

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BURGHILD OF MERCIA: NEW LIGHT ON ANGLO-SAXON BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

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The field-name material for Buckinghamshire provides many fascinating insights into its social and economic history, a selection of which have been discussed in Records. Although on record from the later medieval period, many names clearly originated before 1066, including Anglo-Saxon personal names that quickly fell out of use after the Conquest.¹ Among these names is that of a lady named Burghild, found in thirteenth-century records of the Stowe area, specifically in connection with the Towcester-Silchester Roman road. Burghild is also widely remembered in names across southern Mercia, however, and is on record from the ninth century. This paper examines in more detail the toponymic and other evidence for Burghild, her life and times, and why she should have been commemorated at Stowe.

INTRODUCTION

This paper was prompted by the names *Buggilderode* (Lampport 1226) and *Buggerode* (Stowe 13th cent.; Boycott 1300), referring to the Roman road connecting Silchester, Dorchester, Alchester and Towcester, hereafter designated Margary 160.² It soon became apparent, however, that these names are only a small proportion those derived from the name of an Anglo-Saxon lady, ranging in date from the early-ninth century to the present day.

The Old English name Burghild occurs only rarely.³ In the case of the Stowe names, it is compounded with OE *rād*, ‘the act of riding on horseback’, hence ‘place suitable for riding’.⁴ Although the word ‘road’ is not recorded in the modern sense until the 16th century, it was clearly used as such long before. The Roman road through Stowe evidently remained in use in the 13th century, and undoubtedly during the Anglo-Saxon period also. ME **rode* replaced earlier **Burghildestraet*, from the more usual OE word for a paved track. As we shall see, the same name was applied to part of another Roman road.⁵

It was not only in north-west Buckinghamshire that Margary 160 was associated with Burghild. There are pre-Conquest references to it in Oxfordshire and Berkshire.⁶ There need not have been a direct connection between Burghild and Stowe, although given the distribution of places including

her name examined below, that remains a possibility. The remainder of the paper discusses the various occurrences of her name, who Burghild was, and concludes with an examination of the Stowe area c.800–1100.

PLACES NAMED FROM BURGHILD

Burghild’s name occurs four times in Anglo-Saxon charter bounds, and in various chronicles, not necessarily contemporary with the events they record. There are more post-Conquest references, which combined with the early material give rise to a sequence of names along Margary 160 between Stowe and Sulhampstead Bannister (Berks.). Between Stowe and Beckley (Oxon.) her name is attached to the road itself, as it was further west, where her name appears along the southern part of Rykniel Street. Burghild is also remembered in the names of settlements and landscape features. Most, if not all, of these names were probably coined in the ninth-tenth centuries, and it is quite possible that others have been lost, as has that at Stowe. The two clusters of names are summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

Burghild Street crossed the Ouse at Water Stratford, whose prefix distinguishes it from the Ouse and Ouzel crossings of Watling Street. Stratton Audley is also named after the road. South of the Ouse Margary 160 forms the shire and parish

TABLE 1 Burghild Place-Names in South-East Mercia

<i>Name</i>	<i>Parish/County</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>
Burgilde treow	Blewbury/Upton Brk	c895	Gelling, 1976, 756
Bugenroda	Beckley Oxon	1005–12	Hart, 190–3
Borgeldeberie	Bucklebury Brk	1086	Gelling, 1973, 154
Bogildestret	Water Stratford	c1220	Oseney Cartulary
Buggilderode	Lampton Bucks	1226	BRS 4 14/15 17
Bugildewaye	Barton Hartshorn	c1250	Oseney Cartulary
Buggestret	Wendlebury Oxon	1250x60	Gelling, 1953, 241–2
Buggerode	Stowe Bucks	13 th	Biddlesden Cartulary
Buggerode	Boycott Oxon	1300	Whittlewood Perambul'n
Burgenhildeburgemede	Bucklebury	1391	Gelling, 1973, 161
Buckles Moor	Englefield Brk	1843	Gelling, 1973, 213

Sources: M. Gelling, *Place-Names of Berkshire* (3 vols. Cambridge 1973–6); M. Gelling, *Place-Names of Oxfordshire* (2 vols., Cambridge 1953–4), 1241; C.R. Hart, *Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966); Bucks. Rec. Soc. 4, *Calendar of Feet of Fines for the County of Buckingham 7 Richard I to 44 Henry III* (ed. M.W. Hughes, 1943); H.E. Salter, *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey* (vol. 5, Oxford Hist. Soc., XCVIII, 1935); Biddlesden Cartulary in BL Harley 4714, fols.166–211; Whittlewood Perambulation at National Archives C67/6A

boundary for two miles to the south end of Barton Hartshorn, and is a parish boundary for a further three miles south of the Padbury Brook, including the south-east side of Caversfield, a detached part of Buckinghamshire until 1844. Since this road is little used as a boundary elsewhere, we may be dealing here with an ancient demarcation. The battle of *Fepanleage* in 584, between Ceawlin and Cutha of the *Gewisse* (West Saxons) and the Britons, has been identified with a lost place in Stoke Lyne parish, a mile or so from Burghild Street. Cutha was killed, but Ceawlin ‘captured many villages and countless booty’ (*monige tunas unarmidelice herereaf*), phraseology that implies the acquisition of new territory from the Britons.⁷

In Oxfordshire, *Buggestret* in Wendlebury is close to Alchester Roman town, while the boundaries of Beckley proceed from Otmoor *pwyr's ofer bugenrode*, ‘obliquely across Burghild’s road’, marking a change of direction at SP573130. In Berkshire, Buckles Moor in Englefield lies on Margary 160.⁸

Burgilde treow, ‘Burghild’s tree’, occurs in a boundary perambulation of 879x899 relating to the exchange of a hundred-hide estate around Cholsey between King Alfred and bishop Denewulf of Winchester.⁹ Margaret Gelling locates this feature

on the Upton-Blewbury boundary in grid-square SU5185.¹⁰ Personal names qualifying boundary features may refer to individuals connected with the estate being granted, or to one adjacent, though they were not necessarily resident locally. Margary 160 is five miles from Burghild’s tree, and it is a distinct possibility that they refer to the same person.¹¹

Bucklebury, usually interpreted as ‘Burghild’s fortified place’, is around ten miles south of ‘Burghild’s tree’. OE *burh* has a variety of meanings, however, mostly relating to fortified or defensive positions, of any age from prehistoric to early medieval. Many hill-forts have such names (e.g. Aylesbury).¹² *Burh* is also used to denote a defensible house or other building, a sense developed post-Conquest to describe a manorial centre (e.g. Stantonbury). Directly relevant to understanding the name Bucklebury is Stenton’s suggestion that *burh*, especially when compounded with a female name, may denote a monastic compound, which were usually defined by often substantial earthworks.¹³ He noted at least ten examples, including Fladbury (Worcs.), Bibury and Tetbury (both Glos.), the latter referred to in an early charter as *Tettan monasterium*, while Westbury on Trym (Glos.) is on record as *Westmynster*.¹⁴

As we shall see, Burghild was a member of the Mercian ruling family and may well have been associated with one or more religious houses. In 1066, the principal manor at Bucklebury was in royal hands. It was granted to newly-founded Reading Abbey by Henry I c.1133. Settlement here is dispersed. The parish church lies in a hamlet near the northern boundary, five miles west of Margary 160. In 1086 it was endowed with half a hide and worth 15/-.¹⁵ John Blair included it in his list of probable or possible Domesday minsters, churches of diverse origins and dates, many of which had already lost their superior status by 1086 as local churches proliferated.¹⁶

The sequence of places incorporating Burghild's name on or near Margary 160 seems unlikely to have arisen by chance, nor, given its rarity as a personal name, to relate to more than one individual, especially as there is another "cluster" of such names.

Roman Ryknield Street (a corruption of Icknield Street) crossed western and central Mercia from the Fosse Way near Bourton-on-the-Water in Gloucestershire to Templeborough in south Yorkshire, crossing Watling Street at *Letocetum* (Wall).¹⁷ In Anglo-Saxon times, the section of Ryknield Street south of *Alauna* (Alcester, Warwicks.) was known as *Buggilde stret*, 'Burghild's paved road'. There appears to be no evidence that the name was used further north.

The clusters of Burghild-names are not too

widely separated. From Stowe and Bucklebury the crow-fly distances to the mid-point of Buckle Street are 35 miles and 55 miles, increasing the probability that we are dealing with only one lady of that name.

WHO WAS BURGHILD?

As we have seen, the toponymic evidence shows two clusters of Burghild-names in southern Mercia, both associated with Roman roads. She is the only woman thus commemorated. The earliest references are from the early-ninth century, and continue through the later medieval period and beyond, when her true significance was long-forgotten.

Who, then, was Burghild? She was Mercian and royal, and such women often played prominent roles in Anglo-Saxon England. Many became heads of religious institutions from the seventh century, including Eadburh (Bicester/Adderbury), and Osgyth (Aylesbury/*Cicc* [St. Osyth]). Burghild's niece, the controversial Cwoenthryth, ruled Minster-in-Thanel, and Burghild herself may have been foundress of the church at Bucklebury, although there is no evidence that she entered the religious life, nor that she was revered as a saint.

In order to provide a wider context for the life of Burghild, it is necessary to make an excursus into the complexities of Mercian monarchy. The death of Offa in 796 marked the end of eight decades

TABLE 2 Burghild Place-Names in Western Mercia

<i>Name</i>	<i>Parish/County</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Source</i>
Buggilde stret	Bretforton, Wo	10 th /11 th	Hooke 1990, 46–57
Buggilde stræt	Upper Swell, Gl	1055	Finberg 1972, 71–3
Bucgan stret	Ullington, Wo	967	Hooke 1990, 174–7
Buggan stret	Littletons, Wo	10 th /11 th	Hooke, 377–82
Buckle Street	Weston-sub-Edge, Gl	current	Witts [1883], 110
Buggyhill	Buckland, Gl	current	Witts [1883], 110
Buckle Street	Welford on Avon Wa	current	VCH 1949, 189
Buckle Street	Pebworth Worcs	current	Wychavon Council
Buckle Street	Bidford on Avon Wa	[c.800]	Seaby 1982, 29–33

Sources: D. Hooke, *Worcestershire Anglo-Saxon Charter Bounds* (Woodbridge 1990); H.P.R. Finberg, *Early Charters of the West Midlands* (Leicester 1972); G. Witts, *Archaeological Handbook of the County of Gloucester* (Cheltenham nd [1883]); *VCH Warwickshire* (vol. 5, 1949); *Pebworth Conservation Area Appraisal* (2005); W. Seaby, 'A Coenwulf Penny from Bidford-on-Avon' (*Brit. Numismatic Jnl.* 52 [1982]) 29–33.

during which there had been only two rulers, who between them raised Mercia to premier position among the English kingdoms. Thereafter, until the effective demise of the unitary kingdom in the 870s, things were far less straightforward, with a succession of often short-lived rulers, whose relationships are difficult to disentangle.¹⁸ Between c.600 and 820, all Mercian kings claimed descent from Pybba, whose son Penda (r. c.635–55) was the first Mercian to make an impact on his neighbours. Æthelbald (716–57) and Offa (757–96) were members of collateral branches descended from Eowa, Penda's brother. After Offa's short-lived son Ecgrith came brothers Coenwulf (796–821) and Ceolwulf (821–3), descendants of Cenwalh, son of Pybba. Beornwulf (823–6) is of unknown lineage, while Wiglaf (827–40) married Ceolwulf's daughter Ælflæd, supposedly the heir to her cousin Cwoenthryth's wealth. Berhtwulf (840–52) may have been related to Beornwulf, as might Burgred (852–74), who was expelled and went into exile at Rome after the Scandinavian takeover of eastern Mercia. Burgred married Æthelswith, daughter of Æthelwulf of Wessex and sister of Alfred the Great in 853. The three 'B-kings' may have been related to Bassa, the only recorded B-name in eight generations and the grandfather of Coenwulf and Coenwulf. The Burg-element shared by Burghild and Burgred may point to some earlier link between their lines.¹⁹

Several sources, all originating long after the events they purport to describe, link Burghild with Coenwulf (r.796–821), either as his daughter or his sister. The twelfth-century chronicler 'Florence' of Worcester names Coenwulf's wife as Ælfthryth, and their children as Kenelm (Coenhelm), Cwoenthryth and *Burgenhild, filias duas*.²⁰ Other sources also name the three as siblings. Elsewhere, however, Coenwulf's wife is named in a charter of 799 as Cynegyth.²¹ A charter of 821 names Burghild and an otherwise unknown Coenswith/Cyneswith as Coenwulf's *sisters (sororum mearum)*.²² Some sources for Coenwulf, Kenelm and Cwoenthryth are more or less contemporary with the events they describe, but Burghild and Coenswith were clearly more obscure.

A dispute between Coenwulf, Cwoenthryth and Wulfred archbishop of Canterbury dragged on from c.817 to 827. It focussed on the jurisdiction of the church over monasteries founded by kings, often headed by their relations.²³ From this it is

clear that Cwoenthryth, abbess of Minster-in-Thanel, was the *daughter* of Coenwulf, and also his heir, since his only son Kenelm was murdered c.811 and quickly sanctified. His principal cult centre at Winchcombe (Glos.) lay in the family's core territory, where their charters were kept and where Coenwulf was buried.²⁴ Kenelm's medieval *Vita*, a late confabulation, stated that he became king after Coenwulf (d.821), but was hated by his "wicked" sister abbess Cwoenthryth, who plotted his death, and loved by his "good" sister, Burgenhild.²⁵ No Coenhelm is named in the Mercian genealogies. Minster was a prize worth fighting for. In the settlement, Coenwulf agreed to give the archbishop Harrow and other lands in Middlesex in compensation, but only after Wulfred had conceded 300 hides at *Iognes homme* (possibly Eynsham) and paid a fine of £120, equivalent to a king's *wergild*, and been suspended by the Pope from his episcopal duties for around five years at Coenwulf's instigation.

It appears that 'Florence' conflated the family relationships, the more likely scenario being that Burghild and Coenswith were the king's sisters and thus aunts to Kenelm and Cwoenthryth. Given that by the early twelfth century, Burghild was only remembered only in assorted place-names, and Coenswith not at all, his error is not surprising.

A grant of Culham to Abingdon dated c.821, made by Coenwulf at the request of his sisters Keneswyth and Burgenilde, who wished to be buried 'in the said monastery', survives only in a copy of c.1330.²⁶ Their choice of Abingdon may have been influenced by Hrethhun/Ræthhun, who had been abbot there early in Coenwulf's reign, and subsequently bishop of Leicester (c.814–840). The witness list of the Culham charter includes Kenelm, already dead by 821, and *Uuighfrit princeps* (Wigfrith), possibly a relation of king Wiglaf (see above).

The complex early history of the church at Abingdon has been discussed by Frank Stenton, Gabrielle Lambrick and Susan Kelly.²⁷ Briefly, it appears that various West Saxon kings, including Cædwalla (r.685–8) and Ine (r.688–726) established and endowed a minster known as Æbbandun for a nobleman called Hæha.²⁸ Abingdon probably refers to the hilly area within the loop of the Thames south and west of Oxford, although the minster was soon moved to a site by the Thames, earlier known as *Seuekesham*.²⁹ Unlike many

early foundations, this was not apparently a double house for monks and nuns. There was a separate house for the latter established by or for Cilla, Hæha's sister, represented by St Helen's church, close to the river in Abingdon, which later became the town's principal parish church.³⁰ A legend that women were forbidden from entering the monks' house, suggests that it was at *Helnestou* where Burghild and Coenswith wished to be buried.

The Abingdon Chronicle repeats the story about the sisters' burial at Abingdon, but does not name them. Chapter XXI, dated 801 and headed *De Soroibus Kenulfi*, 'concerning the sisters of Coenwulf', calls them his uterine sisters (born of the same mother by a different father). Their mother may either have been married previous to marrying Ceolwulf's father Cuthbert, or remarried after his death.

It seems on balance that Burghild was Coenwulf's sister, not his daughter. Her nephew Kenelm was born c.790, and depending on the chronology of their mother's marriages, Burghild and Coenwulf were probably born in the 760s or 770s. Burghild and Coenswith were probably in their forties or fifties around 820, and unmarried. The family clearly had close ties to the church. If Burghild did indeed found a minster at Bucklebury in the early-ninth century, she may have done so to commemorate Kenelm, although it was her name that was remembered here. Burghild's death is as shrouded in mystery as her early life. It had probably occurred by 840.

Berkshire was long disputed between Wessex and Mercia. In 571, the West Saxon Cutha took the four *tunas* of Benson, Limbury, Aylesbury and Eynsham from the Britons.³¹ The territories of these 'central places' covered much of the Chilterns and upper Thames Valley, controlled by Mercia from the late-seventh century. In 779, Cynewulf of Wessex and Offa of Mercia 'contended' (OE *gefuhton*) at Benson, Offa took the *tun* and control of north-west Berkshire, the area associated with Burghild four decades later.³² By the mid-ninth century, Mercia had begun to lose control of the area. Alfred the Great was born at Wantage in 849, while in 853 his sister Æthelswith made a dynastic marriage with Burgred of Mercia. Pressure from the Vikings led ancient enemies to make common cause, however, and the Mercian *ealdorman* Æthelwulf remained in office until his death in battle with the Danes at Englefield in late-870.³³

The early ecclesiastical history of this region is equally complex. Dorchester was the see of the *Gewisse* or West Saxons from 635 until the 660s, when it was moved to Winchester.³⁴ When Mercia took over this area, Dorchester became the see of Ætla, one of five Whitby monks to become a bishop, c.675–685.³⁵ The see moved briefly to Lichfield, thence to Leicester, whose first bishop was the exiled Northumbrian cleric Wilfrid.³⁶ Dorchester continued to function as the a local minster until Danish settlement led to the abandonment of Leicester c.870. Dorchester was finally abandoned for Lincoln shortly after 1066.

The disparate sources for the life of Burghild discussed above enable us to establish a broad, if sketchy, framework:

- She lived in the period 760x770 to 820x840.
- She was a member of the Mercian royal family that ruled from 796 until 823.
- She was the sister of kings Coenwulf, and Ceolwulf, and Coenswith, and aunt to St. Kenelm and abbess Cwoenthryth.
- She seems to have remained unmarried and may have entered the religious life.
- She was connected with Berkshire, and may have founded a minster at Bucklebury, that took her name.
- She is commemorated by two clusters of place-names in southern Mercia, centred on two Roman roads.

Even if Burghild did not join the ranks of Anglo-Saxon royal saints, she was remembered long after her death across a large swathe of Mercia. The Buckinghamshire Burghild-names centre on Stowe, while the southern end of Buckle (Ryknield) Street lies close to Stow-on-the-Wold, both possible cult-centres (see below).

THE POSTHUMOUS POPULARITY OF BURGHILD

The earliest contemporary references to Burghild are in Worcestershire (967) and Oxfordshire (1006x11). Given the rarity of her name, it is probable that these and later examples do refer to Burghild, sister of Coenwulf. Although she appears to have been forgotten in north Buckinghamshire by c.1350, perhaps because the Roman road through Stowe ceased to be a major route,

her name persists to this day as Buckle Street in Gloucestershire, Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

How can we account for this enduring popularity? It is hardly surprising that her niece Cwoenthryth did not give rise to a cult in her adopted Kent, given the belligerent record of Mercia there in the eighth and ninth centuries. Burghild's murdered nephew Kenelm had an enduring medieval cult, with a few church dedications and one place-name to his credit. Burghild herself may have founded the church at Bucklebury, and had links with Abingdon. Hers is the only Anglo-Saxon female name linked with lengthy stretches of Roman road.

Burghild is not named in surviving lists of Anglo-Saxon saints, although she is mentioned in Kenelm's late *Vita*. John Blair has argued that, with 120 recorded cults at places known to have been minsters, plus twenty not so identifiable, there is a case to be made for *every* major pre-Conquest church once having had its "own" saint.³⁷ Although the Conversion of the English began only in 597, a vigorous cult of native saints had developed by 700, mostly high-ranking ecclesiastics and royal virgins, as shown by Bede and other early writers.³⁸ Burghild's father Coenwulf was apparently venerated at the family minster of Winchcombe, while the youthful royal 'martyrs' Kenelm (d.811) and Wigstan (d.849) show that such cults continued to develop in the ninth century, in Burghild's own milieu. Fifty or so of the known Anglo-Saxon saints were women. There was no formal process of canonisation or authentication of cults at this early date. It is a matter of chance whether written records survived and cults persisted into the later medieval period and beyond that a saint's name is known to us today.

Blair identifies four principal types of cult: lay founders; heads and members of religious communities; bishops and hermits.³⁹ A broad band of known pre-Conquest cults runs across the south Midlands from Herefordshire to Ely. Most locations with Burghild connections are peripheral this zone, although only one-third of the twenty-eight known minsters in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire have recorded saints. Conversely, the major churches at Brixworth and Wing, both with relic-crypts, have no identified saints. Stenton's suggestion that Anglo-Saxon female names prefixed to *burh* may

denote the sites of minsters may offer examples of "lost" saints. One such is Bucklebury, echoes of whose superior status persisted in 1086, and Burghild may have been associated with other, as yet unidentified, minsters, including Stowe.

BURGHILD AND STOWE

We now turn to consider the history of Stowe and its environs between the seventh and eleventh centuries. Stowe parish, including Dadford, Lamport and Boycott (a detached part of Oxfordshire until 1844) is neatly bisected by the Roman road known as *Buggildestret*. Several Roman sites have been identified, including a pottery kiln (possibly 1st century), a tile kiln, a possible cremation urn and two ditches.⁴⁰ Although there is no documentary evidence earlier than Domesday Book, the place-name Stowe hints at a possible religious significance (see below).

There were six small estates in Stowe parish in 1086, together assessed at sixteen hides. There was land for twenty-three ploughs but only 9½ were at work, suggesting a landscape far from fully exploited. The enumerated population was twenty-three, with a social structure very different from both Hundred and shire (see Table 3).

There is no mention of freemen or sokemen at Stowe in 1086, although such individuals occur frequently in later manorial and other records. Villeins, the upper echelon of the peasantry, are less than half as numerous as might be expected. The population of Stowe manor and Dadford 2 consisted entirely of bordars, smallholders with perhaps five to ten acres of land. Dyer has suggested that excessive numbers of this class may hint at commercial activities.⁴¹ If that were the case here, the bordars may have been associated with the 'holy place of assembly' and 'long market' discussed below, offering services to travellers. Cottagers still outnumbered villeins in 1279.⁴²

The area within a dozen miles of Stowe was divided between three of the shires created in the tenth-century, thereby obscuring whatever Mercian administrative arrangements may have existed between c.660 and c.875.⁴³ Elsewhere in Mercia there is clear evidence of *provinciae* (often erstwhile kingdoms), ruled by *subreguli*. King's Sutton was an important Mercian centre, connected to Brackley and Buckingham by the legend of St Rumwold, whose third and final resting-place was

TABLE 3 Domesday Population Statistics

	% Villeins	% Bordars	% Slaves
Stowe	17.5	65.0	17.5
Stotfold Hundred	45.4	35.4	19.2
Buckinghamshire	57.2	26.1	16.7

at the latter.⁴⁴ Weedon Bec was also a Mercian royal estate. Stowe, with its Roman road, a market of some kind at Lamport, and the hundredal meeting-place, may once have been a Mercian royal centre on the route between the kingdom's core territory around Tamworth/Lichfield and the Thames Valley. Two *burhs* were built at Buckingham in 914 by Edward the Elder as part of his strategy to re-conquer the Danelaw. In 1066, Buckingham was the only borough in the county. Its minster was held by the bishop of Dorchester and worth almost as much as the borough.⁴⁵ It was joined with King's Sutton and Horley (Oxon.) as a prebend for the new see at Lincoln c.1090, and became a mere chapelry for several centuries.⁴⁶ Although the minster and medieval town lay north of the Ouse, the bulk of the parish was south of the river and Buckingham lay in Rowley Hundred, whose meeting-place was in Lenborough.⁴⁷

The name Buckingham (OE *Buccingas+hamm*, 'land in a river bend occupied by Bucc's people') probably originated before c.650.⁴⁸ *-Ingas* names often denoted territories rather than individual settlements to which they subsequently became attached, and there is a cluster in this area: Lillingstone, 'people of Lytel or Lytla', Lenborough, '[hill of] the slope-dwellers' and Tingewick, '[outlying farm of] Tida's people'.⁴⁹ Their territories cannot have had especially extensive, and all probably lay within the original *parochia* of Buckingham minster. Slight evidence of late-Saxon fabric at Lillingstone Lovell church which may point to its having been a 'secondary' minster, it is dedicated to the Assumption, as is Stowe church, part of a significant cluster of ten in north Buckinghamshire.⁵⁰ The antiquity of these dedications is unknown, although this feast was noted in England before 1066.

Of the settlements in Stowe parish, Boycott (Boia's cottage; from OE **boia*, 'boy, servant, knave' – it is difficult to tell whether the common or proper noun is the source) and Dadford (Dodda's

ford) are typical combinations of personal-names habitative and landscape elements.⁵¹ Stowe and Lamport, however, are altogether more interesting. The root of OE *stōw* is '[to] stand', hence 'place where people stand together' with developed senses such as 'place of assembly, holy place'.⁵² Gelling notes that *stōw* applied to Christian institutions is unusual, and 'each may be considered as referring to something exceptionally noteworthy in its region'.⁵³ *Stōw* is sometimes compounded with the names of saints or other religious, especially in the south-west and Welsh Marches, but note also Hibaldestow (Lincolnshire) from Hygebald, and Bury St. Edmunds, formerly St. Edmunds Stow.⁵⁴ Unqualified Stow[e]-names are more common in eastern England, albeit generally widely spaced.⁵⁵ Stowe Nine Churches (Northants.) is only twelve miles from Stowe (Bucks.), and is associated with St Werburgh (d.700x707) in her twelfth-century *Vita*.⁵⁶ Her father Wulfhere played an important role in the conversion of Mercia, and she belongs to the company of royal abbesses and saints characteristic of the time, similar to the milieu of Burghild a century later.

Gelling notes that Stow[e] is seldom used of minor settlements. Most were Domesday manors and parishes, performing 'a special function in the life of a wide area'.⁵⁷ Kenelmstow in Romsley (Worcs.) lies about twelve miles from Buckle Street, and was the site of a chapel said to have been built over the place where Burghild's nephew was murdered, while Wistanstow (Salop. and Leics.) commemorate Wigstan (k.849), while St Helen's, Abingdon (see above) is recorded as *Helnestou*.⁵⁸

The grant of a five-hide estate at Stowe (Northants.) in 986 by King Eadwig to Byrthelm bishop-elect of Wells offers valuable clues for the history of 'our' Stowe, which had the same assessment, the notional minimum for achieving thegny status.⁵⁹ The bounds of this estate include *wætlinga stræte, fyrdstræt* (OE *fyrd*, 'army, military array', road used by the levies that every holder

of bookland was obliged to provide) and *þa oþre stræt*, ‘the other street’.⁶⁰ Watling Street formed the eastern boundary of the estate, while ‘Army Street’ led from Northampton towards Banbury. The perambulation begins and ends at *halgan wylles forda*, ‘ford by the holy well or spring’ on Watling Street, abutting Weedon. On the western boundary was *Rumboldes dene* (now Ramsden Corner), ‘Rumwold’s valley’, evidence that infant saint whose resting-place was at Buckingham was remembered here.

Like other places now known simply as ‘Stow’, Stowe (Bucks.) might once have had a prefix. Burghild’s association with the Roman road in this area may merely be an extension of its use further south, where she had, or was believed to have had, links with Abingdon, Culham, Blewbury and Bucklebury. Although there is no evidence that Stowe church was ever a minster or saint’s resting-place, John Blair’s thesis about the ubiquity of Anglo-Saxon saints raises the possibility that Stowe was once *Burghildes stow*, the prefix surviving in the road name, before being forgotten completely. The name *Cruchweie*, ‘cross/crucifix way’, is on record in the 13th century.⁶¹ Stowe church is documented from the early-thirteenth century, although the earliest visible fabric is century about a century later. It was valued at £10 in 1291, on a par with substantial villas such as Leckhampstead, Thornborough and Padbury.⁶²

While the meaning of the name Lamport, OE *lang port*, ‘long town or market’, is clear, its significance difficult to explain.⁶³ The two rural manors of Domesday offer no hint of commercial activity, and later sources also depict a typical open-field farming community. Langport/Lamport-names are rare, and their salient features as revealed by Domesday Book are discussed briefly below.

Lamport (Northants.) lies on the Northampton-Market Harborough road, just north of Brixworth, with its major minster church. In 1066 there were three small estates totalling five hides, with no evidence of commercial activity.⁶⁴ There were two miniscule holdings named *Langeport* in Hertfordshire totalling three virgates. This lost name has been identified with Hare Street in Great Hormead near Buntingford.⁶⁵ Kent had two Langports. One was an urban settlement belonging to St Augustine’s abbey, Canterbury, with seventy burgesses.⁶⁶ The other was an estate of the Archbishop on Romney Marsh, with 21 burgesses at nearby

Romney.⁶⁷ Lamport (East Sussex) was a tithing of Eastbourne, held by the Norman abbey of Fécamp in 1054. It may have originated as a beach market at the end of the sea-crossing from Normandy.⁶⁸ Langport (Somerset) originated as a *burh* in the ninth century, one of a network created by Alfred the Great and his successors as a defence against the Vikings, and remains a market town today.⁶⁹

Assuming that Lamport (Bucks.) *did* once have the commercial activity implied by its name, that role had been lost by 1086, and possibly long before. The general upsurge in commerce and trade from the late-ninth century may have been the catalyst for setting up a market, possibly seasonal here, on *Kingstrete* close to Roman *Burghildestraet*.⁷⁰

The meeting-place of Stodfold Hundred was located in Lamport (c.SP683375). The name is from OE *stōd-fald*, ‘stud-fold, horse-enclosure’.⁷¹ By 900 Stowe was close to the boundary between Wessex and the Danelaw, with Buckingham soon to acquire two fortified *burhs*. If Stowe had once been the administrative centre of a ‘multiple estate’, it had clearly been fragmented by 1066. This process was common in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as kings rewarded retainers with land, while ensuring that military capability was preserved.

If there had been a holy site at Stowe and a market at Lamport, they had probably ceased to function before the end of the Anglo-Saxon period. Roman *Buggildestret/rode* apparently continued to be used, before finally disappears from the record c.1300.⁷² The Hundred meeting-place lost its function with the development of the triple hundreds. First recorded in 1255, the Hundred of Buckingham replaced Anglo-Saxon Stodfold, Lamua and Rowley Hundreds.

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to explore the significance of the name *Buggildstrete* which features prominently in medieval manorial records for places in Stowe parish. We have seen that the name of Burghild, a Mercian princess who lived in the period c.770–840 was given to the Roman road over much of its length in Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Burghild was remembered not only in connection with the Silchester-Towcester road, however, but also with the southern section of Rykniel Street between Stow-on-the-Wold and Alcester, where it survives to the present disguised as Buckle Street.

There were also various locations not directly on these two roads, notably Bucklebury (Berks.) where she may well have founded a small minster.

Burghild was the sister of Coenwulf of Mercia (r.796–821). They belonged to one of several branches of the Mercian monarchy which occupied the throne in the decades following the death of Offa. Her niece Cwoenthryth was a well-known and litigious abbess, while her murdered nephew Kenelm was venerated as a saint. In the early 820s, Burghild indicated that she wished to be buried at Abingdon. It is by no means impossible that she is one of many “missing” Anglo-Saxon saints, almost, but not quite, lost to view.

The persistence of Burghild’s name around Stowe, a place-name often associated with cult centres, may indicate that she had once been venerated there. The seventh-century infant prodigy St Rumwold was associated in medieval times with King’s Sutton, Brackley and Buckingham, and also Stowe Nine Churches (Northants.), but not apparently with Stowe. The names of Stowe and Lamport are both significant, indicating a probable religious centre and a trading-place. The late survival of the name *Buggildestret* may be a clue that Burghild, a pious royal lady, featured in a cult at Stowe, whose festivals in turn attracted commercial activity at Lamport, and possibly the administrative functions of Stodfold Hundred. Whatever the reality of her life and times, it is clear that Burghild was long-remembered over much of southern Mercia, from central Berkshire to Warwickshire. It is hoped that the present study has succeeded in rescuing Burghild from the obscurity into which she fell in later medieval times, as well as highlighting the fascinating history behind many of our minor place- and field-names.

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