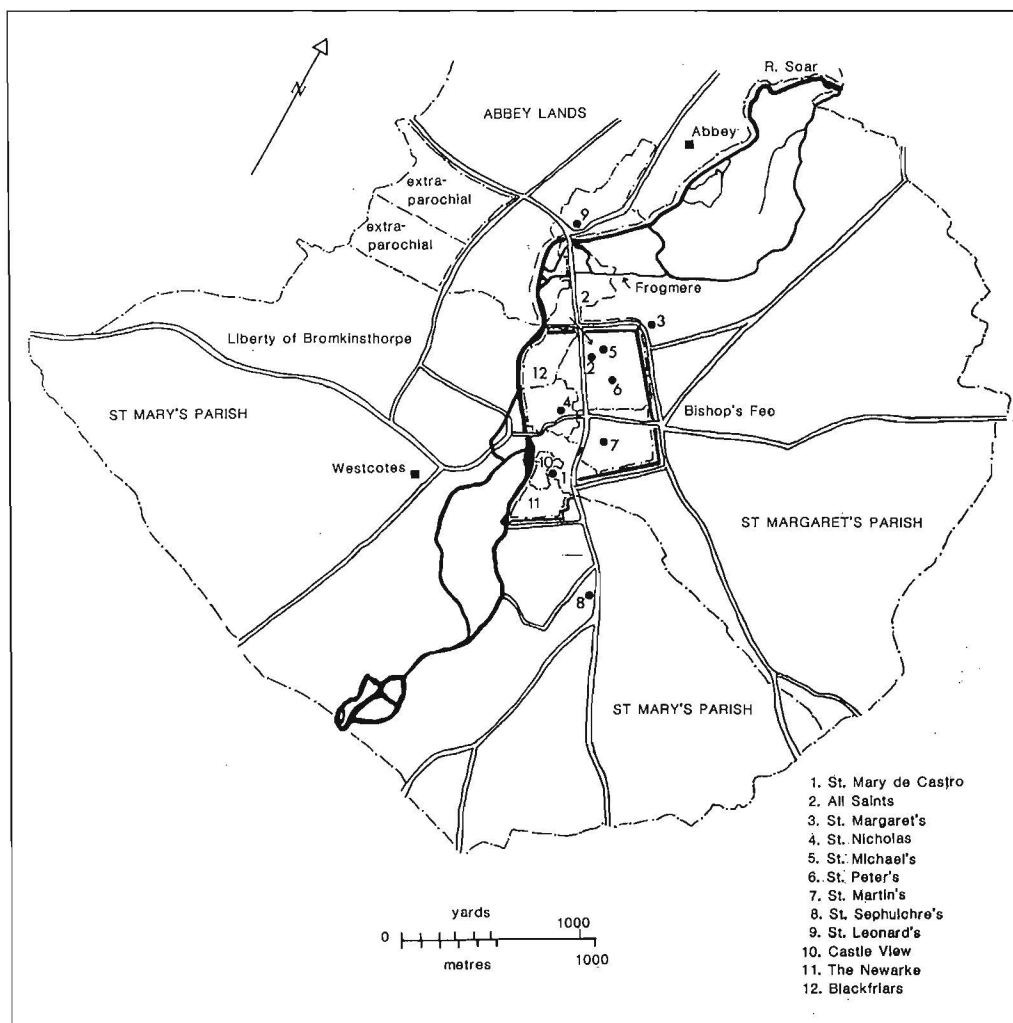
probably located on the north side of St. Peter's Lane. It was rented by the abbey to lord William de Herle in 1341, and was said to have been formerly tenanted by William Wascena, probably the William de Wasteneis or Wasteneys who held a fee at Kirby Bellars *c.* 1230. The hall is last recorded in 1477 when it was rented by William de Hastings, whose family had inherited the de Herle estates in 1367. This building could also have been a late 12th-century, town house of the Jew's House (Lincoln) type with a first-floor hall (see Wood 1965, 1-15).

Little excavation has taken place along the axial roads. Exceptions are the forum site of the 1960s along the west side of Highcross St. and the 1992 excavation on the site of the Cameo cinema (illus. 1: B), on the south side of High St. (Cooper 1992 and Julian Hagar, pers. comm.). On both sites the first evidence for structures or boundaries was dated to the 13th century. The forum site may not be typical because it may have continued to be used as a stone quarry after the Norman Conquest. On neither site was it possible, owing to cellaring and safety considerations, to examine the immediate street frontage. The shop-units of the later medieval buildings on both sites were not recovered but only the hall and kitchen blocks behind. It is possible that evidence for pre-13th century occupation will only be found closer to the frontages. Certainly 13th-century and later occupation is much more archaeologically visible due to improvements in housing, with elongate plans which run back from the frontages, and the use of stone construction for foundations and boundary walls. As mentioned above, late-Saxon pottery was recovered from residual contexts on the forum site, and an 11th-century pit was found on the Cameo excavations. However, the sparsity of evidence for 12th-century occupation on both sites, a period when digging of refuse pits in Leicester was common, is striking. Before the 13th century the Cameo site appears to have been cultivated. More comparative evidence is needed, but the above excavated sites do suggest infilling of settlement. It is thus possible that the sub-division of large, early properties, or communal areas, into narrow 'burgage' plots may still have been taking place along the axial streets in the 13th century. The sub-division of properties in Winchester appears to have been a long drawn out process, reflecting population expansion, and is traceable from the 10th to 12th centuries (Biddle and Keene 1976a, 343).

The mint and north suburb

The foundation charter of Leicester Abbey (*c.* 1139) included the grant of 5 virgates and 8 houses (*mansiones*) outside the North Gate (Crouch 1990, 7-9). In addition the grant included a carucate at the North Bridge which had lain at the mint (*Ad pontem de Norht carrucatem terre que iacebat olim ad cuneos monete*). The reasons for the removal of the mint from the north suburb and its subsequent location are uncertain. The last coinage which can be ascribed to the Leicester mint is the Tealby Type A coinage of *c.* 1158-61 (North 1980, ii, 1840). The evidence of Winchester suggests that Leicester's mint may have comprised a number of distinct moneyer's workshops rather than a single structure. At Winchester five *monete* or workshops stood close together in the High St. in the early 12th century (Biddle and Keene 1976a, 397-99). Unfortunately the Abbey charter does not indicate on which side of the bridge Leicester's mint was located. However, the mint is most likely to have been located within, or adjacent to, the area defined by the abbey's parish of St. Leonards (36 acres in 1891).

In 1477 the abbey had 24 messuages, 34 cottages and a bark house in Abbey Gate and 2 messuages and 5 cottages in Woodgate, probably all within the parish of St. Leonard's. The parish also included part of the island (now Frog Island) to the south of



2. Leicester Parishes in the 16th century (based on Charman 1951)

the North Bridge. This was separated from the town by the stream known as the Frogmere, crossed by a further bridge. It is uncertain to what extent the course of the canal in the 1790s. The New Rental of 1477 also locates the abbot's mill, 5 cottages, 2 messuages and 3 tenements in the Frog Island part of the parish (*Laud* 625, fos. 190r-192v). The above total of 28 messuages, 3 tenements and 44 cottages contrasts with approximately 115 tenements, buildings or cottages listed in St. Leonard's parish in 1341 suggesting marked late-medieval contraction (*Laud* 625, fos. 94v-95r). The abbey also held 3 cottages in St. Margaret's parish 'above frogm(ere) bank' in 1477. The first Leicester guild roll lists an Aldwin de Frogmere in 1196 and a Herbert de Frogmere in 1199 (*RBL* i, 14 & 17). The borough bounds for rate purposes extended to the North

Bridge in the 19th century and in the medieval period the town and not the abbey was responsible for the bridge's upkeep (*RBL*, *passim*). Certainly Frog Island may have provided a suitably protected location for a mint.

Mints are strongly associated with boroughs in the late-Saxon period (Loyn 1961) and a law of Athelstan (924-39) specifies 'no one is to mint money except in a borough' (*II Athelstan 14*). In the absence of an episcopal connection it seems likely that the Leicester mint would have operated under the authority of the King, though it would theoretically have been possible for that authority to be granted to the earl (see Freeman 1985, 77). At the very least this seems to suggest a well-developed suburb at the North Bridge (whether on the north or south side) in the immediate post-Conquest period. It is noticeable that the only urban church besides St. Mary's to have its parish extending beyond the walls is All Saints (fig.2). Parochially, Northgate St. is divided between All Saints and St. Margaret's suggesting that this suburb was already well established by at least the 12th century when the parochial system became fossilized. A surprisingly high proportion of the measly collection (around 300 before the 16th century) of medieval deeds to survive in the borough archives also relates to this suburb (*RBL* i & ii, *passim*). Presumably this reflects the relative uncertainty of holding land in an area where authority was divided between the borough, abbot and bishop.

References in deeds to the *vico fullonum* (Fuller's Street, later Walker's or Soar Lane) just outside the North Gate suggest that this extramural area was the centre of the fulling industry from at least the 13th century (*RBL* i, 381). In 1608, 19 of the town's 27 tanners lived outside the North Gate and six of the remaining eight dwelt in the adjacent intramural ward (Chinnery 1986b). It seems possible that this industry too had medieval roots in the north suburb, though one would expect it to be located downstream of the fullers as tannin can discolour cloth (Guillermé 1988, 99). Tanning and fulling needed both space and water and Frog Island was still the site of a tannery and adjacent bleach-yard in the 19th century. It is not inconceivable that the north suburb was a specialised industrial area from its very beginnings, whether pre- or post-Conquest. It is unclear, however, whether this industrial character also extended to the abbot's suburb in St. Leonard's parish. However, the displacement in 12th and 13th century Winchester of the tanners from Tanner Street, by the clothing trades, and their subsequent movement to the eastern suburb is a reminder that occupational geography might be dynamic (Keene 1985, 287).

If a suburb already lay across the North Bridge, or on Frog Island, before the foundation of the abbey it would invite comparison with the suburb of Wigford in Lincoln. Wigford lay south of the R. Witham from the walled town of Lincoln with marsh to its east and west. Archaeological evidence points to an origin in the early 10th century rather than to a middle-Saxon *wic* (CA 1992). A possible origin for both the Lincoln and postulated Leicester suburbs might be, as at Stamford, that they represent English *burhs* founded in the early 10th century after Edward the Elder's reconquest of the Danelaw. The 12th century chronicler Hugh Candidus notes that the abbot's mint at Stamford lay in the suburb south of the river. This was the area of the former site of the Edwardian *burh* (Mahany and Roffe 1982, 206; *H. Can.*, 70). Bridgehead *burhs* were founded next to several existing Danish boroughs by Edward including Nottingham and Stamford. These *burhs* presumably served to keep a eye on the reconquered Danish boroughs, to control the important bridges and movement along the rivers (when navigable). The Soar was hardly an important artery even if navigable at this date, but the North Bridge at Leicester certainly controlled the chief route northwards towards Leicester Forest (where the burgesses had extensive rights) and probably on to Ashby and Derby. However, the chief

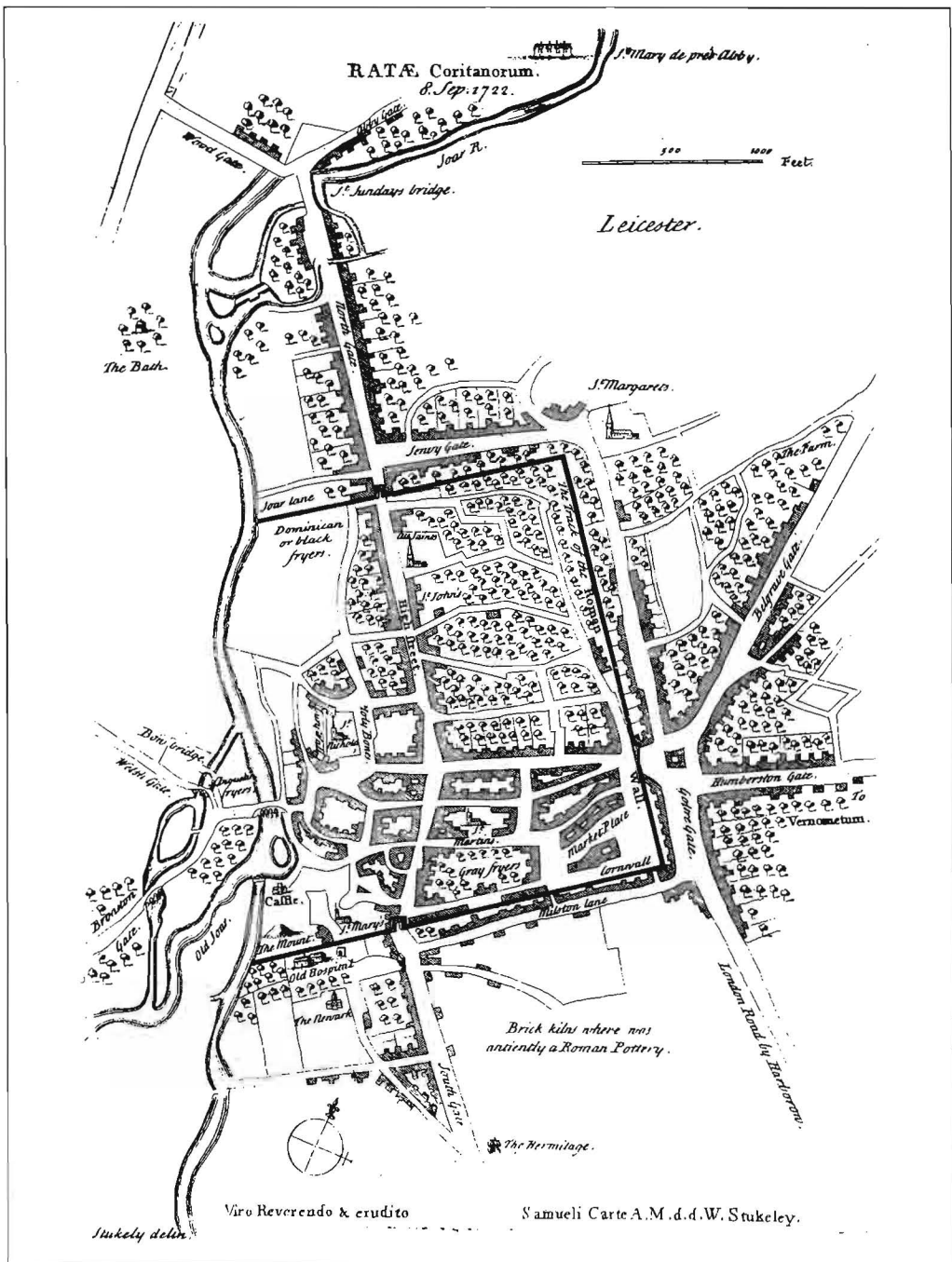
artery to Lincoln (and perhaps Nottingham) along the Fosse Way lay east of the Soar. Moreover, a *burh* origin is also unlikely for the southern suburb of Hereford, located across the R. Wye, which has occupation dating back to the 10th century (Rahtz 1977, 126).

No double *burhs* are recorded as having been founded by Aethelflaed (d.918), though the Mercian Register which records her exploits is more laconic than the A text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which describes Edward's campaign. An Aethelflaedan borough at Derby may be suggested by archaeological evidence for a late-Saxon refortification of the Roman fort of Little Chester on the opposite bank of the Derwent (Hall 1989, 153-63). However, as no fortifications have been identified in Derby itself, Little Chester may have been fortified earlier by the Danes. The *ASC* records that Aethelflaed lost several of her thegns 'within the gates' at Derby in 917. Clearly the suggestion of an early 10th-century English *burh* at Leicester is highly tenuous and is hardly necessary to explain the emergence of an early extra-mural suburb along the town's chief thoroughfare. It seems more likely that it was the commercial opportunities presented by the movement of people across the bridge which promoted suburban growth at Leicester and Lincoln. The town walls of Leicester and Lincoln may have had much less impact on their topographic development than is generally thought. Hopefully more attention by archaeologists will be paid in future towards the North Bridge area and the more general question of the date of origin of Leicester's suburbs.

One might tentatively suggest that the division of at least some late-Saxon towns may have paralleled the Pirenne (1925) derived model of *castrum*, *burgus* and *faubourg* suggested for many centres across the Channel, for instance, 11th century Lille (see Blicke & Guiffroy 1994, fig.1). This can put alternatively as a division between the lordly space of the enclosed hall, the merchant's borough and the suburb with its wage labourers and industries. However, the functions of the borough and suburb are likely to have often overlapped, for instance, early markets may have been located outside the defences as at Stamford and Lübeck (Mahany and Roffe 1982; Fehring 1989, 61-4).

Other suburbs

Domesday Book (I, f.230d) records 12 bordars or smallholders (as well as 3 villeins and a priest) on the bishop's fee. These dwellings may have been located either adjacent to the bishop's manor-house, on the east side of St. Margaret's church, or at the heart of the later settlement in the bishop's fee along Belgrave Gate. Such settlements of bordars/cottars outside boroughs, as Professor Dyer (1985) has demonstrated, are quite common; whether created by lords or growing more spontaneously. Some of their income may have come from the land but they must also have been actively involved in the economic life of the town. The earliest evidence for suburban development on the earl's fee comes from deeds of the late 13th century onwards. This suburb had its cottages (e.g. *HMC Hastings* i, 63) but deeds referring to capital messuages, and on one occasion to an adjoining court and gate, suggest more substantial tenants (e.g. *RBL* i, 389 & 398; see also LRO Rothley Temple deeds). There is a reference to a bread oven on the earl's fee in this suburb in 1204 though this could have been recently acquired from the bishop, who was forced to exchange his manor with the earl in 1203-4 but succeeded in recovering it in 1217. (*HMC Hastings* i, 335-6 & 341; *Reg. Antiq.* ii, 215-27). By the early-modern period the part of the suburb along Gallowtree and Humberstone Gates formed the wealthiest part of the borough. In 1627 a survey and map of the Bishop's Fee, then held by the Cavendish family, reveals that 40 tenants then owed suit to its court (*Senior Survey*, 95-6; *CH Atlas* f.36).



3. William Stukeley's 1722 map of Leicester.

Suburban development can also be shown to have existed along Southgate St. (now Oxford St.) by c.1200 when a charter indicates that both burgesses and customary (peasant) tenants were living outside the South Gate (*RBL* i, 10-11). The south suburb had its own bread oven, possibly a relict of its former status as a separate fee (*ibid* and *HMC Hastings* i, 355-6). A rent of hens recorded in 1204 from without the south gate points to the continued presence of customary tenants (*HMC Hastings* i, 335-6). The 1524 and 1544 Lay Subsidies show the south suburb (Southgate, Horsefair and Millstone Lane) to have been the poorest area of Leicester (Hoskins 1962, 92 and Charman 1951, 27). It was no coincidence that it was the only suburb to be demolished by the Parliamentary defenders preparing for the siege of the borough in 1645 (Courtney & Courtney 1992).

The western suburb was perhaps the least significant but also the least recognised. The earliest reference to property outside the West Gate is in a 12th-century charter which grants a property (*mansura*) outside the gate to Nuneaton priory. Unlike another *mansura* in the 'great street', granted in the same deed, it was not described as being held in burgage (Stenton 1920, nos. 246 & 259). A foot of fine of 1199/1200 refers to a third of a messuage in the suburb next the West Bridge, and a similar document of 1202 deals with a messuage outside the West Gate (Fletcher 1895-6, 215 and 1897-8, 240-1). In 1304 three messuages probably on the island east of the West Bridge had been granted to the Austin friars to enlarge their site (*CPR 1301-7*, 268 and Martin 1981, 1). A Leicester Abbey register (Charyte's Rental) records 3 cottages in Walshegate (immediately outside the West Gate) in 1477, though it is not clear whether they lay on the island (*Laud 625*, f.100r). Some occupation clearly continued in this area after the foundation of the friary, since a property is located in the suburb outside the West Gate in the reign of Edward II (1307-27) (*Cat.Anc.Deeds* i, no.C110). Charyte's rental also indicates other tenements and cottages lying west of the river in Braunstone Gate, within the liberty of Bromkinsthorpe (*Laud 625*, f.179v). The post-Dissolution manor of Westcotes probably derived its name from this suburban development, though there is no evidence of the name being used in the medieval period. The 1722 Stukeley (illus. 3) and 1741 Roberts maps of Leicester suggest that the cottage settlement in Braunstone Gate may have been abandoned in the early-modern period. This might reflect the falling population of the city and/or economic changes associated with the Dissolution.

Urban landscapes were not composed of undifferentiated space developed in a systematic pattern but were strongly affected by patterns of lordship and ownership. Gloucester offers a close parallel to the model suggested above. The distribution of 10th-century pottery in Gloucester suggests development was confined to the frontages of the axial streets with some suburban occupation outside the North Gate. Infilling of the back streets seems to have begun in the mid 11th century, but only in the 12th century do they show signs of being densely built up. There was still room for the extensive Blackfriars and Greyfriars precincts to be created in the south part of the intra-mural area in the 13th century (Heighway 1984a and 1984b).

The picture painted above of extra-mural suburbs existing alongside empty areas within the walls at both Leicester and Gloucester should not cause surprise. The manor of Hungate in the western area of the Roman walled town at Lincoln retained a rural character well throughout the medieval period (Hill 1927) while the extra-mural suburb of Wigford was occupied in the early 10th century (CA 1992). Finds of late Saxon pottery also suggest the possibility of suburban settlement outside the Roman east gate of Chester, along Foregate Street, though occupation outside the southern Roman gate may have lain within the *burh* (Ward 1994, 118-9; Carrington 1996 and K. Matthews,

pers. comm.). Domesday Book indicates that 45 *mansiones* lay outside the walls of Canterbury (Urry 1967, 186)

Domesday Leicester

Domesday Book (I, fos.230r & 231v) records 322 houses and a further 55 burgesses in Leicester in 1086. It has been suggested that Leicester was the largest borough in the Midlands (Millward 1972, 232). As far as can be determined from the inconsistent presentation of Domesday towns, Leicester was certainly larger than Nottingham, Derby and Northampton. However, it may have been slightly smaller than Stamford which had 405 $\frac{1}{2}$ *mansiones* in 1086 even with the omission of any data for the suburb south of the Welland (Darby 1977, 364-6). Lincoln appears to have been considerably larger with 900 *mansiones* in 1066. Leicester's farm in 1066 (the annual sum it paid the crown) was £30 compared to £20 at Lincoln and £15 at Stamford. It is unclear, though, on what principles levels of farm were based and some boroughs paid lump sums to maintain an artificially low farm (see Biddle and Keene 1976b, 499-501).

In 1072 the council of Winchester sealed the fate of Dorchester as the seat of the bishopric by deciding that all sees should be located in towns. The bishopric was moved, though, to Lincoln rather than to its former locale in Leicester. This along with Lincoln's more complex plan and parochial development and rich Saxo-Norman ceramic assemblages (Gilmour 1988) are all suggestive of its leading commercial role in the East Midlands, not surprising considering the size of its hinterland and access to the North sea coast. Phythian-Adams (1986, 10) and Cain (1990, 5) suggest that Leicester played a leading political role in the mid 10th-century confederacy of the Five Boroughs; however, Roffe (1986, 122) assigns this function to Nottingham.

The relationship of urban and rural economies in the late-Saxon period remains a key problem. The 10th century appears to have seen not only a burst of urban expansion in the Midlands but also the creation of the first villages, at least in the river valleys, on the evidence of recent field-work at Raunds (Northants.) and elsewhere (Parry, *forthcoming*). The French historian George Duby (1974) has linked the initial rise of urbanism in this period with the growth of 'feudal' lordship in the countryside. He argued that seigneurial exaction was an important factor behind increased peasant productivity and innovation. Furthermore he suggested that lordly consumption of luxury goods was the driving force behind urban growth in the 10th-12th centuries. However, more recently it has been suggested that the peasantry may also have played a more active role in stimulating economic growth and change both as producers and consumers (Dyer 1995; Courtney, *forthcoming e*). The relative roles in the tenth century transformation of the money supply, population expansion and class conflict continue to be the subject of fierce debate.

Leicester had four chief fees, belonging to the King, the bishop of Lincoln, Hugh de Grandmesnil and Countess Judith. Other minor holders included: Coventry Abbey (10 houses), Crowland Abbey (3), the archbishop of York (2) and earl Hugh of Chester (17). The bishop of Lincoln, had 17 burgesses associated with his adjacent rural manor. A recent analysis by Cain (1990, 17-9) suggests that the Leicester holdings of Countess Judith (the Conqueror's niece) and Hugh were derived from the fief of earl Waltheof, Judith's husband, who was executed for rebellion in 1076. It thus seems likely that the lands of Hugh de Grandmesnil and Countess Judith in Leicester once formed a single estate with a consolidated extra-mural rural estate to the south and west of the town,

perhaps co-terminous with the parish of St. Mary de Castro (which would originally have included the extra-parochial lands of the abbey). A similar late-Saxon comital estates, with origins probably also linked to the needs of borough defence, existed outside the Anglo-Scandinavian, 'English' borough at Nottingham. It had belonged to earl Tosti before the Norman Conquest and subsequently became the site of the new Anglo-Norman, 'French' borough (Roffe 1990a, 26-7).

The rural estate of the bishop of Lincoln was the other major fee recorded by Domesday Book (I, f.230v) and was located on the east side of Leicester. At the beginning of the 12th century, Robert de Meulan acquired first the share of Ivo, son of Hugh de Grandmesnil and then in the words of Orderic Vitalis 'with the King's aid and his own cunning brought the whole town under his control' (*Ord. Vit.* vi, 18-20). There is no contemporary evidence for the bishop of Lincoln's estate being of pre-Conquest origin. Daniel Williams (1990, 1-12) has highlighted Leicester's Domesday status as a *civitas*, a term which he argues is strictly associated with the presence of the bishop of Lincoln's estate within and without the walls. The flexible use of this term in Domesday, however, suggests that it was used very loosely to describe large, ancient towns which tended to have, but by no means invariably, Roman origins or an episcopal presence. Indeed in the Exeter version of Domesday the term *civitas* was used for the small royal borough of Lydford in Devon which had none of these characteristics (Darby 1977, 289-90 and Reynolds 1982, 97 and 197). Even more dubious is the argument that the application of *civitas* to Leicester in the *ASC* for 943 indicates *cathedra* status for St. Margaret's and the presence of an episcopal palace (Williams 1990, 4-6). However, the estate falls within a overall pattern, which can only be pre-Norman in origin, of the bishop's concentrating lands around the leading towns of the diocese. Other such estates are found at Buckingham, Huntingdon, Oxford and Dorchester, for example, and only Northampton seems to be an exception in the diocese (Crouch 1993, 10). The leading towns became increasingly important as centres of royal administration in the 10th and early 11th centuries and an episcopal presence was advantageous. A strong case can therefore be made for both the episcopal estate and St. Margaret's being of pre-Norman origin.

Ecclesiastical

Domesday Book mentions four churches in Leicester in which Hugh de Grandmesnil had a financial interest. Two are given in a separate entry along with two houses and four waste houses. It has been suggested that the two houses might belong to the priests and that the four 'waste' (valueless) houses may have been destroyed by the construction of the castle (Chinnery 1986a, 46). If so, one of the churches was probably St. Mary de Castro (Cain 1990, 21). Two other churches are recorded as belonging to the bishop of Lincoln. However, this list should not necessarily be assumed to be comprehensive as several other fees existed in the town. Unfortunately the amalgamation of urban fees by Robert de Meulan in the early 12th century does not allow Hugh's four churches to be identified, except that St. Mary's must have been included. The earliest detailed list of Leicester's churches is in the 1220 *matriculus* of Bishop Hugh de Welles. It lists: St. Mary de Castro (a collegiate church with canons), St. Nicholas, St. Clement, St. Leonard, All Saints, St. Michael, St. Peter and St. Martin as within the walls. Extramural churches include the chapel of St. Sepulchre (attached to St. Mary's) and St. Margaret's, which was held as a prebend of Lincoln cathedral (*Rot. Hug.* i, 238). St. Margaret's also possessed by 1204 the chapelry of Knighton to

the south of the town (*Reg. Antiq.* i, 139-41 and iii, 213-5). These were probably the two churches in Leicester held by the bishop in the Domesday Book.

The later parochial geography of the borough is dominated by the two large parishes of St. Mary de Castro and St. Margaret's, though the latter does not extend inside the walls (illus. 2). The former is particularly large and presumably formerly incorporated the extra-parochial area of Leicester Abbey. Its importance in late-Saxon Leicester is confirmed by its association with Hugh de Grandmesnil's estate. It seems unlikely that Robert de Meulan's annexation of the fees in Leicester would have radically altered the parochial structure at such a late date. If we accept this premise, the size of its parish would point to St. Mary de Castro as the site of a late-Saxon minster. The status of St. Margaret's is more problematic due to its association with an episcopal manor, first documented in Domesday Book. According to Nichols (1 ii, 304 citing Carte Ms) St. Mary's and St. Margaret's were originally the only churches to have cemeteries, with All Saints, St. Martin's and St. Nicholas gaining cemeteries about the end of the 12th century. The original source cannot now be traced but such a pattern would be typical of many towns. At Chester the two minsters of St. John's and St. Werburgh's possessed exclusive burial rights in the 12th century (Thacker 1982). It seems unlikely that Nichols would have had the historical knowledge to make such an assertion on purely theoretical grounds.

St. Mary de Castro and St. Margarets

The present church fabric of St. Mary de Castro is of 12th century and later date. A later citation of an apparently authentic charter dates the foundation of St. Mary de Castro to 1107 (*Mon. Ang.* 6i, 467). It was founded by Robert de Meulan as a collegiate church for a dean and 12 secular canons. His son, Robert le Bossu transferred the church and its endowments to his new abbey of St. Mary de Pratis but, out of respect for his father, made provision for a sacrist, chaplain and 6 clerks (*Anc. Chs.*, 59-63). The 14th-century chronicle of Henry Knighton, a canon of Leicester Abbey, indicates that Robert de Meulan, who had established himself as sole lord of Leicester, rebuilt (*reaedificavit*) St. Mary's rather than founding it on a de novo site (*CHK* i, 62). His chronicle also refers to the restoration of lands and churches to the canons, implying that it was formerly of minster status. An account in Charyte's Rental, a 15th-century register of Leicester Abbey, alleges that Leicester with its castle and church was destroyed by William I and that St. Mary's was rebuilt by Robert de Meulan in the time of the Conqueror (*Laud* 625, f.188v; *Mon. Ang.* 6i, 466-7). William Charyte's grasp of the chronology is confused as the re-foundation clearly occurred after the death of William I though he appears to have had access to the foundation diploma of the college of St. Mary's (Crouch 1993, 10). As Round (1895, 347-8) rightly pointed out there is no other evidence for the sacking of the town and Domesday Book only refers to four waste houses within the borough. Round also suggested that, as there can have been no Saxon castle, that the alleged destruction was more likely to date to the rebellion of Ivo de Grandmesnil in 1101. The recent excavation of a Saxon defended enclosure at Goltho (Beresford 1987), however, raises the possibility that William I could have built a motte and bailey castle upon the site of a defended comital enclosure. A substantial late-Saxon hall, and ditched enclosure, have been excavated beneath the bailey of Southampton castle and the castle at Stamford may have overlain a royal-estate centre (Holdsworth 1984, 340-1; Mahany and Roffe 1982, 200-4). Such a progression from palisaded hall (often with associated church) to motte would appear to have been

normal across the Channel where the transition is less confused by political change, for instance, at Douai in NE France and at Gent in Belgium ((Demelon *et al.* 1988, 63-4; Demelon & Louis 1994, 54-5; Callebaut 1994). St. Mary's is sited within the Norman bailey and it is conceivable that it was demolished at the time of its construction, or else have suffered a reduction in its status to that of castle chapel (illus. 1).

St. Margaret's was probably one of the two churches associated with the fee belonging to the bishop of Lincoln in 1086. A document of *c.* 1205 reveals that a courtyard or house (*curia*) lay near to the church (*Reg. Antiq.* iii, 203). Its gabled barn, where the tithe would have been stored, and the bishop's *fossatum* (bank, ditch or even moat) are documented in *c.* 1215 (*ibid.*, 234). There was also likely to have been a hall in which the bishop's court could be held and possibly a chamber for a steward. The present St. Margaret's church has a 13th-century nave and aisles with a 15th-century chancel and west tower (Whittingham 1933). Excavations in 1945-6 revealed two earlier phases of building. In the earliest phase the granite wall of what appears to have been a chancel, within the east end of the later nave, was uncovered. The second phase consisted of an extension to this in green sandstone and may represent an early south transept (Clarke 1952, 29-35). A further clue to the 12th-century church is suggested by the 'clasped tower' plan in which the aisles extend back to embrace the tower. This usually suggests a pre-existing tower (i.e. pre-dating the 13th century aisles) preventing the westward growth of the church (cf. Richmond 1986).

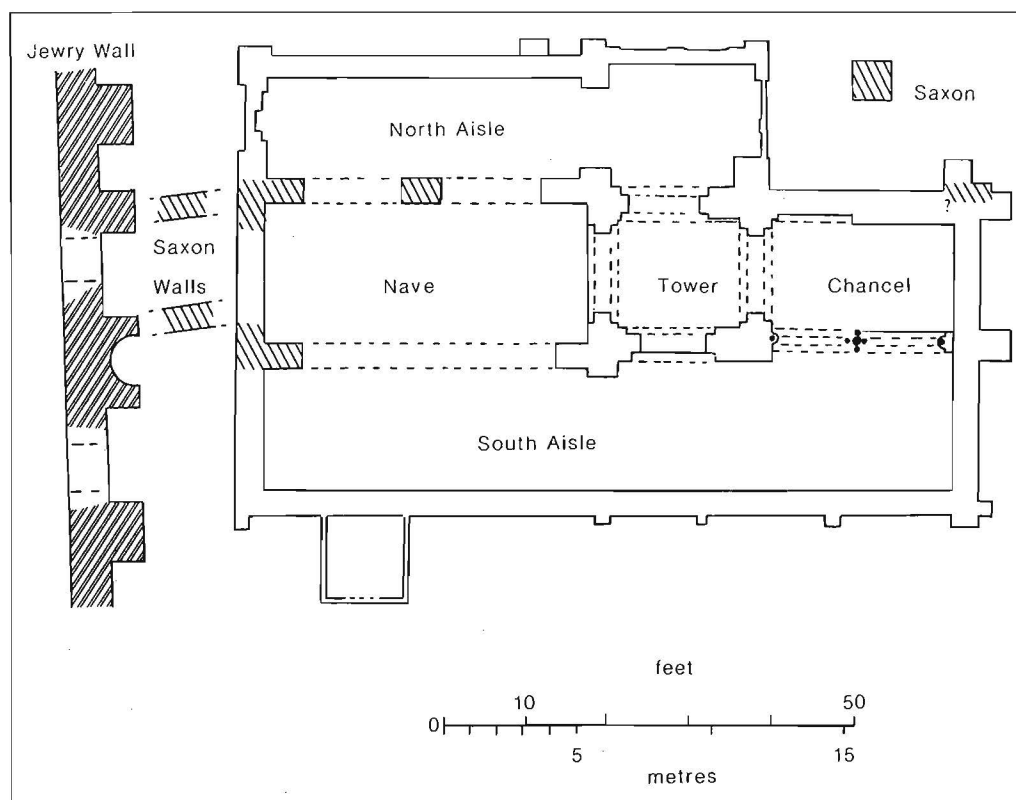
In the later Middle Ages Whit Monday processions progressed from St. Mary de Castro and St. Martin's to St. Margaret's. The procession from St. Martin's is recorded in the churchwardens' accounts as early as 1495 (North 1884, 3). Nichols (1 ii, 305 & 570) also describes the former procession from St. Mary's in which the image of the Virgin Mary was carried under a canopy with musicians and 12 persons representing the apostles. At St. Margaret's the procession from St. Martin's offered, among other oblations, two pairs of gloves, one for God and one for St. Thomas of India (the apostle, who was alleged to have introduced christianity to India) in the 16th century. Nichols states that there was no music or canopy associated with the St. Martin's procession. A case in the borough records of 1314 indicates that a similar Whitsun procession also came from Wigston. It led to a fight with a procession from another unnamed parish from outside the town in the lane which led to St. Margaret's (*RBL* i, 374-5). This sounds typical of the many fights which occurred in other Whitsun processions around the country over precedence (Kennett 1818, 286 and Wright 1936, i, 150). A 16th-century reference indicates that Peter's Pence and Whitsun dues were still being paid to St. Margaret's by All Saint's church (Hepworth 1950, 101). Pentecostal dues or 'smoke farthings' were originally paid directly to Lincoln cathedral and the clergy and representatives from each parish were supposed to join the annual Whitsun procession at Lincoln. In the middle of the 12th century, however, Bishop Robert de Chesney issued a mandate allowing distant parishes to process instead to suitable churches chosen by the archdeacons (*Reg. Antiq.* i, 265; see also *Reg. Antiq.* ii, 257-9). An archdeaconry court case of 1509 shows that the parishioners of Seale were similarly supposed to process to Ashby de la Zouch (Percival Moore 1905-6, 659). There is no evidence to suggest that Ashby or its church were of importance before the Norman Conquest.

St. Margaret's may have been chosen as the reception point for the Whitsun processions merely because it was a wealthy episcopal church. It should not be assumed that all grand churches of the 12th century were former minsters (Franklin 1984 and Courtney *forthcoming* d). As noted above, however, the overall pattern of episcopal estates and towns in the diocese argues for a pre-Conquest origin for the bishop of

Lincoln's estate at Leicester. St. Margaret's is sited outside the north-east corner of the borough wall, well away from the main thoroughfares. Its siting has close parallels with the suburban episcopal minster of St. John's at Chester with its Roman cemetery associations (Thacker 1982). Roman pottery has been found both within the churchyard of St. Margaret's and in the surrounding area (along with coins and a glass jar), possibly from cremation burials; while undated inhumations have been found nearby in Belgrave Rd. and Watling St. (LM sites and monuments record). However, Roman remains recovered in 1992 during small-scale evaluation work in Sanvey Gate just outside the north wall of Leicester suggests occupation pre-dating the construction of the town walls in the third century (Finn 1993 and J. Lucas, pers. comm.). The cemetery theory therefore remains unproven at present. However, the possibility that St. Margaret's could pre-date the episcopal estate, for instance, originating as a chapel on the site of a Roman martyrrium, needs to be considered (see Morris 1989, 6-45).

St. Nicholas and the problem of Leicester's early cathedral

St. Nicholas is the only church in Leicester with surviving Saxon fabric including two windows of late-Saxon date (Taylor and Taylor 1965, i, 385-6). The survival of its



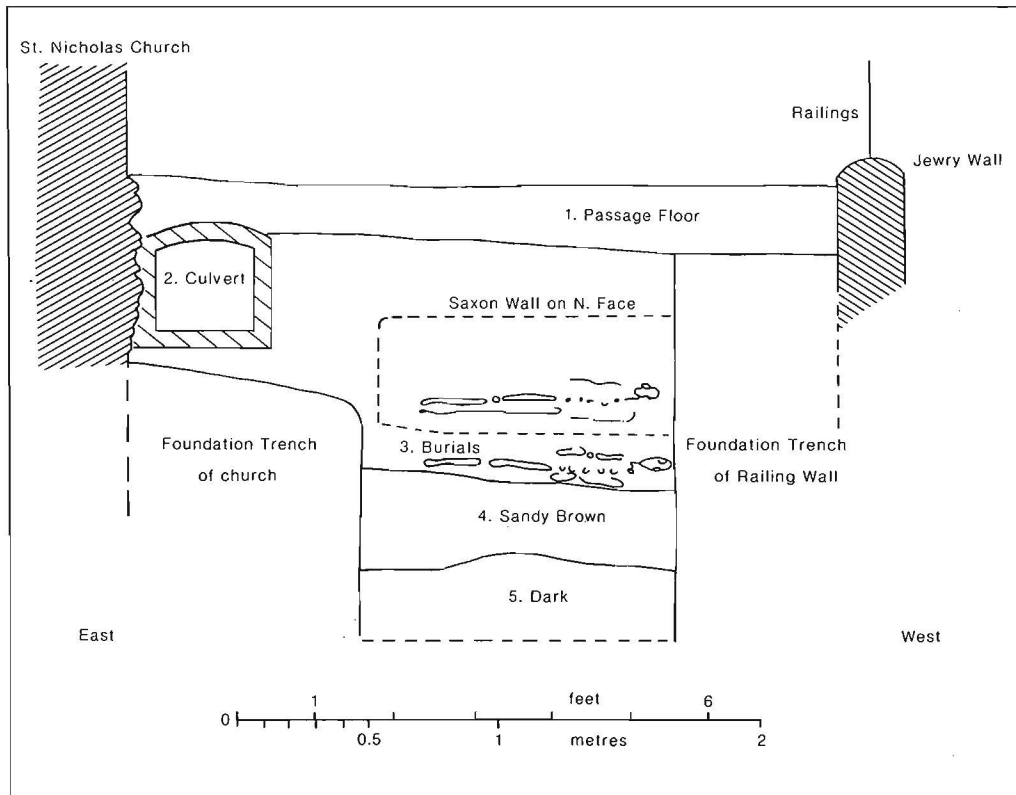
4. St. Nicholas Church (based on Radford 1955).

Saxon fabric is perhaps due to the small size of its parish (16 acres in 1896) and lack of wealth to rebuild it. It did possess the chapelry of Cosby to the south of Leicester but its income from this source was probably small. The attachment of a rural chapelry to such a small urban parish may be an indication that St. Nicholas was held in special esteem.

The dedication of St. Nicholas has maritime connections (he was the patron saint of sailors) and is linked to fish markets at Winchester and London (Keene 1985, 113). At Leicester, though, its closest geographical connection was to the butchers' shambles, at least in the later Middle Ages. Both the first and second guild halls, the latter built *c.* 1257, lay in St. Nicholas parish (*RBL* i, 71 and 92, and ii 19). The church is famous for the survival of the Roman structure known as the Jewry wall in front of its west end. This wall once separated the *palaestra* (exercise hall) from the main baths on the west side. A similar length of walling from the baths at Viroconium still survives in a field at Wroxeter, testimony to its massive construction. Kathleen Kenyon (1948, 8) who excavated Leicester's Roman baths suggested that the wall survived because it had been incorporated into an early-Saxon church. Rodwell (1984, 6) has added that it was ideally suited for the west front of a large basilican church with a pair of entrances leading to the nave via a *narthex* or anteroom. There is insufficient room for a *narthex* between the Jewry Wall and the present west front so the plan of Rodwell's basilican church, if it existed, has presumably not been respected by the present church.

The relationship of the church and Jewry Wall can hardly be fortuitous but does not necessarily date the church to the 7th century. It is just as possible that the church was erected in the 10th century, adjacent to a still standing piece of monumental masonry. Certainly recent excavations in the back-lanes area of Causeway Lane and the Shires indicate survival of Roman masonry into the post-Norman period (R. Buckley and J. Lucas, pers. comm.). More remarkable than the survival of the Jewry Wall into the tenth century is its survival from that period to the present, testimony to its continued if changing symbolic importance. Kenyon's excavations revealed two walls leading from the opening in the *palaestra* wall towards the west door of St. Nicholas. Kathleen Kenyon did not discuss these walls in the final report but dates them to the Saxon period on a phase plan (Kenyon 1948, pl. XXVII). Re-examination of original section-drawings in the site archive (LM: Jewry Wall museum), though not to modern standards, suggests that the north wall was truncated by the church's foundation trench (illus. 5). The two Saxon wall foundations certainly post-date the Roman levels. They also appear to be post-dated by a soil-layer (illus. 5: layer 3) which contained several burials. The burials would appear to be of children if the dimensions are accurate but they may be a stylised portrayal of adult burials truncated by the foundation trench for the railing wall. Certainly the relationship of the two Saxon walls to the standing church of St. Nicholas implies that a stone structure pre-dated the existing late-Saxon church and given the rarity of stone construction in the Saxon period, this is most likely to have been associated with an earlier church.

A confirmatory charter of Henry II (1154-89) records that Robert de Meulan granted the church of St. Augustine's in Leicester, along with its chapelry of Cosby, to Leicester Abbey (*Cal. Ch. R.*, 3, 379 and *Mon. Ang.* 6i, 467-8). The later attachment of Cosby to St. Nicholas suggests that the latter is merely a re-dedication of St. Augustine's. This interpretation is further supported by a reference in the first merchant gild roll which records the dedication of St. Nicholas in about 1220 (*RBL* i, 25). Charyte's Rental records the tradition of two chapels on the east side of St. Nicholas church. The chapels are said to be under two roofs with central pillars and to be dedicated to St. Augustine and St. Columba. Charyte's Rental also notes that Cosby was attached to the chapel of



5. Excavated section between St. Nicholas Church and the Jewry Wall (Jewry Wall museum: Kenyon excavation archive).

St. Augustine (*Laud* 625, f.47r; *Nichols* 1 ii, 328). St. Augustine and St. Columba were founding fathers of respectively Latin and Celtic Christianity in England. Mercia was first converted to the faith from Northumbria, a centre of Celtic christianity.

It is unclear to what extent the entry in Charyte's rental is reliable. The reference to the chapelries may be merely a crude attempt, after the re-dedication was forgotten, to explain and establish the abbey's right to Cosby through the lost church of St. Augustine. It is possible, however, that the tradition was encouraged by the remains of a genuine Saxon chapelry or perhaps even by Roman masonry remains. The existence of a separate chapel on the same alignment, but lying to the east of the main church, would certainly have parallels with a number of Saxon ecclesiastical complexes such as those at Canterbury, Winchester, Monkwearmouth and Jarrow. It seems possible that St. Augustine's possessed a chapel dedicated to St. Columba or alternatively possessed a double dedication to both saints. The only other known dedication to St. Columba in the Midlands is at Collingtree in Northamptonshire which has a subsidiary altar dedicated to St. Augustine.

A charter of the second earl Robert (1118-64) grants that the burgesses need not go for pleading or any other custom out of the town but only just to the '*coumecherchia*' (*set tantummodo ad coumecherchiam*) as was anciently established. Mary Bateson suggested

that the word was a variant of *touecherchia* or *communecherchia*, the 'town churchyard' (*RBL* i, 4), though 'church of the commune' might be another translation. She, no doubt, based her interpretation on then recently published account of events in Ipswich. Upon receiving the grant of their fee farm in 1200 the community of Ipswich met in the churchyard of St. Mary's to elect officers for the borough (Gross 1890, ii, 116-7). If Bateson's interpretation is correct the most likely location is St. Nicholas in view of its later association with the merchant guild. Indeed it has been suggested that the adjacent Jewry Wall might have gained its name from the 24 *jurati* who gave judgements at the portmanmoot or borough court (*VCH Leics* 4, 385). The late R. E. Latham (*ibid*) has, however, raised the possibility that *coumecherchia* might instead stand for *communia serchia*, the duty of assisting the sheriff in finding stolen or strayed cattle which would have involved leaving the town.

St. Nicholas seems to have been no more than a private church in the late-Saxon period with a tiny parochial area, though this is not necessarily a guide to earlier status. In the post-Conquest period it was closely linked with the commercial hub of the town (it was adjacent to the butchers' shambles) and the first two guildhalls lay within its parish (Billson 1920, 50-2). St. Nicholas has a claim, however uncertain, to be the site of the mid-Saxon cathedral on the basis of its siting in the civic hub of the Roman city. Its east-end must more or less front on to the former Roman street running past the west side of the forum. Less convincing is the claim that the Jewry Wall was built into such a church. This would imply a church of monumental scale which was then demolished leaving nothing but Roman work. Perhaps the cathedral merely lay adjacent to the Jewry Wall and was of more modest proportions than Brixworth which was probably a royally founded monastery with an important relic. St. Nicholas is nevertheless the only Leicester church with structural evidence which may date back to the mid-Saxon period. The dedication to St. Augustine (d. c. 605), and perhaps also St. Columba (d.597), is unlikely to date to the 7th or 8th centuries but would be a suitable late Saxon re-dedication for Leicester's founding church.

St. Mary de Castro seems likely to have been the premier church of late-Saxon Leicester but the problem of its origins is more thorny. Its large parish size linked with its intramural location might suggest that it was an old minster and thus the site of the cathedral. However, its comital rather than episcopal associations point to reorganisation rather than continuity. New minsters with royal connections were newly created or re-founded, for example, at Chester and Gloucester by Aethelflaed (Thacker 1982). The lack of a Mercian (or Middle Anglian) cult association at Leicester as there was in many other new minsters of Aethelflaed may have been due to policy changes after her death, which occurred within months of taking Leicester. Dedications to the Virgin Mary, though they occur earlier, saw a dramatic increase in the 10th century (Clayton 1990, 131-6). The church of the Anglo-Scandinavian, 'English' borough at Nottingham and the minster at Lincoln were both dedicated to St. Mary. Alternatively a Mercian cult association may have been lost when St. Mary de Castro was refounded at the beginning of the 12th century.

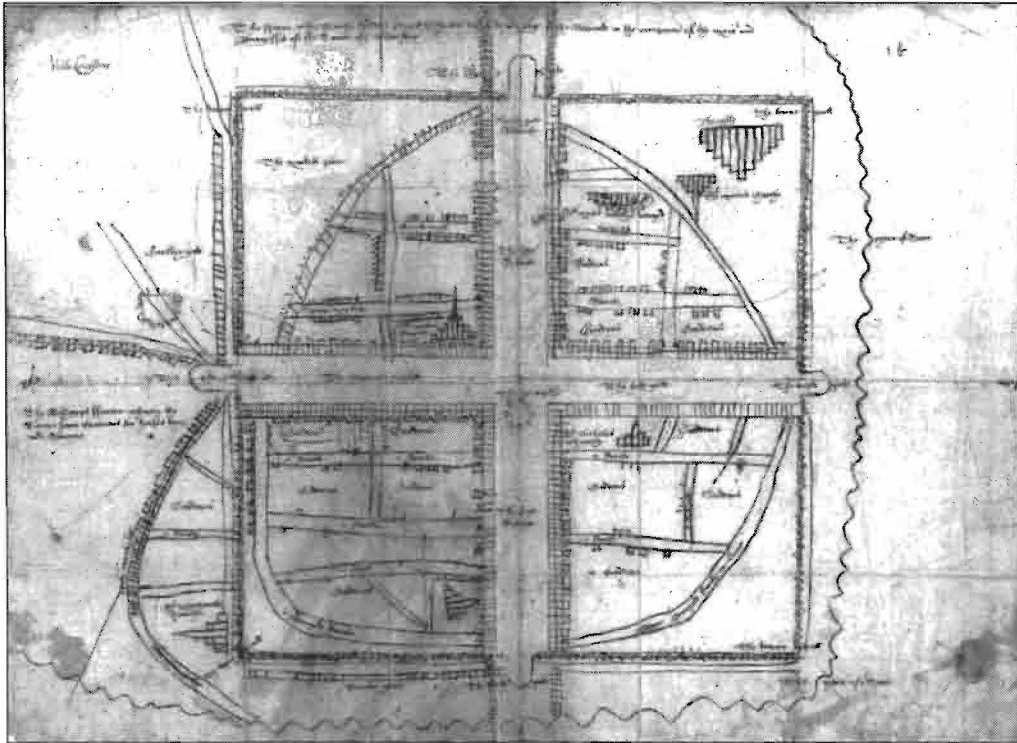
If St. Nicholas was indeed the cathedral, rather than St. Mary de Castro, the flight of its bishop to Dorchester, never to return, may well have led to its decline or ruin and failure to become a late-Saxon minster. Indeed its association with the desertion of the bishop may have made it particularly unsuitable for the needs of the Alfredian dynasty, whose new minsters were designed to inculcate loyalty from their new subjects. Episcopal churches at Chester, Gloucester and Shrewsbury appear to have been deliberately avoided as sites for new minsters (Thacker 1982, 210-11). The subsequent

large parish size of St. Mary de Castro might therefore merely reflect the dynamics of power and new ideological needs of the 10th century rather than its ancient nature. As Rollason (1992) has recently reminded us, one should be careful of ascribing parochial functions to the mid-Saxon church. The possibility that the cathedral was not the only church before the Danish invasion also needs to be considered. Eighth-century York, for example, appears to have had the cathedral of St. Peter and the church of the *alma sophia*, the latter probably part of a monasterium with the bishop as its patron. (Palliser 1984 and Morris 1986). Unfortunately, the Danish and Mercian periods offer few solid facts to the historian or archaeologist studying Leicester. There is therefore substantial room for continuing debate, though perhaps one day excavation may lead us towards some firmer answers.

Lesser churches and settlement in the 'back-lanes'

The High St. position of All Saints suggests a pre-Conquest origin. Its parish extends outside the North gate to include much of Northgate Street (the rest was in St. Margaret's or St. Leonard's parishes), an indication that this parish was well established by the early 12th century if not earlier. Leicester has three 'lost' churches within its walls: St. Clement, St. Michael and St. Peter. St. Michael's is first documented *c.* 1200 and the other two churches are first recorded in the 1220 *matriculus* of Bishop Hugh de Welles (Martin 1990, 21; *Rot. Hug.* i, 238). Barbara Crawford (1992) has recently suggested that the English dedications to St. Clement of the Danes, primarily eastern and urban in location, are associated with a politically-motivated cult. She dates its inception to the arrival of Cnut and his followers in England in 1016. The Leicester church of St. Clement appears to have stood somewhere in the north-western part of the town (Billson 1920, 69-71). St. Michael's and St. Peter's lay in the 'back-lanes' within the north-eastern sector of the walled town. The back-lanes area was predominately occupied by gardens and orchards from at least the late 13th century. Both St. Michael's and St. Peter's were poorly endowed. By the end of the 16th century both churches had been abandoned and their parishes incorporated into All Saint's (*ibid.*, 71-8).

St. Peter's may have been associated with a small group of medieval dwellings on Dead Lane but it is uncertain if St. Martin's parish had any habitation within its parish in the later Middle Ages (see Martin 1990 and Courtney, *forthcoming* a & c). Recent excavations in Causeway Lane (illus. 1: E) has suggested short-lived occupation of the 12th to early 13th centuries (Connor 1992). Both St. Peter's and St. Michael's may have had origins in the 12th century phase of urban expansion, though firm evidence is lacking. Late founded churches, especially if they had cemeteries from the beginning, are more likely to have been built on less valuable land away from the main street frontages. It is possible that St. Peter's was founded by an early owner of the hall, discussed above, which was situated on the south side of the churchyard. The idea that the sack of Leicester by Henry II in 1173 had a negative impact on settlement in the back-lanes was first proposed by the Rev. Samuel Carte in the early 18th century (BL Add Ms 5822, f.182v). It seems unlikely, though, that destruction would lead to permanent settlement contraction unless there were other underlying causes for failure. In 1175 the sheriff was able to account for the farm (dues) of the borough in full to the crown, which suggests rapid economic recovery (Martin 1972, 271 and 273). One alternative explanation is that settlement infilling (and possibly sub-division of properties) on the main streets, as suggested by the Forum and Cameo Cinema sites,

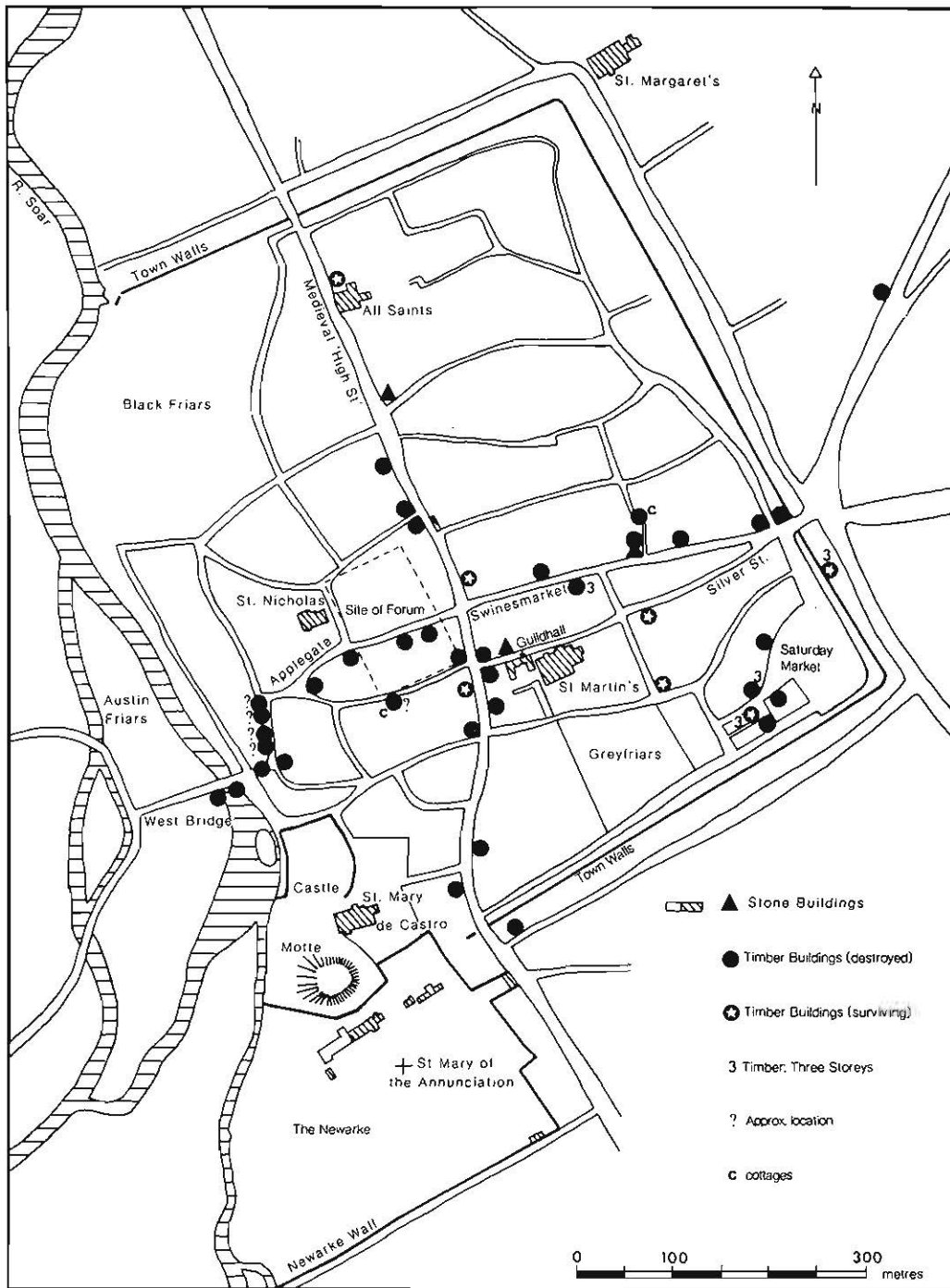


6. Map of Leicester in the late 16th-century (LRO BR/II/18/1).

allowed a shift of settlement to the more favourable frontages. The suburbs, including the relatively prosperous Bishop's Fee, are also likely to have been expanding in this period. However, the processes and chronology of tenement formation in Leicester are still poorly understood.

Changing social space: the late medieval period

One major change in the social and economic topography of Leicester has been the eastward shift of its commercial heart. By the 16th century the term 'high street' was being applied to the former Swinesmarket (Billson 1920, 8). Today the main commercial frontages lie outside the former medieval walls in what was the eastern suburb. Intra-mural development may have been only partial by the 13th century when the Greyfriars and Blackfriars were respectively given precincts in the NW and S. parts of the town, though these may have replaced some pre-existing occupation. However, their extensive nature can be contrasted with Northampton where there is some evidence for the friaries' gradual acquisition of existing properties within a more compact urban landscape (see *VCH Northants* 2, 144-9). No evidence has survived, however, for the existence of extensive precincts to parallel those at Leicester. The positioning of Leicester's extensive Saturday Market in the S.E. corner, first documented in 1298, is also suggestive of late infilling (RBL i, 350). Archaeological evidence suggests this form of rectilinear regular market place generally appeared for the first time in the 12th and



7. Distribution of timbered buildings in Leicester based on architectural remains and artistic sources.

13th centuries (Courtney 1994 123-6; Verhaeghe 1994, 166-9), Indeed they can perhaps be regarded as emblems of the high medieval 'commercial revolution'.

In medieval towns economic, administrative and ecclesiastical structures were inter-dependent. The creation of the Saturday market shifted the economic focus of the borough eastward and southward, which in turn had repercussions for other expressions of urban spatial organisation. The guildhall, the focus of borough government, had lain within the parish of St. Nicholas. About 1400 the Corpus Christi Guild (a socio-religious guild dominated by the borough's leading citizens) was built adjacent to St. Martin's church. By the end of the 15th century the hall of the Corpus Christi Guild had become the *de facto* town hall, a position it retained until the 19th century (Fosbrooke and Skillington 1925 and Billson 1920, 50-5). In the late-13th century St. Martin's was already equalling St. Mary de Castro and St. Margaret's as the richest churches in the borough with its relatively large parish. (*Tax. Eccles.*, 65a and 66b). Indeed the wealth and architectural grandeur of St. Martin's, especially compared to St. Nicholas, may have played a role in prompting the choice of the new Corpus Christi guildhall as the town hall. Another important factor may have been the economy of not having to re-build or repair the old hall in St. Nicholas parish.

Leicester has few timbered buildings remaining. However, evidence for many more can be reconstructed from old prints and photographs (Courtney and Courtney 1995; Courtney 1996). Illus. 7 shows the distribution of certain 15th-17th century timber buildings recorded in Leicester from archaeological, photographic and other pictorial sources. Question-mark symbols indicate where the building can only be located to a street rather than to an approximate or exact location. The main feature to stand out is the predominance of the axial streets and the market area, with the exception of the north end of the town. This is presumably a reflection of the high commercial value of these frontages in the 15th-17th centuries which led to relatively high investment in the building stock. The few three storey buildings are located in the 16th century High St. and the market place. The relative lack of buildings in the eastern suburb, reflects the high destruction as this area became the commercial heart of the town in the 19th century. The 1664 hearth tax, for example, shows that it had some of the largest mansions in the town (*H. Tax*, 14-5 & 21-2). One feature to emerge is the importance of road to the western gate (illus. 7: Applegate). This is hinted at by the medieval references to the four high streets, mentioned above, and by a sketch map of *c.* 1600 (illus. 6). This map can perhaps be regarded as what geographer's term a 'mental map'. This implies its usefulness for reflecting contemporary perception of the town rather than for its topographic accuracy.

Conclusion

This review has argued that archaeological remains of the late-Saxon period are most likely to be found within the walls. The lack of finds from the pre-12th century Leicester has several explanations. The pattern of rescue archaeology has inevitably been decided by the pattern of development rather than by research considerations. After the 1960s and 1970s excavations in the St. Nicholas Circle area, in the wake of the inner ring-road, work has focused on the eastern part of the town, where most recent large-scale development has occurred. This reflects the eastward shift of the commercial centre since the late Middle Ages. Archaeological deposits of this period are also unlikely to be artefact rich. Recent analysis of excavations of Norman buildings along Monnow St. in Monmouth have demonstrated how all evidence for occupation may be absent 6-10

metres back from the street frontage (S. Clarke, pers. comm.). Unfortunately cellaring as well as safety considerations mean that it is often impossible to excavate close to the street frontages of central Leicester. However, excavation of backyards on their own can give a highly misleading picture of settlement history due to the complexity and changing nature of rubbish-disposal processes. Late-Saxon deposits in Leicester are most likely to be found in Highcross St., Southgate St., Northgate St. and those parts of High St. not affected by the road widening of 1902. The areas around St. Nicholas and St. Martin are also strong candidates for pre-12th century occupation. Unfortunately, archaeological deposits in all these areas have probably been badly affected by Victorian, and later, commercial cellaring. Leicester's economic success in the late 19th and early 20th centuries has taken a heavy toll of both its architectural and archaeological heritage.

The impact of the recent D.O.E document on planning policy guidance, PPG16, (Nov. 1990) has been to place emphasis on protection of archaeological strata *in situ* by encouraging developers to make use of concrete rafts and piling for foundations. This will inevitably lead to a decline in the number of major urban excavations. Archaeologists as a result will increasingly concentrate on giving planning advice and carrying out small-scale excavations for evaluation purposes. Nevertheless, such work may still shed further light on the changing settlement topography of Leicester before the 13th century. It will be necessary, however, to analyse the fragmentary knowledge gained from such sites within the wider geographical context of the whole town. One way forward is presented by the rapid development, and decreasing cost, of geographic information systems (GIS) which allow the overlay of different categories of data on computer-generated maps. The value of such an approach has been shown by Vince's recent work in Lincoln (CA 1992). GIS would also be a powerful tool for planning evaluation. The present survey is not intended to provide any definitive blueprint to Leicester's origins. Unavoidably (and unashamedly) certain theoretical perspectives and interpretations have been preferred but hopefully alternatives have also been examined. Debate and re-interpretation must of course be a continuing process.

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