

Offa's Dyke Journal



Volume 4

Borders in Early Medieval Britain

Edited by Ben Guy, Howard Williams and Liam Delaney

Aims and Scope

Offa's Dyke Journal is a peer-reviewed venue for the publication of high-quality research on the archaeology, history and heritage of frontiers and borderlands focusing on the Anglo-Welsh border. The editors invite submissions that explore dimensions of Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke and the 'short dykes' of western Britain, including their life-histories and landscape contexts. *ODJ* will also consider comparative studies on the material culture and monumentality of frontiers and borderlands from elsewhere in Britain, Europe and beyond. We accept:

1. Notes and Reviews of up to 3,000 words
2. Interim reports on fieldwork of up to 5,000 words
3. Original discussions, syntheses and analyses of up to 10,000 words

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Front cover: The River Dee looking east from the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct. Here, the Offa's Dyke Path traverses the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct & Canal World Heritage Site (Photograph: Howard Williams, 2022, with thanks to Rose Guy for assistance). Cover and logo design by Howard Williams, Liam Delaney.

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Place-names and Offa's Dyke: The Limits of Inference

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This chapter examines English and Welsh place-names along the line of Offa's Dyke. It is divided into three sections, each concentrating on a separate area and each given a rather different focus. First, names either side of the dyke passing through the hundred of Clun in south-west Shropshire are examined to show the nature of the evidence and some of its complexity, as well — it is hoped — as some of its interest. The second section reconsiders some specific arguments about the dating of English names lying to the west of the dyke in modern Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire. Finally the third section, in rather speculative vein, attempts to co-ordinate a 'reading' of the place-name evidence in Oswestry hundred, north-west Shropshire, with the different lines indicated by Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke and various types of historical evidence. It is suggested, on one hand, that a cultural boundary visible in the later medieval period may have roots deep in the Anglo-Saxon period, but also that this line was probably always only one element in a complex skein of boundaries that made up the Anglo-Welsh frontier.

Keywords: place-names, linguistic history, language contact, English, Welsh, Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke, Shropshire, Radnorshire, Montgomeryshire, borders

For Offa, a most mighty king of March ... caused a very deep ditch with an exceeding high wall to be made ... about an hundred miles long ...

And all the towns and villages almost which be on the east side therof have their names ending in these terminations, *-ton* or *-ham*, whereby it appeareth that the Saxons sometime dwelled there. Howbeit, now the Welshmen in all places beyond that ditch towards Lloegr [England] have planted themselves.¹

Although Humphrey Llwyd's pioneering work represents a significant early recognition that surviving place-names could help throw light on this aspect of Britain's early medieval past, it must be said that his observation is true only at a rather low resolution. The pattern of naming along both sides of Offa's Dyke nowhere shows a very tidy divide between common English types on one side and Welsh formations on the other. Even allowing for the areas to the east in which Welsh populations thrived in later periods, as Llwyd recognised, it is far from straightforward to construct a detailed account of the history of the border by correlating name-evidence with the line of Offa's Dyke. That is not to say, however, that the attempt is not worth making, nor that both types of evidence do not have valuable information to offer.

¹ Humphrey Llwyd, *The Breviary of Britain*, trans. Thomas Twyne (1573). The quotation is taken from the recent edition by Schwyzer (2011: 98–99).

This article has the limited aim of discussing the relationship between place-names and the line of Offa’s Dyke along some fifty miles of the frontier between Chirk in the north and Radnor in the south. This is not a comprehensive study: that would be a much larger work, for which much of the groundwork — in terms of the collection and interpretation of medieval and modern documentary name-forms — remains to be done. Rather it is arranged as three separate reflections on the partial materials currently existing. Two of these sections, on the hundreds of Clun in the south-west and Oswestry in the north-west of Shropshire, are in a sense progress reports on ongoing work to complete the English Place-Name Society’s survey of that county, begun by the late Margaret Gelling.² The other section, taken in second place below, briefly reconsiders the significance of a number of English place-names lying west of the dyke in the east of modern Montgomeryshire and Radnorshire. Not tackled here is the stretch of border running further south, through Herefordshire and on to the confluence of Wye and Severn, nor the situation to the north in Flintshire, where Offa’s Dyke is not firmly identified.³

The three reflections approach the material in different ways. The first, on Clun, introduces the kind of material offered by medieval place-names, a rich resource for studying Anglo-Welsh contact in what has clearly long been a border zone; it does not seek to make any general historical argument about conditions in the time of Offa. The second, in contrast, examines some influential arguments that have been advanced about the significance of a number of English place-names lying to the west of the dyke in modern mid-Wales. Although it finds those arguments wanting, the final reflection, on Oswestry, suggests some new possible correlations that might inform historical debate, albeit that the more substantial part of this proposal involves not Offa’s but Wat’s Dyke, a little to the east.

Clun: characterising names on the border

The complexity, challenge and interest of place-names at the linguistic border is well illustrated in the hundred of Clun. Here, in an area neatly bisected by Offa’s Dyke, there is a rich mix of English names, Welsh names and names shaped or reshaped by give and take between the two languages. Compounds with common English generics include

² The first published volume, the fruit of decades of preparatory work, was Gelling 1990. Gelling published five subsequent volumes, the last appearing posthumously. Since then additions to the series have been made by John Baker, Jayne Carroll and Paul Cavill; Oswestry hundred will be Part 10 (Parsons forthcoming) and Clun will follow in Part 11 (Carroll and Parsons forthcoming) completing the material of the survey. A twelfth and final volume will contain introduction and apparatus.

³ In fact the stretch examined here constitutes almost the whole undisputed length of the dyke given that Hill and Worthington (2003) argue that sections in Herefordshire and Gloucestershire are not part of the same construction. Ray and Bapty (2016) strongly disagree with this view, though they accept that the line and intermittent nature of the earthwork in Herefordshire suggests a different kind of cross-border relationship in the eighth century to that implied further north (2016: 272–274). More recently Delaney (2021) has argued that the dyke did indeed run continuously as far as the Wye, and that the apparent gaps are due to later loss.

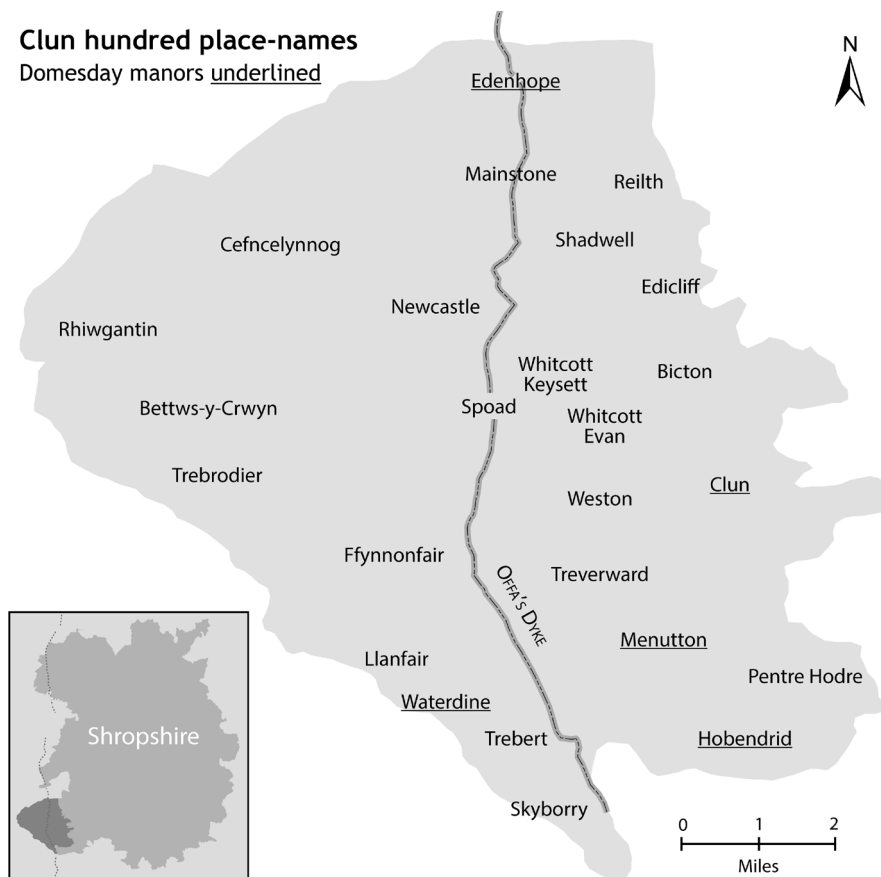


Figure 1: Clun hundred place-names

Weston (Old English [hereafter OE] *tūn* ‘settlement, estate’), Bicton (OE *tūn* or *dūn* ‘hill’), Whitcott (OE *cot* ‘cottage’), *Edicliff* (OE *clif* ‘cliff, steep slope’), Edenhope (OE *hop* ‘secluded valley’) and Shadwell (OE *welle* ‘spring, stream’).⁴ Wholly Welsh names include *Ffynnonfair* (Welsh [hereafter W] *ffynnon* ‘well, spring’ + *Mair*, the W form of Mary), *Cefncelynnog* (W *cefn* ‘back, ridge’ + *celynnog* ‘growing with holly’), *Skyborry* (W *ysguborau* ‘barns’) and *Pentre Hodre* (formerly *Perthrodry*, with W *perth* ‘hedge, thicket, copse’ and perhaps the personal name Rhodri; W *pentref* ‘village, hamlet’ has been substituted, since at least the seventeenth century, as first element).

⁴ The details of all the place-names mentioned in this section will be treated in Carroll and Parsons (forthcoming). In the meantime most are discussed by Gelling (1990) and/or Morgan (1997). The six names listed in this sentence are all certainly or probably wholly English formations: Edenhope, Whitcott and perhaps *Edicliff* are likely to contain OE personal names, Bicton probably involves **bica* ‘beak, promontory’ and Weston is west of Clun. Shadwell is an example of a recurrent compound meaning ‘boundary stream’ (see Smith 1956, vol. 2: 99 [*scēad* ‘separation’]), though it is not clear which of various possible streams is meant, nor whether the boundary would have been one of any great cultural or political significance. Note that italicised head-names, as *Edicliff*, are no longer current.

Also ultimately Welsh (or ‘British’, since it is probably older than the separation of Brittonic languages into the medieval survivors of Welsh, Cornish and Cumbric) is the *caput*-name Clun, which is an adoption of the river-name that became Colunwy in Welsh.⁵ Such a transfer of an early river-name to a settlement-name used by the Anglo-Saxons is widespread across England, of course. More distinctive of the border, as a name-type, is probably Menutton. Here the qualifier is, or derives from, W *mynydd* ‘mountain, (large) hill, common grazing’. Whilst this could be another fairly common type in England, in which OE *tūn* is added to the Welsh name (or a part of the Welsh name) for a local feature, it is more likely in this instance that the Welsh term has been borrowed into local usage. English is generally resistant to the adoption of loanwords from Welsh, but in the case of *mynydd* > Middle English [hereafter ME] *munede* there is persuasive evidence that the borrowing occurred in several border regions, including south-west Shropshire. This name — like the now-lost *Wolstanmynd* (Cavill 2020: 24; Morgan 2001: 169–170) and *Munetun* some fifteen miles to the north in Chirbury hundred (Cavill 2020: 116–117) — is likely to contain the loan, perhaps in the particular sense ‘upland common grazing’.⁶ The much more common opposite phenomenon of an English loanword into Welsh is found in the parish-name Bettws-y-Crwyn, where the generic element is W *betws* ‘chapel’ < OE *bed-hūs* ‘prayer-house’.⁷

Another of the modern parishes, Llanfair Waterdine, combines two separate names, one from each language: the Welsh ‘St Mary’s church’ is distinguished from other instances of Llanfair by the addition of an English topographical name ‘water valley’, with OE *denu*. Ecclesiastical place-names with secular affixes — sometimes, as here, topographical names denoting the ‘same’ place or a broader unit where the church is situated — are a common type in Wales.⁸

A number of further names in the hundred appear to be English in origin, but to have been greatly altered in the mouths of Welsh-speakers. Hobendrid represents Domesday Book’s

⁵ The relationship between Welsh Colunwy and the borrowed monosyllabic Clun has been explained as suggesting early versions of the river-name with different suffixes (Ekwall 1928: 87–70; Jackson 1953: 309, 382, 688; Parsons 2013a: 113).

⁶ See MED *mōunthe* n., with examples of the form *munede* from the south-west midland author Lazamon. Morgan (1997: 39) cites an instance from the Clun medieval court rolls of the holding of a *menede* where men burnt turves. Instances of *mynd* used as a generic in English-structured minor names abound in the hundreds of Purslow and Munslow which neighbour Clun to the east: examples are given by Baker and Carroll (2020: xiii, 274, 340, 359, 384–387, etc.). For a comparable use and (probably independent) borrowing in the Forest of Dean, see the evidence for *meend* < ME *munede* discussed by Smith (1964: 218; 1965: 19, 26, 157, etc.). In this context its application is to ‘a piece of open ground or waste in the forest’, the link presumably being through common grazing or pasture, senses also perhaps consistent with the turbarry implied above. ‘Common grazing’ would appear to fit Welsh usage; see also Barrow (1998: 62–66) for judicious discussion of the Brittonic term in Wales and Scotland.

⁷ Morgan’s suggestion (1997: 17), based on the form *Rhyd y Crwyn* 1622, that the chapel was built at ‘the ford of the skins’ (W *crwyn*, plural of *croen*) — where hides may have been washed — is probably the best available explanation of the qualifier. For *bed-hūs* and *betws* in English and Welsh names see Parsons and Styles (1997: 70) and Owen (2013: 335).

⁸ For numerous comparable formations involving Mary and Michael churches, as e.g. Llanfair Clydogau, Ceredigion, and Llanfihangel Nant Melan, Radnorshire, see Owen and Morgan (2007: 242–251); also Richards (1968).

Edrethope, with the OE personal name *Ēadred* + *hop* 'secluded valley'. It has been assimilated to Welsh patterns, in that the generic element has moved to first position and its final /p/ has been voiced to /b/.⁹ Something similar has apparently happened with Trebert, which is found in the early thirteenth century as *B'ton*'. This seems to be an example of a common English name-type — probably Burton, but just possibly Barton — which has been 'cymricised' by the inversion of elements and the replacement of *tūn* by *W tref*, of similar meaning.¹⁰ A third example is very probably Treverward, though in this case there is no direct evidence of the original English form. First recorded as *Treboreward* in 1284, this surely belongs to the set of names incorporating an OE *burh-ward* 'fort guardian' which cluster in the border counties of Cheshire, Shropshire and Herefordshire. It seems very likely that this place-name should be regarded as originally identical with Burwarnton, some twenty miles east (Gelling 1990: 67–68), and with a lost Domesday *Burwardestone* in Cheshire (Dodgson 1972: 1).¹¹

It is worth pausing to consider the processes lying behind these transpositions. They do not seem to be wholly consistent. Treverward might be seen as a full assimilation of an English **Burhwardestūn* — and could have first been current when the concept and role of the putative *burh-ward* were still understood. Trebert, on the other hand, would be a very 'unsatisfactory' form of Burton or Barton: neither *bwrt* nor *bert* probably ever meant anything to anyone, while the preservation of /b/ — as opposed to the regular lenition to /v/ seen in Treverward — represents a failure to assimilate the name fully into Welsh. The structure of the name, with generic *tūn* in final position, was clearly understood, but the significance of the name as a whole was not appreciated — Morgan (1997: 53) aptly called it a combination of *tref* and 'undigested *Burt*'. Whether *Edrethope* made much sense to the Welsh who first turned it into *Hobendrid* is also unclear. While *hop* might have been understood and even adopted very locally as a loanword into Welsh, since

⁹ Gelling (1990: 152–153) felt the identification of DB *Edrethope* with *Hobendrid* was not certain, but the equation of the names is highly probable, even if the rather large Domesday manor may have encompassed a wider area than the later township. Thorn and Thorn (1986: note to 4,20,23) are surely mistaken in equating the Domesday name with *Lurkenhope*. Both Gelling and the Thorns were also probably misled by the 1066 holder, Edric the Wild, into suggesting Edric as the personal name element: OE *Ēadred* suits the forms better, as Morgan (1997: 32) observes. *Ēadred* was presumably a somewhat earlier holder of the manor. On *hob* for *hop* see n. 12 below.

¹⁰ Gelling (1990: 41) includes the name in her discussion of Burton-names (see further below p. 115–116), with the comment that it is 'an obvious Welsh rendering of Burton'. Early forms like *Trebert* 1284, *Trefburt* 1345 tend to support that interpretation, though the earliest form so far collected, *B'ton*', might equally — perhaps more straightforwardly — represent *Berton*', OE *beretūn* 'barley farm, grange', which would regularly develop to a modern Barton; a possible association with the barns of neighbouring *Skyborry* is then attractive. It is not clear how much weight to assign to the apparent vowel-quality in the reordered and Welsh-influenced *Trebert*.

¹¹ On the group see further below, p. 116. As noted by all commentators, *Burgward* could alternatively be a personal name in any or all of these names, but the recurrence and the distribution favour the interpretation as an administrative official. It is tempting to compare the later Marcher evidence for the service of castle-guard, and perhaps also for the Welsh-named office of the *ceisiad* 'sergeant of the peace'; it is intriguing that the latter term is the affix in *Whitcott Keysett*, three miles north of Treverward. On castle-guard at Clun see Lieberman (2010: 177). On *ceisiad* and similar Welsh terminology in the March see Lieberman (2010: 203–205); also Rees (1924: 103–106).

it a very frequent generic in the region, there is no evidence for its independent use in surviving records of the language. The shift of the word to initial position here could alternatively be an unconscious reflex stemming from an appreciation of the relative shapes of English and Welsh names.¹²

One last name to be considered neatly sums up the dints and bruises that place-names passed to and fro between languages can receive. Reilth is in origin simply the Old English word *hyll* ‘hill’ (itself a remarkably understated choice in a very hilly landscape). Local Welsh-speakers adopted it and – doubtless with understanding, though without choosing to translate it into an equivalent term like *bryn* or *rhiw* – added the Welsh definite article *yr*, giving ‘the hill’. They also assimilated the word-final /l/ to the characteristic Welsh lateral fricative /ɬ/, as in *llan* ‘church-enclosure’ or *pwll* ‘pool’, a sound ‘sharp in the hissing’ as Humphrey Llwyd described it (Schwyzer 2011: 52). Later generations then attached the *r* of the article in *yr Hyll* to the root of the name, and finally English speakers substituted /θ/, *lth*, for the tricky /ɬ/.¹³

The discussion so far has focused on the languages and language-contact evident in the place-names of Clun, and has not seriously raised questions of chronology and geography. A consideration of chronology must begin with the dates of record. Five names in the hundred are recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086: Clun, Edenhope, Hobendrid (as *Edretheope*), Menutton and [Llanfair] Waterdine. All the other names marked on Figure 1 are first found in the thirteenth century, most of them in either 1272 or 1284.¹⁴ The primary point that needs emphasis, therefore, is that any use of this material to investigate the Anglo-Saxon period requires caution. There is no reason to doubt that many of the township-names were coined before the Norman Conquest, but not all were. Newcastle is one evident exception, clearly a late name with the Norman French *castel* and probably with reference to a Norman-period motte.¹⁵ The referent in Skyborry is also likely to be post-Conquest. The place was the property of the Cistercian

¹² Shropshire and Radnorshire examples of *-hop* include Edenhope above, Lurkenhope, Wilderhope, Millichope, Evenjobb, Cascob (Gelling and Cole 2000: 133–141, and see further below). However, although instances of simplex Hope in FLI and MTG are assimilated into Welsh to the extent that a Welsh definite article is sometimes provided, as *Yr Hob* (Owen and Morgan 2007: 198), I see no likely examples of thoroughly Welsh formations with the term as generic element, which would more clearly suggest lexical borrowing. The township of Hobarris, which adjoins Hobendrid to the north, is the only probable parallel in which the term appears as generic in first place; the qualifier in that name is quite uncertain, but is not unlikely to be another English personal name and the two adjoining names would then be of the same, ultimately Old English, type. See Parry-Williams (1923: 240–241) on the voicing of the final consonant in English *hop* > Welsh *hob* in a number of these names; the equivalent process voiced final *t* to *d* in Spoad, below.

¹³ The name is a near parallel for the well known Rhyl, Flintshire, though that name did not share the same development of final /l/ (Owen and Gruffydd 2017: 171).

¹⁴ The two key documents of these dates are, respectively, the inquisition *post mortem* of the holdings of John FitzAlan III, Earl of Arundel (IPM 1236–72: 280–281), and a settlement relating to the dower lands of his widow, Isabel Mortimer, which had recently been regained from the Welsh (Close Rolls 1279–1288: 260–262; see further below, n. 20, on the Welsh annexation).

¹⁵ Probably the motte ‘the Crugyn’ at SO 243820: see castlewales.com/crugyn.html and castlesfortsbattles.co.uk/midlands/newcastle_crugyn.html, both viewed 25 May 2022; also Lieberman 2010: 168–169.

monastery of Cwm-hir in Radnorshire, founded in 1176, and the 'barns' may well have been its own grange buildings (Morgan 1997: 50).¹⁶ A third name may be suspected of being late on different grounds. Spoad (*Spoot* 1272, *Spote* 1284) looks very much as if it is English *spout*, a term commonly applied in later Shropshire minor names to springs of water.¹⁷ Since the OS maps mark more than a dozen springs issuing from the slopes of Spoad Hill, which is surmounted by Springhill Farm, it seems very likely that this is the correct origin.¹⁸ Yet the word *spout* is not recorded in English texts at all before the fourteenth century, and it may be a medieval loanword from Dutch or Norse.¹⁹ While it is by no means inconceivable that Spoad in fact preserves a native Old English term cognate with its Germanic cousins, and that the name dates back centuries before its first appearance, it is clearly not safe simply to assume that it does so.

Putting aside the Norman-period Newcastle, and uncertainty about Spoad, there is nonetheless an obvious chronological pattern in Clun hundred to discuss. Four of the five Domesday names are English-language formations (albeit that Menutton contains a Welsh first element, probably as a loanword) and the fifth, a transferred river-name, is a common type in Anglo-Saxon England, as has been noted. More 'actively' Welsh names are not found until the thirteenth century, and much of the reshaping of originally English names discussed above is first evident in documents subsequent to the initial records: *Edrethope* 1086 is first found reversed to Hobendrid in 1272; *B'ton'* 1214–1215 is reversed to Trebert by 1284; Reilth is *Ulle* in 1272 and remains as *Hulle* 1284 and *Hull'* 1336, before the influence from Welsh described above first appears in *Rielt'* 1344. It would seem that the relative strength of English and Welsh languages in the area shifted between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries, and in part this has a known context. In the thirteenth century most of the area was attached to the borough of Clun as a 'Welshry', a Marcher term used to define areas with distinctive Welsh legal and tenurial arrangements, and the recorded personal names of local people tend to confirm that the population at this time was substantially Welsh-speaking.²⁰

¹⁶ The township contained the grange of Mynachty-boeth (with W *mynachdy* 'monk-house' plus the qualifier *poeth* 'hot', which may indicate either burning or a warm situation). Possible association with a potentially Anglo-Saxon *bere-tūn* 'grange' in neighbouring Trebert (above, n. 10) might complicate the dating, however.

¹⁷ For instances in nineteenth-century field-names in south-west Shropshire see, e.g. Baker and Carroll (2020: 40, 173, 237, 282). With the last example there, Spouthouse, cf. Spout House in Chirbury (Cavill 2020: 14), also first noted in the nineteenth century, which takes its name from the spring providing a 'bountiful supply of excellent water' that gives the place's Welsh name Llanffynnonwen 'church at a white or holy spring'. Earlier instances of the term in the county appear rare, the first noted being *The Spowte* 1611 (Gelling 2001: 258). For final *-t* > *-d* under Welsh influence see n. 12 above.

¹⁸ The springs are best shown on the modern OS 10,000:1 sheet. It should be noted that the *spring* in Springhill could alternatively denote a 'young wood, coppice' (Smith 1956, vol. 2: 140), but in the context springs of water are evidently to be preferred.

¹⁹ OED 3rd ed., *spout* n. As noted there, and by Smith (1956, vol. 2: 139), thirteenth- and fourteenth-century instances in minor names in Cumberland and the West Riding of Yorkshire are likely to derive directly from the Old Norse word. That is most unlikely to be the case in Shropshire.

²⁰ See Lieberman 2010: 46–47. It may have been the perception that the land was essentially Welsh which encouraged the Welsh prince Llywelyn ap Gruffudd to occupy a significant part of the hundred

A conventional reading of these facts — in line with Llwyd’s sixteenth-century assessment — might suggest that English control and settlement, established during the Anglo-Saxon period, had been overlain, perhaps in the twelfth century, by immigrant settlers from Wales, reintroducing their language to borderland that had adopted English speech centuries before.²¹ If this were the case, then a number of the Welsh names, and the cymricised name-forms, that have been discussed here would probably be no older than 1100. There is, however, an alternative possibility — explored at greater length below in the comparable case of Oswestry — that while Anglo-Saxon control and lordship produced predominantly English place-names at the higher, administrative level, much of the farming population of Clun hundred may have remained Welsh-speaking throughout the Early Middle Ages; in this case the Welsh-language influence which is first apparent in the record in the thirteenth century may have been present, but largely invisible, for a very long time.

With regard to geography, given the appearance of Edenhope and Waterdine in the Domesday Book, the western boundary of English-controlled territory here in the later eleventh century presumably reached, and probably passed beyond, the line of Offa’s Dyke, in much the same way as the modern border does. It must be uncertain where the most westerly parts of the modern hundred, and especially the later parish of Bettws-y-Crwyn, stood — with regard to English administrative control or settlement — at this time.²² There are however tantalising hints, in the forms of some of the names, that early English settlement may at some stage have extended, like the modern frontier, up to the Kerry ridgeway and close to the source of the Teme. The evidence for this comes from two of the township-names in Bettws: Trebrodier, which survives attached to a farm, and *Rhiwgantin*, now lost (Morgan 1997: 53, 48). The etymology and development of neither name is wholly clear, but both could suggest underlying English formations. Beside Trebert and Treverward, Trebrodier (*Trebrother* 1284) perhaps represents an original ‘Brotherton’ with the Old English personal name *Brōðor*: as in the case of Trebert, a failure regularly to lenite /b/ to /v/ after feminine *tref* rather counts against a wholly Welsh name with *brodyr*, the plural form of *brawd* ‘brother’.²³ In *Rhiwgantin* (*Rouganton*

in the second half of the thirteenth century, and the occupation itself must have reinforced the status of the language locally. It is evident from the phrasing of the documents, and especially the 1284 Close Roll, however, that the concept of the Welshry antedated Llywelyn’s involvement, and some of the Welsh and Welsh-influenced place-names — including Pentre Hodre and the reversed Hobendrid — lie in the east of the hundred and outside the area annexed by Llywelyn.

²¹ Lloyd (1941: 53), for instance, observed that the Teme valley shows ‘a mixture of English and Welsh, which suggests an original English settlement, with a later tide of Welsh settlement’. For Smith (1997: 15) ‘Llywelyn ap Gruffudd occupied, albeit temporarily, the western parts of the lordship of Clun, an area long subject to alien rule and colonization but which, as the place-names indicate, had seen extensive Welsh resettlement’.

²² As Lieberman (2010: 194–202) explains, the Marcher lordship — which in the west matches the nineteenth-century hundred of Clun — does not continue the Anglo-Saxon hundredal pattern. In these circumstances it does not feel safe to project later arrangements back and assume that westerly territory not specifically named in Domesday was under English rule in the late eleventh century (see also Lieberman 2010: 29–30).

²³ As a personal name, *Brother* is often derived from ON *Bróðir*, but — as von Feilitzen noted (1937: 208 n. 7) — there is some evidence for equivalent English usage, notably in the name of an early ninth-century

1272) the first syllable either is, or in later forms has been assimilated to, *W rhiw* 'hill, slope', but the last looks very much like OE *tūn* which frequently gives *tyn* when adopted into Welsh.²⁴

Therefore it is possible that, just as clearly Welsh names stretch across the hundred from *Cefnclynnog* to *Pentre Hodre*, so English place-names, or traces of them, might be discerned from east to west. There is no sharp correlation with the line of Offa's Dyke down the middle of the hundred: rather the place-names, first and foremost, give a unique insight into aspects of what was clearly a border zone of long standing, over many centuries.²⁵

It is more difficult to come to firm conclusions about detailed matters of chronology. Of the putatively English names west of the dyke, *Trebrodier* and *Rhiwgantin* are too uncertain of derivation to bear the weight of any chronological deductions. *Waterdine* is of a type – a topographical name with *denu* 'valley' – that Gelling and Cole (2000: xvi–xviii) have taught us could be early, and it is certainly plausible that it might date from the earliest years of Anglo-Saxon settlement in this area. But it does not indicate that date to us and there is the complexity that as a topographical name it was not necessarily at first applied to an English-settled area: the Teme valley to the west could conceivably have been so named by Mercians peering over the dyke!

In the search for chronological indications the most promising of the names west of Offa's Dyke is probably *Trebert*, especially if that represents *Burton* rather than *Barton*. The distribution of names derived from OE *burh-tūn*, literally 'fort-settlement', suggested to Gelling (1990: 40) that in Mercia 'they may refer to a system of defence posts which remained operative until the Danish wars of the late ninth century' (also Gelling 1989; 1992: 119–122), and John Blair (2018: 199–228) has warmly endorsed and extended her interpretation, suggesting that the system had its origins in Mercia between 750 and 850. Although there seems to me some residual room for doubt about the interpretation and the chronology (not to mention the rival etymology in *bere-tūn*), even a tentative dating for *Trebert* to the 'age of Offa' would of course be of considerable interest. Yet even so, it does not answer an obvious question that arises from its position less than a mile to the west of the dyke: was the settlement established before the earthwork was built, or does the name represent English expansion beyond the dyke in subsequent years? Further — as yet unanswerable — questions are raised by *Trebert*'s possible

Northumbrian moneyer (also Smart 1981: 21; North 1994: 71–72).

²⁴ Owen (2013: 350) observes that this treatment of *tūn* is characteristic of Welsh areas of Shropshire and Flintshire. If the first element is originally English we might naturally think of *rūgan*, an inflected form of OE *rūh* 'rough', but there are other possibilities.

²⁵ It might be noted that the impression given by Davies (1978: 20) that Welsh influence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries correlated with the line of Offa's Dyke ('East of Offa's Dyke the lordship became more English in character and population') is true only at low resolution, i.e. as a broad geographical generalisation: no obvious trace of the dyke as a significant and lasting boundary seems to emerge from the later material.

association with Treverward, barely two miles north and equally close to the dyke but on its eastern side. Are the (putative) *burh-tūn* and the *burh-ward* related, and how do they relate to the great earthwork?²⁶ Although Gelling and Blair associate the two name-types in their discussions of early Mercian defences, examples elsewhere are not generally closely paired like this and nor – despite a weighting of instances towards Shropshire and Cheshire – are any others, of either type, sited so close to the dyke. If the group does represent a system of defence, it seems to be one independent of Offa’s Dyke.

Radnorshire and Montgomeryshire: beyond the pale

Previous generations of scholars have been less inclined to shilly-shally about the significance of English place-names to the west of Offa’s Dyke, and their views seem to be reflected in the recent comprehensive archaeological and historical review of the earthwork by Keith Ray and Ian Bapty who suggest (2016: 216) that it ‘seems probable from place-name evidence ... that [when it was constructed] there were English communities on both sides of the Dyke in several areas’. Ray and Bapty (2016: 269) go on to explain that some names west of the dyke ‘are seen by some scholars to belong to the earliest stratum of English place-names’, though they at once add that ‘on present evidence it is not possible to distinguish between settlements that originated before or after the eighth century’. Whilst their rider may be directed at present *archaeological* evidence, it is – in my view – a wise reservation that should apply to the place-name material too. This second section re-examines some of the suggestions that have been made about the chronological implications of early English names lying on the Welsh side of the modern border.

For much of the last century the authoritative opinion on this matter was that of Sir Frank Stenton (1947: 212–213):

The course chosen for the frontier north of the Wye seems to have meant the abandonment of English territory to the Britons. Villages bearing names which are very unlikely to have arisen after the eighth century occur in this quarter far to the west of the dyke. The name Burlingjobb, borne by a hamlet within the Radnorshire border, is as ancient in type as any place-name in the western midlands.

The closing statement is based on the view that Burlingjobb, *Berchelincope* in the Domesday Book, contains an early Germanic ‘tribal’ or group-name in *-ingas*, such as are widely found in the south and east of England in names like Hastings and Reading, Gillingham and Nottingham. Such group-names predominantly belong to an early

²⁶ Blair takes Trebert and Treverward as one of his case-studies (2018: 207–209) and is convinced that they are related to one another, and that the eponymous *burh* in both is a hillfort at Knucklas south of the Teme. He takes this to demonstrate that ‘the Mercians controlled a border strip, including Knucklas, on the Welsh side of the Dyke’, but does not comment on whether he thinks Trebert was established before or after the building of the earthwork.

stratum of Anglo-Saxon settlement, say between the fifth and seventh centuries: debate has raged as to whether they tend to mark the settlements of immigrant groups fresh from the continent, or 'secondary' colonisers in the generations that followed the initial landings.²⁷ Likely examples of these group-names west of Birmingham are, however, rare — the predominant southern and eastern distribution is a main plank in the chronological argument — and in a paper published in 1982 Margaret Gelling pulled Stenton's suggestion to pieces.

Gelling observed both that the spellings of Burlingjobb do not support an etymology from *-ingas* (which typically leaves forms in *-inge*, derived from Old English genitive plural *-inga*), and that it belongs to a group of seven similarly structured settlement names in the west midlands, which she termed 'The *-inghope* names of the Welsh Marches'. Examples include nearby Evenjobb in Radnorshire (earlier *Emynghop*), and Dinchope, Millichope and Ratlinghope in Shropshire, all well to the east of the border and the dyke. The final element in these names is the OE *hop* 'secluded valley' which we have met in Clun and which is common in the border area. Neither the spellings nor the geographical position of the *-inghope* group speak in favour of Stenton's implied explanation; rather the local parallels are with names like Buttington and Hyssington in Montgomeryshire, and Cardington, Eardington and Rorrington in Shropshire. In these *-ington* names it has long been accepted that *-ing-* is not the plural *-ingas* suffix, but rather a 'connective particle' which has a function similar to that of a genitive singular ending (Smith 1956, vol. 1: 291–298 [*ing^d*]; Gelling 1988: 177–180). There are documented examples in Anglo-Saxon charters which appear to illustrate this, both with *tūn*, as Tredington, Worcestershire, which had been held by a thegn called Tyrdda (Sawyer 1968: no. 55, datable to 757), and with other elements, as *haga* 'enclosure' in *Ceolmundingchaga* in London, bought from one Ceolmund (Sawyer 1968: no. 208, datable to 857). To distinguish this connective from a genitive it has been usual to give a gloss along the lines of 'estate associated with Tyrdda', rather than genitival 'Tyrdda's estate', but the precise nuances of usage are not established and might benefit from further research. In any case, the qualifiers in the *-inghope* names seem also to be personal names, and the group appears to represent a fashion for naming these settlements in enclosed valleys as 'secluded valley associated with *Berhtel*' (Burlingjobb), or with **Rōtel* (Ratlinghope), or with **Emma* (Evenjobb). Gelling's derivation, or some variant of it, has been generally accepted by place-name scholars.²⁸

²⁷ The literature on this question is vast. For the material, and conventional mid-twentieth-century interpretation of it, see Smith (1956, vol. 1: 298–303) and Ekwall (1962). Views since the mid-1960s are briefly surveyed and discussed by Parsons (2013b: 46–52, with references).

²⁸ See relevant entries in Mills (2011); Watts (2004); Owen and Morgan (2007). It is true that Mills and Watts allow an alternative possibility, in which *ing* is a place-name forming suffix, so that Ratlinghope would for instance be 'valley at Rotel's place'. To my mind Gelling's objections to this suggestion (1982: 34) are convincing, but the more important point here is that no modern commentator now accepts Stenton's etymology — which Ekwall (1960) always stuck by — with its chronological implications. It should be noted, though, that Gelling's reading was by no means wholly new; a similar interpretation of the Radnorshire names is offered by Charles (1938: 279).

To the extent, therefore, that Stenton was basing his chronological deductions on Burlingjobb, and presumably Evenjobb — and he does not discuss any other type — those deductions should no longer stand. Gelling, however, did not leave her discussion here, but went on to discuss the likely date of the western names with connective *-ing-*, and she suggested (1982: 35–36) that:

If the two *-inghop* names in Radnorshire, and the two *-ingtūn* names, BUTTINGTON and HYSINGTON, in Montgomeryshire, do belong to an early stage in the evolution of lay landownership in the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms which lie mainly to the east of the earthwork, then they probably were formed before the building of Offa’s Dyke.

She was keen to emphasise that her vision of Berhtel and Emma ‘as thegns who were given a life tenure of border estates by a king of the Magonsæte’ was quite different from Stenton’s view of them as ‘pioneering English settlers accompanied by bands of followers’, but the chronological relationship with the dyke remained: these appeared to be settlements with English names which antedated the earthwork, granted in the seventh or eighth centuries.²⁹

Margaret Gelling’s interpretation of the chronology of these names deserves respect, but it is not beyond question. Her own work elsewhere indicates that the clear documentary support for the connective *-ing-* comes from eighth- and ninth-century texts. There is perhaps an implication in this pattern of attestation that it is a grammatical construction which more likely belongs to the middle of the Anglo-Saxon period than to its latter centuries, but there appears to be no linguistic reason to prefer, say, the seventh or eighth centuries above the ninth. In an effort to find a rationale for the use of *-ing-*, Gelling (1982: 35) wrote:

it is necessary to consider whether *-ing-* was a straightforward alternative to the device of putting a personal name in the genitive, or whether it indicates a significant difference in the relationship of the person to the estate, such as, for instance, a life tenure rather than one which could be bequeathed. It is possible that the use of *-ing-* in place-names corresponded to a stage in the evolution of lay land-ownership, and that the whole body of names can be assigned to a fairly definite period which is likely to be earlier than the widespread use of personal names in the genitive as the first elements of place-names.

This hypothesis led to the chronological conclusion quoted above. It should be emphasised, however, that positive evidence in its support is extremely thin, and

²⁹ This date is given in the revised account in *The West Midlands in the Middle Ages* (Gelling 1992: 110). This version varies the earlier formulation to suggest that Berhtel and Emma ‘were probably thegns of the Mercian or Magonsætan kingdoms’. More importantly, the 1992 monograph, which will have been much more widely read than the earlier journal paper, gives no indication of the reasoning that led Gelling to stand by a pre-Offan date.

apparently limited to a possible interpretation of the circumstances of the eighth-century grant of Tredington in Worcestershire; there are also instances which, at face value, seem to show *-ing-* used equivalently to genitival constructions, and at a rather later date.³⁰ Both the supposition that the connective particle denoted an especial kind of tenure, and the inference that this might indicate a pre-Offan date, are interesting ideas, but they are quite unsubstantiated and cannot alone bear the weight of the significant conclusion that Anglo-Saxons settlements were established to the west of the line of the dyke before it was built.³¹

In her account of *The West Midlands in the Middle Ages*, Gelling (1992: 106–111) set a brief review of the *-inghope* question alongside a set of maps showing ‘English place-names west of Offa’s Dyke’ in the stretch between Buttington on the Severn in Montgomeryshire south to the cluster containing Burlingjobb and Evenjobb in eastern Radnorshire. The names she marked are reproduced on Figure 2 here, which also introduces a distinction: black triangles for names recorded in Domesday Book, white triangles for those first recorded in later records.³² This map tends to indicate that the western boundary of English-controlled territory in the second half of the eleventh century lay two to three miles or so beyond the dyke along most of this line (with the possible exception of the sparsely populated upland of Clun forest). The later-recorded English names that Gelling maps in this zone sit neatly within the Domesday boundary, and it is probable enough that most or all of them were also pre-Conquest coinages. But the question is: pre-Conquest by how long? Gelling felt that ‘any English names to the west which would on general grounds be considered to originate before the Norman conquest are likely to be pre-Offan’ (Gelling 1992: 106). Yet that is a notable jump across three centuries of essentially undocumented history, and the surviving names may have been coined at various points across a long period.³³ On current understanding, whether the

³⁰ Gelling herself, while she makes the suggestion (1988: 178) that the previous holder of Tredington, Worcestershire, might be seen as a temporary overlord, some time before the mid-eighth century, nonetheless in the same place adds to the example of *Ceolmundingchaga* further ninth-century instances of *-ing-* as a contemporary connective/possessive from Kent.

³¹ It appears possible that despite their reservation about precise datings, quoted above, Ray and Bapty’s reference (2016: 345) to ‘putatively early (?seventh-century) English settlements’ around Walton and Radnor (and Burlingjobb) may ultimately be based on deductions from the place-names.

³² For a fuller context I have also added several additional Domesday names, all of them English in origin, on the line of the dyke. I have omitted the two north-westerly English-language names from beyond the River Severn – Guilsfield and Welshpool – that Gelling included. Neither of them is recorded before the end of the twelfth century and both appear likely to be post-Conquest coinages which may be based on Welsh originals (Morgan 2001: 95–96, 175–176; Owen and Morgan 2007: 178, 490–491). Without them the implication of the distribution is clearly that the boundary of English-controlled territory at the time of the Norman Conquest extended to the line of the Severn for several miles south from Buttington. It might be noted that for English-language settlement-names included in Domesday Book I assume a degree of ‘English control’ by, and for some unknown period before, the later eleventh century, but that this is not necessarily to be equated with dense or exclusive English settlement — see further below.

³³ At least one Domesday name shown on my map (and not mapped or mentioned by Gelling) presumably post-dates the earthwork: Discoed/Disgoed, Radnorshire (*Discote* 1086, *Dichcote* 1329) combines OE *cot* ‘cottage’ with *dīc* ‘ditch, dyke’ (Morgan 1998: 49; Owen and Morgan 2007: 125–126) and the parish

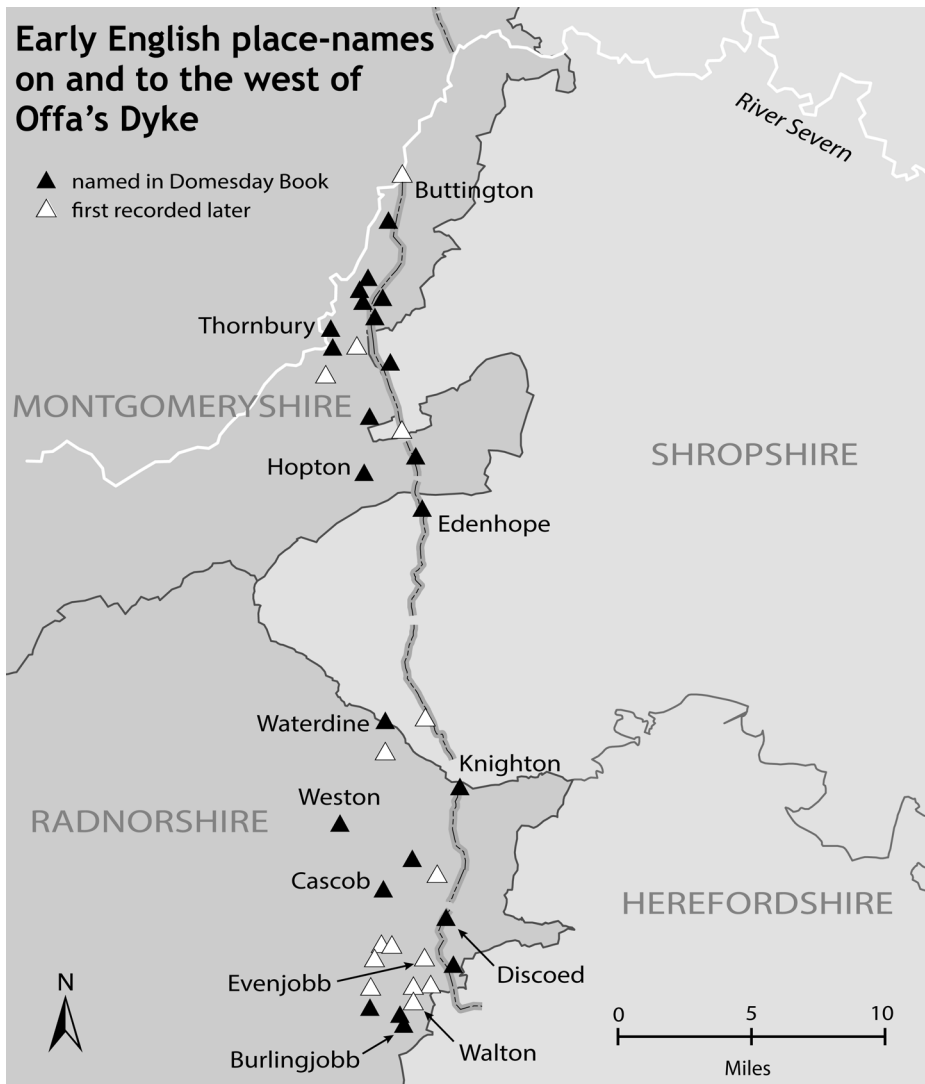


Figure 2: Early English place-names on and to the west of Offa's Dyke

strip beyond it was already in English hands before the earthwork was dug, or whether it represents a later expansion of English territory beyond Offa's line, seems to be a question of historical judgement (or guesswork), and not something to which place-name evidence supplies an answer.

straddles Offa's Dyke. It also seems to me just possible — though Morgan rejects the idea — that Walton in Radnorshire might refer to the barrier: its first element might be OE *w(ε)all* 'wall', OE *welle* or *wælle* 'well/spring/stream' or OE *w(ε)alh* 'Welshman' (Morgan 1998: 93; Owen and Morgan 2007: 488). Although the modern settlement of Walton is centred a mile and half from the dyke, the parish of Walton and Womaston runs up to it.

Oswestry: two dykes and many boundaries

Having declined to offer a chronological narrative for the areas discussed so far, a rather different approach is taken in this third section. The nineteenth-century hundred of Oswestry is crossed not only by Offa's Dyke, but also by Wat's Dyke, which runs parallel with it between two and three miles to the east; in the later medieval period the area was cut by lordship boundaries, diocesan boundaries, linguistic boundaries (of different kinds) and a tenurial boundary between land held according to medieval Welsh practices and that held on Anglo-Norman terms. Any attempt to account for all of these lines in a single historical narrative must embrace hypothesis and uncertainty, and it is in that spirit that the following thoughts are offered on the place-names, the dykes and Anglo-Welsh border(s) before the Norman Conquest.³⁴

As before, the western boundary of the settlements enumerated in the Domesday Book is an obvious place to start. In Oswestry, unlike further south, the most westerly named manors do not lie west of Offa's Dyke but some distance east of it. In fact a line drawn from Molverley, Maesbrook, Morton, Maesbury, Weston Coton to Weston Rhyn – passing through the town of Oswestry (though that is not named in Domesday Book) – traces a course two or three miles to the east of Offa's Dyke. This is intriguingly similar to the line of Wat's Dyke, the southern end of which is to be sought either in Morton or Maesbury, and which passes north through Weston Coton and Oswestry (Figure 3).

There are then a number of reasons encouraging us to explore further an apparent correlation in Oswestry hundred between Domesday Book and Wat's Dyke. As Margaret Worthington Hill has emphasised (2019: 72–74), a related pattern is even more marked along the northern course of Wat's Dyke through Flintshire. Here, Domesday records English settlements either side of the dyke, but consistently indicates a distinction between them: those to the east are hidated, suggesting that they are established English territory, while those to the west are not. Worthington Hill was trying to interpret this pattern within a context where Wat's Dyke tended to be viewed as earlier than Offa's, but more recent archaeological intervention has provided a scientifically grounded date for Wat's Dyke which would place it in the first half of the ninth century, in the generations following Offa's reign.³⁵ It is not for me to pass comment on the reliability of such an archaeological dating, though I would observe that if Domesday Book corresponds more closely with a ninth-century line than an eighth-century one, this might suggest a more straightforward chronological narrative than the reverse.

³⁴ The material in this section is treated more fully in Parsons (2022, particularly Chapter 6, pp. 219–251). Both that work and the present paper draw on material which will be set out in the EPNS volume for Oswestry hundred (Parsons forthcoming).

³⁵ A technique called Optically Stimulated Luminescence, which measures the time elapsed since a surface has been exposed to sunlight, suggested a construction date in the 830s or 840s for a section of the dyke at Gobowen, two miles north of Oswestry (Hayes and Malim 2008; Ray and Bapty 2016: 20, 356–360). It should be noted that Worthington Hill's essay was published earlier, in 1997, and that 2019 is the date of the reprint in the present journal.

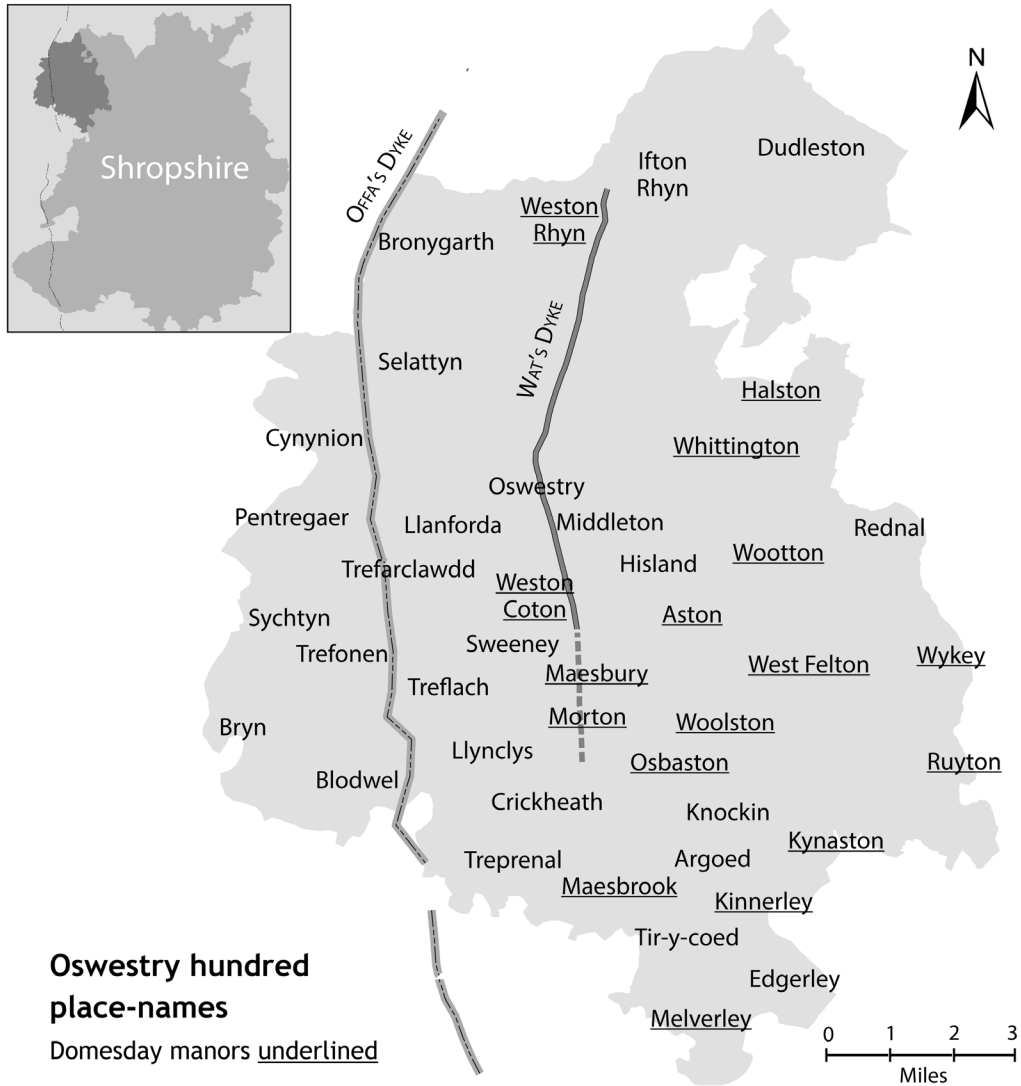


Figure 3: Oswestry hundred place-names

The notion that it might be possible to trace continuity between the line of Wat’s Dyke and the limits of English lordship implied by Domesday Book then gains further traction from several related aspects of later medieval evidence.³⁶ From at least the thirteenth century (and into the early modern period) land-tenure in parts of the Oswestry area employed practices and terminology familiar from medieval Welsh legal texts. The

³⁶ The key material is found in the series of extents and rentals from the lordship of Oswestry published by Slack (1951). See his introduction, especially pp. 21–37, and the pioneering study of the area’s place-names by Charles (1963: 96–109). The Welsh administrative terminology and the strong Welsh character of place- and personal names in the area are common ground between us; for the linguistic distributions and boundaries see Parsons (2022).

population in these parts overwhelmingly bore Welsh personal names and used Welsh names for their tenements and fields. Detailed study of these minor place-names, in use between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggests that an interesting linguistic boundary ran through Oswestry hundred. It was not the boundary between English and Welsh, since Welsh seems to have been widely spoken across most of the hundred, but rather a boundary between a zone in which the minor names were wholly Welsh, and a zone in which both English and Welsh names were employed. The western zone, where only Welsh minor place-names appear, correlates very neatly with the townships in which Welsh land-tenure was practised. And the eastern limits of this area follow a very similar line to the named Domesday manors and Wat's Dyke.

There is no mystery about the thirteenth-century context of the boundary delineated in this way by linguistic and tenorial evidence. In the Close Roll of 1272 the territory of the Marcher lordship of Oswestry is first described in detail, and comprised the town of Oswestry and a number of associated townships which made up its *Waleschiria*, or 'Welshry' (Close Rolls 1268–72: 507–511). The Welshry so described included, at its eastern edge, the townships of Maesbury, Weston Coton, Crickheath and Middleton, but did not include the likes of Aston, Hisland, Wootton and Woolston, which only became fully incorporated in the lordship later. It is the early core of the lordship that remained distinguished by its Welsh tenorial customs and terminology, and by an apparent resistance to the English language, for centuries thereafter. The question that then arises is whether it is reasonable to connect the significant cultural and tenorial boundary of the lordship and Welshry with the late eleventh-century arrangements reflected in Domesday Book, and beyond that, just possibly, with an early ninth-century dyke. The lines suggested by the three types of evidence all run similarly north–south, some three miles east of Offa's Dyke, though it should be conceded that the correlation between them is not exact, and that if Wat's Dyke did mark a hard frontier in the ninth century, it had undergone some local adjustment by the thirteenth.³⁷

In these circumstances, the answer to my question will never be more than speculative. It has inevitably to negotiate a range of disparate indications – all of them very partial – and to bridge gaping periods about which historical sources are silent. The following paragraphs develop the case for continuity, and examine the place-name evidence in that light. This is only one of — no doubt — various possible readings of the evidence.³⁸

³⁷ Thus, for instance, the hypothesis would presumably imply that the boundary of the Welshry must have shifted a little to the east to enclose Maesbury itself which, as an Anglo-Saxon royal vill, must have been significantly English-speaking early on. Similarly the town of Oswestry, including the castle and church, was built close to the western side of Wat's Dyke – putatively culturally Welsh territory – though it became of course the Anglo-Norman *caput*.

³⁸ For brevity and clarity various complicating factors are not considered in any detail in what follows. Chief among them is the extent to which annexation by Madog ap Maredudd of Powys, for perhaps a decade or more around the middle of the twelfth century, may have brought about fundamental changes. On this, and other related questions, Parsons (2022) offers fuller consideration.

All the Domesday manors in *Mersete* hundred (which was largely equivalent to the later hundred of Oswestry) bear place-names that are English in origin; their owners bore Anglo-Saxon personal names in 1066 and Norman ones in 1086. However in this area, unusually, the Domesday Book indicates the ethnicity of most of the free tenants, which reveals that a majority of them, across the hundred, were Welsh. Anglo-Norman lordship was here set above a largely Welsh farming population living in villis with English names (Lewis 2007: 132–136), a striking eleventh-century parallel to the situation that persisted throughout the later medieval period.

West of the named manors — the region making up the bulk of the thirteenth-century Welshry — the situation in 1086 is unknown, but when records emerge, from the later twelfth century onwards, they offer some interesting possibilities. Welsh-named townships cluster in the west, especially the south-west, of the hundred, and they appear rather markedly to line up facing the Domesday frontier as defined above. Although there was – from at least the eleventh century onwards, it seems – a significant Welsh-speaking population in parts, and perhaps most, of the east of the hundred, the Welsh-named townships are largely limited to the area of the Welshry.³⁹ Unfortunately, there is little in names like Treflach, Trefonen, Llyncllys or Crickheath that gives any indication as to how old they might be.⁴⁰ Trefarclawdd ‘township on the dyke’ presumably post-dates Offa’s Dyke, while neighbouring Llanforda *could* be a name of great antiquity.⁴¹ The names and status of these lands before the Norman Conquest are unknown. Maesbury, Weston Rhyn and Whittington each possessed a number of unnamed berewicks at Domesday and it may well be that these account for much of the westerly zone of the later lordship and hundred; the possibility that they might have made up an early equivalent to the later Welshry — essentially Welsh townships that rendered their taxes to English manorial centres — is an intriguing one.⁴²

Equally intriguing are the later-recorded English-language township names which lie beyond the named Domesday manors. There are several of these, including Sweeney

³⁹ The exception is the group of three in the centre of the south of the hundred. These can probably be thought of as post-Conquest coinages. Tir-y-coed ‘land of the wood, the wooded land’ and Argoed ‘beside the wood’ or simply ‘wood, woodland’ are first recorded respectively in 1685 and 1583, significantly later than other township-names in the area. Knockin, *W cynyn* ‘hillock’ is found much earlier (1195–1196; Gelling 1990: 168), as befits a place that became a parish and head of a lordship. It may well be, however, as Richard Morgan has suggested (1997: 33), that the name relates not to natural topography, as Gelling proposed, but to the Norman castle-mound.

⁴⁰ For discussion of the names in this section, in advance of Parsons (forthcoming), see Charles (1963: 100–101) and Morgan (1997).

⁴¹ The place-name combines *W llan* ‘church, church-enclosure’ and the river-name Morda. No church is known, and it is uncertain whether a ‘chirch now decayd’ reported by Leland (Toulmin Smith 1906: 76) is a reliable report. It is not, however, inconceivable that Llanforda may preserve a memory of an ecclesiastical arrangement that pre-dated the celebration of the cult of Oswald at Oswestry.

⁴² Cf. Slack (1951: 21): ‘It is possible that this area had never been settled by the Saxons, the original inhabitants remaining undisturbed in their holdings and paying their accustomed renders to the Saxon Lord of Maesbury’.

and Oswestry itself, which lie only fractionally to the west, and essentially reinforce the line of the putative frontier.⁴³ Three further instances particularly catch the eye here, however. Selattyn, which became a parish, was recorded as *Sulatun* in 1254. It is apparently a doublet of Sulton (*Suleton* 1086), some 17 miles east near Wem, both names combining OE *sulh* 'plough', genitive plural *sula*, with *tūn* 'settlement, estate' (Gelling 1990: 258, 275). Selattyn shows the influence of Welsh speech-patterns, throwing stress onto the penultimate syllable in a name that must have been adopted at a relatively early, presumably pre-Conquest, date when the Old English genitive plural inflection, *a*, was still distinctly sounded (Owen 1987: 107–109). The township lies in the north-west of Oswestry hundred, bounded on its western side by Offa's Dyke. Further south, two townships – Sychtyn and Blodwel – apparently also bear names that are English in origin though both lie immediately to the west of Offa's Dyke. Sychtyn (?*Seghom* c.1175, *Sufton* 1272, *Soghton* 1307), is surely another name involving *tūn*; the first element is not certain, but Gelling (1990: 289–290) proposed an OE **sōh*, the etymon of ME *sogh* 'bog'. As in Selattyn the modern form of Sychtyn is cymricised, though in this case spellings clearly indicating Welsh influence are post-medieval. Thirdly, Blodwel looks like 'blood(y) spring/stream', with OE *blōd* and *welle* (Gelling 1990: 178–179). The name has probably been surrounded by mythology ever since it was first recorded, as *Blodwelle* c.1200, in a list of *aquae dulces* 'sweet/fresh waters' in Shropshire. Even though the precise feature to which it relates (a chalybeate spring?) seems not to have been identified, alternative derivations from Welsh appear strained and unlikely (Morgan 1997: 18). It survives in the surviving parish name Llanyblodwel, the 'llan [church-enclosure] in Blodwel'.

As in the other stretches of the border examined above there is no documented context to explain the origin of the English names that push furthest to the west. Whereas further south, however, such names for the most part clearly lie within territory that was English in the second half of the eleventh century, in Oswestry the situation is less clear. Indeed, if there is any merit in the hypothesis sketched above – that a linguistic and cultural boundary visible from the thirteenth century may, to judge by the Domesday evidence, already have existed in the pre-Conquest period — then Selattyn, Blodwel and Sychtyn would represent a distinct phase, an advance of Anglo-Saxon lordship earlier than the middle of the eleventh century. And if there might be anything in the further association of the line of the cultural boundary with that of Wat's Dyke, then these settlements to its west perhaps belong to the earlier years of the ninth century or still earlier. The question of whether or not they predate the reign of Offa still seems to me out of reach, but it certainly appears possible that they might represent an early, and ultimately temporary, westward penetration of English lordship, closely associated with the advance implied by the earthwork. Whether or not this chronology is correct, these English place-names

⁴³ Sweeney is OE *swīn* 'pig' with either OE *ēa* 'river' or OE *ēg* 'island, dry ground in marsh'. Published authorities have favoured the former: Morgan (1997: 51), Ekwall (1960: 456). Oswestry combines the OE personal name *Ōsweald* with OE *trēow* 'tree'. Since at latest the twelfth century the personal name has been identified with Oswald, king of Northumbria, who died at the uncertainly located battle of *Maserfelth* in A.D. 642; see further Gelling (1990: 229–231), Gelling (1992: 74–75), Stancliffe (1995).

beyond Offa’s Dyke and the line of Domesday manors strongly suggest that there was some fluctuation in the control of territory before the eleventh century. It must, however, be uncertain how far the political control which seems to be implicit in the naming of townships necessarily brought with it wholesale linguistic, let alone ethnic, replacement. It seems to me possible that the Welsh-speaking farming population of *Mersete* hundred may have survived throughout the period: just as they demonstrably lived under English-speaking lords for hundreds of years after 1100, so they may have done in earlier centuries.

Two further points deserve discussion. One involves the apparently related names Maesbury (Domesday *Meresberie*) and *Mersete*. Maesbury, now a small village two and half miles south of Oswestry town, was a significant royal manor in the eleventh century and expressly the head of *Mersete* hundred: it was the building of the castle in the north of its estate, shortly before 1086, which led to the post-Conquest change of focus. One factor relevant to Maesbury’s early status was presumably that it lay directly on the line of Wat’s Dyke. For a long time indeed it was believed that the southern terminus of the dyke was at Maesbury, since its last clearly upstanding section survives near Pentrecoed farm in the north of the township (Fox 1955: 251). Although modern investigations now seem to have detected an extension of the dyke’s line one-and-a-half miles further south into Morton (Worthington Hill 2019: 64–67), the suggestion that the River Morda may have been artificially straightened at Maesbury as part of the boundary works (Fox 1955: 251–253; Hayes and Malim 2008: 147–149) would preserve the idea of a particularly significant association between the boundary and the royal manor. Such an association is all the more striking if the place-name is — as is usually believed — to be derived from OE (*ge*)*mǣre* ‘boundary’ in genitival composition with *burh*, dative *byrig* ‘stronghold, fort’. Although other possibilities are conceivable for the first element — OE *mer(i)sc* ‘marsh’ would not be inappropriate — the ‘boundary’ word must be a strong candidate in the circumstances. There is then also the question of the hundred name. *Mersete* is a group-name that has often been understood as the ‘dwellers on the boundary’, although it may alternatively be construed as elliptical for ‘the Maesbury people’. Margaret Gelling (1990: 193) thought the boundary-word was involved but that the reference was to the ‘general concept’ of the borderland at the edge of Mercia, rather than to either of the great earthworks. John Baker (2015) has suggested that ‘boundary dwellers’ is an unconvincing group-name, partly because it is applied to only a relatively short part of the border. Neither discussed the specific association of Maesbury with Wat’s Dyke, nor the possible longevity and significance of the boundary that it delimits. Perhaps this part of the border, and/or the nature of Anglo-Welsh arrangements around it, gave the area a distinctive flavour in the pre-Conquest period, just as it was to have in later centuries.

The second and final point in this section returns us once again to a note of caution, and to the fundamental difficulty of dating the origins of place-names with any precision. It relates to a further indication of Maesbury’s early status given by Domesday Book, which records that it (together with neighbouring Whittington and Chirbury in the south-

west of the county) had contributed to the royal revenue in the time of King Æthelred (d. 1016). It must at that time have been a relatively wealthy centre, though in 1066 it was waste and rendered nothing. The implication may well be that Maesbury, together with Whittington and indeed perhaps the remainder of *Mersete* hundred, was lost to the Welsh for a stretch of the intervening period.⁴⁴ Following from this, Chris Lewis (2007: 134–135) has argued that many of *Mersete*'s recorded English place-names may have been coined, not when the land was first in the hands of the Mercians, but in the eleventh century when it was regained from the Welsh. Such a sequence – whilst unproven – is certainly plausible, and its implications would be thought-provoking: a cycle of gains and losses across the unrecorded centuries could have led to multiple namings and renamings of territory before the surviving documentation. This must complicate further any attempts to draw a chronological narrative from the map of place-names.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the material rehearsed above has illustrated something of the interest and potential of place-name evidence, and the unique insights into language and society along the border that such evidence can offer. It must be conceded, however, that it is a challenging resource for the historian, particularly in that it resists close dating, and previous conclusions regarding the chronological relationship between Offa's Dyke and certain place-names have, to my mind, been expressed too optimistically. The truth, in my view, is that just as over a century of archaeological investigations has failed to produce a secure date for the earthwork (Ray and Bapty 2016: 19), so too the place-names along its line cannot be closely pinned down. It is not impossible that future co-ordination of archaeological and place-name evidence will lead to advances.⁴⁵ In the meantime, however, just as scrutiny of the construction and siting of the monument can inform plausible hypotheses, so careful reconsideration of place-name patterns can suggest new possibilities. In the third section I have advanced one reading of the names in their historical and archaeological context which may be worthy of further consideration. It is probably more important, however, to appreciate that the evidence from Oswestry demonstrates that in the later medieval period the 'Anglo-Welsh border' was a multi-stranded affair in which onomastic, linguistic, tenurial and political boundaries demonstrably followed different lines concurrently. Whatever the value of my specific hypotheses about the pre-Conquest period, it is surely possible that the border was equally complex when Offa's Dyke was built.

⁴⁴ See Guy elsewhere in this publication.

⁴⁵ Ray and Bapty (2016: 273) observe that Bullinghope near Hereford (and east of the line of the dyke) has produced archaeological evidence of seventh-century Anglo-Saxon settlement. They very properly do not leap to any conclusions about the *-inghope* group as a whole – and there is no guarantee that the name was yet current when the datable material was deposited – but one could see that equivalent archaeological discoveries in one or two of the other so-named settlements might begin to suggest a significant pattern. On the other hand, it is rather awkward that Bullinghope is something of an exception in the group discussed by Gelling, since *hop* here appears to mean 'promontory jutting into marsh' rather than the 'remote, enclosed valley' appropriate to all the other instances involving connective *-ing-* (Gelling 1982: 32).

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