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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Shifting Border, Shifting Interpretation: what the Anglo-Norman Castle of Dodleston in Cheshire might be trying to tell us about the eleventh-century northern Anglo-Welsh Border

Rachel E. Swallow

This chapter follows on from research and publication by this author on the form and placing of Anglo-Norman castles situated within the northern Anglo-Welsh medieval borderland, recently interpreted and newly termed the Irish Sea Cultural Zone (Swallow 2016). This interpretation argues for the Anglo-Normans' reuse of pre-existing monuments dating from the prehistoric and Romano-British periods for the deliberate placing of their castle builds. Dodleston Castle was situated within the fluctuating borders of this frontier borderlands zone, and, it is argued, played a significant role in the continuity of strategic and commercial movement along the entirety of the Anglo-Welsh border and the Irish Sea Region. Within this context, and taking a cross-period and interdisciplinary research approach to re-examine the earthworks and landscape of Dodleston Castle in more detail than hitherto, the earthworks at Dodleston may reveal a meeting point of significance over millennia. It will be demonstrated, for instance, that Dodleston's earthworks likely represent an Anglo-Saxon assembly site situated at the meeting points of important medieval administrative boundaries within the Irish Sea Cultural Zone. By considering the wider spatial significance of Dodleston beyond the temporal confines of the Anglo-Norman period, it is therefore possible to understand better, and reinterpret, the form of the castle earthworks as they exist in the landscape today.

Keywords: Anglo-Norman; borderland; historic landscapes; Anglo-Welsh; castles

Dodleston Castle was situated within the powerful border earldom of medieval Cheshire, with the county's capital at the borough of Chester, some 9 km to its north-east; the fortification was therefore embedded within the medieval Anglo-Welsh border zone. This position gave Dodleston strategic importance, as well as vital control – and valuable exploitation of a wide economic territory within the frontier county of Cheshire.

As a frontier, Cheshire was liminal: an outer boundary of a core society (Mullin 2011: 5). Cheshire occupied a position at the boundary of Wales and England, and 'by distinction of privilege', according to Lucian in about 1195, was separate from the rest of England (Taylor 1912: 29). Indeed, the name of Mercia, of which Cheshire formed a part during the sixth to tenth centuries in its north-west fringes, means 'the people of the *merc*', or 'boundary' (Bu'Lock 1972: 25; Hill and Worthington 2003: 13). In addition, the later twelfth-century medieval administrative term, March (Latin: *marcha*) (Davies 1978: 15) referred to the border area on the fringes of west Cheshire. This interdisciplinary examination of Dodleston Castle recognises that the cultures of these liminal places were based on past kingdoms, and that the liminal spaces and places of the borderlands

were also focused on areas of influence and regional interaction shaped by geographical, marine and riverine landscapes (Phythian-Adams 1993: 14; Mansfield 2014: 51–52); these in turn formed the county's external and internal boundaries, and a 'geographical expression of social power' (Harvey 2000: 202).

Ideally located where land and river traffic joined the seaborne trade of the Irish Sea routes (Bu'Lock 1972: 62), the importance of Chester's, and thus Dodleston's, position in the land-, river- and seascape of west Cheshire cannot be understated. Dodleston Castle formed a significant link in parallel defensive chains of fortifications focused on the River Dee valley and Roman Watling Street leading to Chester. These defensive chains of castles were intended to protect Chester from attacks from the west from the Welsh, and they also, I suggest, had the time-honoured purpose of overseeing north-to-south routeway, riverine and maritime movement, of people and trade (Swallow 2016). Commercial, social, political and economic factors were prime motives in defending and securing the frontier county of Cheshire, and could give natural rise to Prior's (2006: 127–129) purely military deterministic view of an Anglo-Norman grand strategy of establishing 'pivotal points' in the landscape, all defending sites on the junctions of major rivers and Roman roads. Research by this author has established that the positions of Cheshire's castles were indeed influenced by pre-existing routes of communication and settlements (Swallow 2016); the control of existing infrastructure, trade, administration or religious *foci* would have been targeted by invading forces. Castles tended to be situated close to major roads or river crossings because of this intent to control the wider medieval economy and landscape.

However, to describe the purpose of Cheshire's castles, including Dodleston Castle, as simply border defence, 'misses the importance of borders as lands of opportunity as much as problems in the early Middle Ages' (Stafford 1989: 120–121). From the tenth century onwards, Chester developed connections with Ireland and Scandinavian settlement all around the Irish Sea (Hudson 1999: 40; Lewis and Thacker 2003: 16–33; Swallow 2016). The county's identity would have been shaped by its relationship with not only England, but also Wales to the west, and the Irish Sea Province. This is evidenced by archaeological studies throughout the coastlines edging the Irish Sea (e.g. Swallow 2016; Swallow forthcoming). It is well established that sea zones are permeable, and should not be seen as barriers (Bates and Liddiard 2013: 1–2; Mansfield 2014: 52). The regional identity of a frontier, therefore, was not impermeable to the interaction – and sometimes alliance – of distinct cultures as 'contact zones' within its wider defensive, commercial and cultural land and seascape contexts (Morrissey 2005: 552–554). The influence of these contact zones within the Irish Sea Region, and along the northern Anglo-Welsh border, can be seen in this new interpretation of the form and placing of Dodleston Castle, as will now be demonstrated.

A previously uninterpreted archaeological survey of Dodleston Castle in Cheshire (NGR: SJ 36145 60851; Figures 1 and 2), undertaken by the University of Chester in 1995, prompted a detailed and multidisciplinary study as part of my ongoing research on the castles of Cheshire
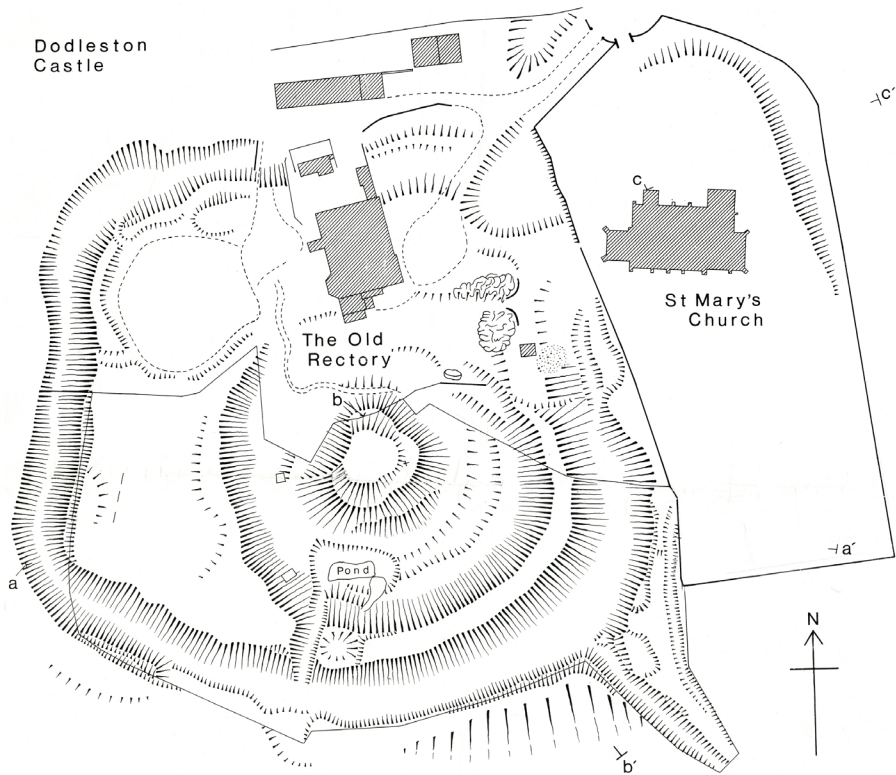
Figure 1: Earthwork Survey of Dodleston Castle, Cheshire, undertaken by University of Chester, 1995

and their landscape settings within the context of the Irish Sea Region. Considering both the conclusions of my 2014 publication (Swallow 2014), and further subsequent research, this chapter more specifically addresses to what extent the earthwork remains of this Anglo-Norman castle site can inform us about the northern Anglo-Welsh border prior to and after the Anglo-Norman arrival in Cheshire in about 1070.

My conclusions call for a revision of the long-held classification (CHER 1978; CHER 1978/2), which was that there was a regular form motte-and-bailey castle at Dodleston. Closer examination reveals that Dodleston was instead a primary ringwork castle, placed within a pre-existing rectilinear feature, and that, sometime later, a motte was inserted into the ringwork castle (Swallow 2014). What is more, this multi-faceted complex is situated within a much larger ring work, not shown on the 1995 survey, and certainly not recognised previously.

This new interpretation indicates that Dodleston Castle was built in a place of prior cross-cultural, secular, ritual and religious significance within this northern border of medieval Anglo-Welsh territory. Forming part of the wider landscape of the Irish Sea Region, archaeological, landscape and to some extent place-name evidence at Dodleston Castle, points to a reused place of significance over time. This reuse, I argue, perpetuated
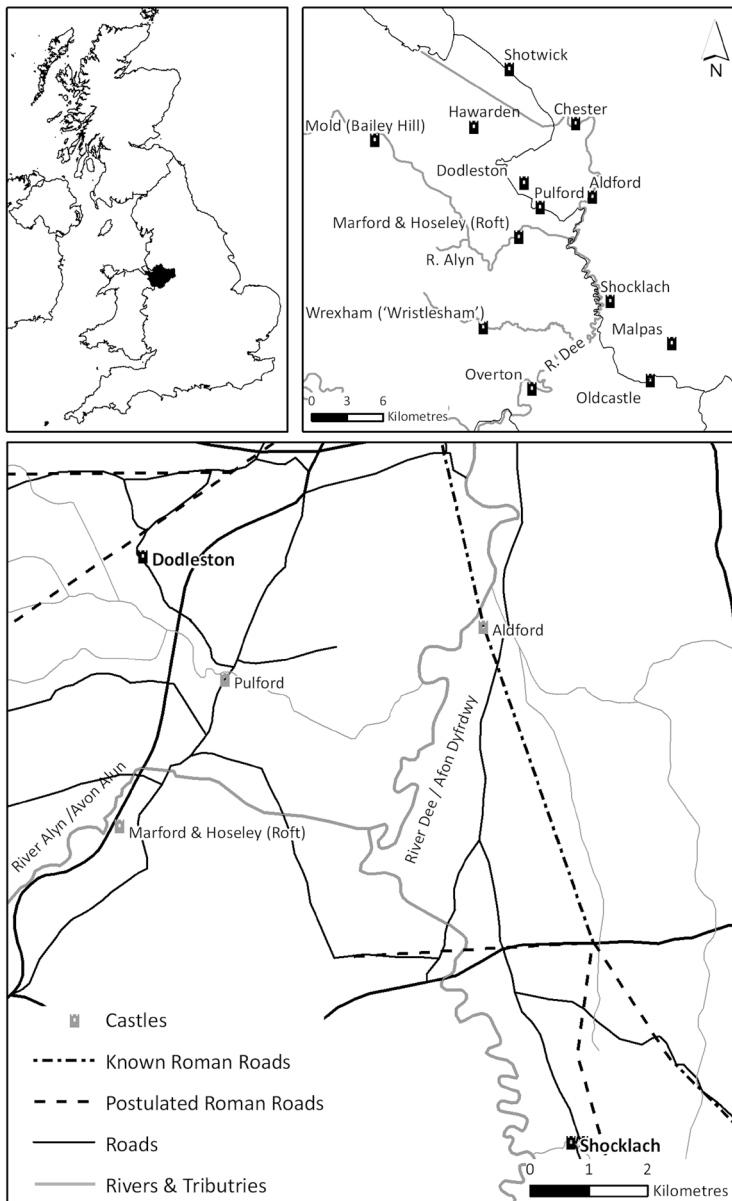
Figure 2: Location of Dodleston Castle, Cheshire. Drawn
by R. Edwards. © Rachel E. Swallow

a memory of communication in an early medieval Welsh borderlands landscape, where
the confluence of people and ideas was common.

Dodleston Castle was situated within the powerful border earldom of medieval Cheshire
(Figure 2). Although the west boundary of medieval Cheshire was fluid over time, the
castles in this boundary zone were also situated within the administrative unit of Atiscros
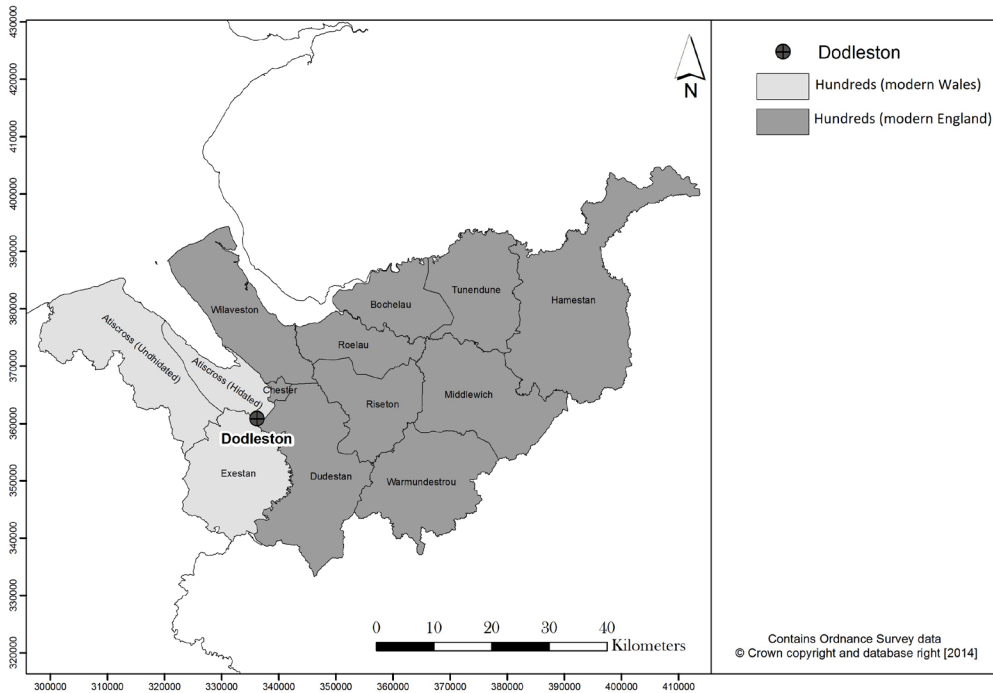
Figure 3: Location of Dodleston Castle (black spot), as positioned within the Hundreds outlined in Domesday Cheshire (c. 1086). Drawn by G. Duckers. © Rachel E. Swallow

Hundred in west Cheshire, as delineated by Domesday Book (Figure 3); during the late Mercian and early Anglo-Norman periods (that is, from the ninth to eleventh centuries), Cheshire extended into what is now north-east Wales, up to the River Clwyd.

In a recent publication, I proposed that Cheshire to the west of the River Dee was for millennia an area of movement and trade via the centrally important ports of Chester and Meols to the rest of the Irish Sea Region (Swallow 2016; Figure 4). What is more, I highlighted that the Anglo-Norman castles to the west of the River Dee and to the east of three Mercian linear earthwork dykes of Whitford, Wat's and Offa's, notably and unusually take one of two forms: mottes without any known evidence of baileys (of which there are nine), and mottes with rectilinear-shaped, rather than the more usual kidney-shaped, baileys (of which there are thirteen). Based on an innovative interdisciplinary research methodology, I proposed the pioneering interpretation that these somewhat unusual forms represent periodic reuse of monuments for the same surveillance purposes of this border territory since the Iron Age and Romano-British periods; this in itself indicates that the beginnings of the medieval Marcher borderlands likely originated in the Iron Age — at least notionally, if not physically (Swallow 2016). This cross-period research methodology has subsequently been adopted for an almost identical study of the Anglo-Norman castle-building reuse of prehistoric and Romano-British sites elsewhere in England (Jamieson 2019), producing remarkably similar results to my earlier study of

what I have termed the Irish Sea Cultural Zone (Swallow 2016). Dodleston Castle appears to take the motte and rectilinear bailey form within this borderland of monument reuse, and the likely origins and reasons for this unusual castle earthworks shape will now be examined in detail (see Figure 1 for the form of the castle).

The Scheduled Monument of Dodleston Castle has never been excavated, and while historical references give some context for the castle, discussion of this site in secondary sources prior to 2014 had been sparse, and often cursory (Bott and Williams 1975: 15; Cullen and Hordern 1986: 10; Salter 2001; Grimsditch *et al.* 2012: 106). Further and ongoing research has been enlightening, however.

The place-name, Dodleston, first appears as *Dodestune* (thus, without the *-l-*) in the Domesday Book Survey of 1086, and is of Old English derivation. It is generally interpreted that Dodleston likely meant 'Dod(d)el's farm' (Dodgson 1972: 156–157), where *Dode*, of the Domesday form, *Dodestune*, was in all probability a scribal error for the personal name *Dodle* or *Dodel*, with the suffix *-tūn* generally meaning 'farm' (Chris Lewis, pers. comm. April 2021). This scribal error is suggested by the fact that every other historical spelling presented for Dodleston by Dodgson (1972: 156–157) includes the *-l-*. Taking note of the fact that a *Dodle*, or *Dodel*, was otherwise unknown in Domesday Cheshire, it is also noted that the Domesday scribe did sometimes mishear, mispronounce, misread, and/or miscopy the entirety or individual elements of place-names (Roffe 2002: 73; Duncan 2021). This seemingly anomalous and presumed scribal error, therefore, is not secure enough evidence to point to an alternative definition of the generally-interpreted 'Dod(d)el's farm' (see below, for further discussion).

Dodleston manor was recorded as being within Atiscros Hundred in Cheshire at the time of the Domesday Survey (Harris and Thacker 1987: 191): that is, Cheshire to the west of the River Dee, where all the unusually shaped castles are sited, these forms being suggestive of periodic reuse of monuments over millennia (Swallow 2016, Figure 4). The castle was positioned adjacent to Pulford Brook, a boundary-marking tributary of the River Dee, and Pulford Castle was positioned to its south; both Dodleston and Pulford castles served to protect the Pulford Pass between them, which gave access across the marshlands from Cheshire, to the Welsh borderlands proper, via The Roft Castle (Figure 4).

In 1066 in Domesday Book, the manor of Dodleston was held directly by the Mercian Earl Edwin, and so presumably carried some considerable importance in west Cheshire. By 1086 in Domesday Book, Dodleston was the *caput* or head manor of the largely dispersed holdings of the Anglo-Norman Osbern Fitz-Tezzo, who was important enough to have had fifteen burgesses in Chester borough (Lewis and Thacker 2003: 23). At some time during the mid-twelfth century, Dodleston was held by the Boydel(l) family, first by Helte de Boydel (b. *c.* 1123), whom the Cheshire antiquary, Ormerod (1819, vol. 2: 844), claims to have been a direct descendent of Osbern Fitz-Tezzo, although this cannot be confirmed.
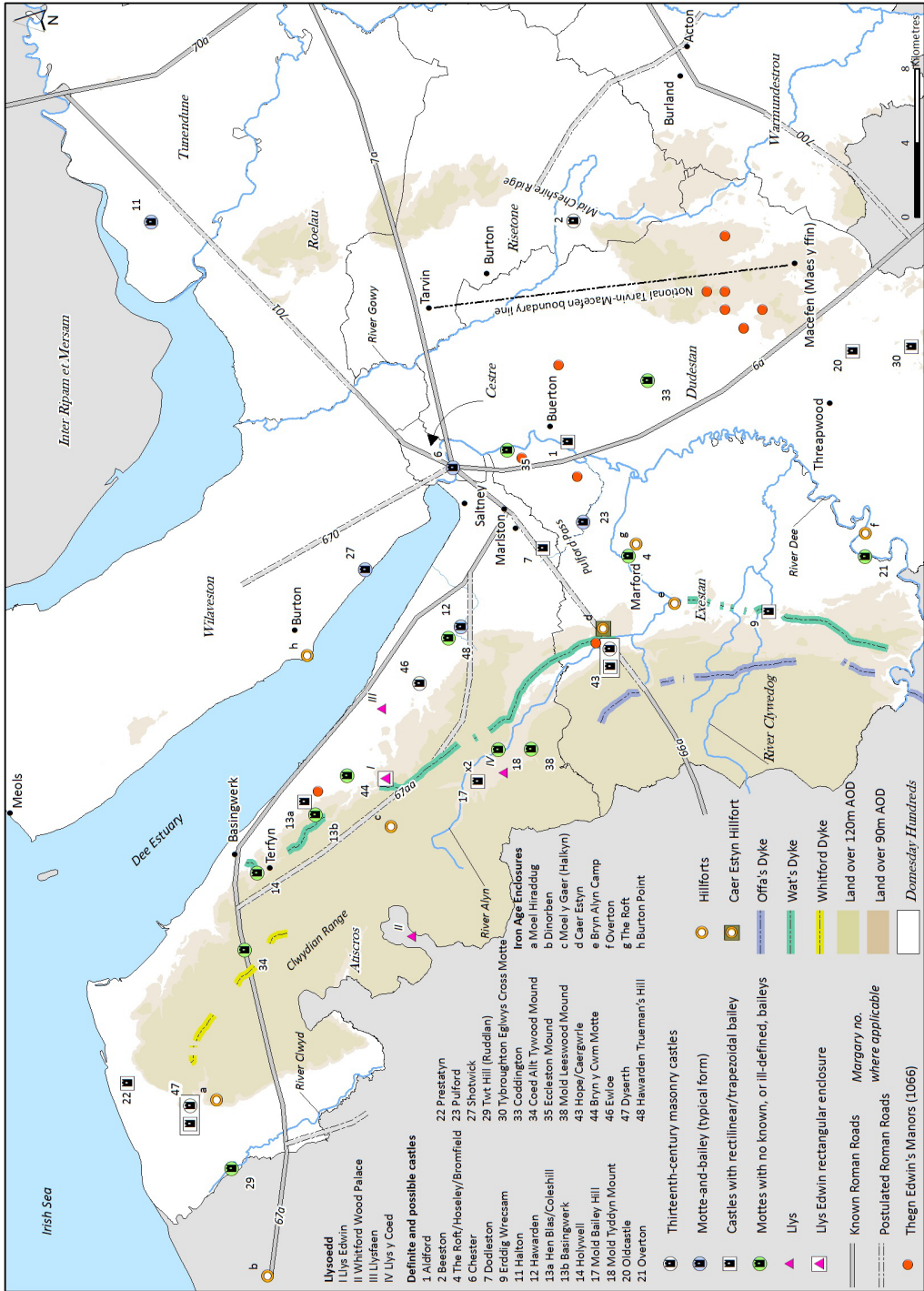
Figure 4: The castles of medieval west Cheshire, c. 1070–c. 1237 (Dodleston Castle at no. 7). Contains OS data @ Crown copyright (and database right) 2015. © Rachel E. Swallow

Figure 5: Tithe Map and Apportionment (*c.* 1842, EDT 140/1 & /2), with author's annotations (field names). Published with the kind permission of Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester

During Richard I's reign (1189–1199), documentary evidence tells us that there was feudal service at Dodleston of 'two armed men … in time of war for forty days' (Ormerod 1819, vol. 2: 440), and in the late thirteenth century William (*c.* 1210–1277) and later John de Boydel (*c.* 1256–*c.* 1308) of Dodleston manor both held four and a half knights' fees in Cheshire, and Dodleston was also providing the service of one knight's fee to the earl of Chester in time of war (Sharp 1906: 130, no. 213). While these mentions indicate land at Dodleston manor was held in return for service, there is however no known surviving documentary evidence to support the fact that Dodleston Castle was in existence prior to 1277 (Ormerod 1819, vol. 2: 847; Dodgson 1972: 157).

Additionally, in 1401, King Henry IV (1366–1413) called upon the castles in the Welsh March, including Dodleston, to prepare for action against the Welsh leader, Owain Glyndŵr

Figure 6: The wider landscape context of Dodleston Castle, Cheshire. Contains Ordnance Survey data. Drawn by R. Edwards. © Crown copyright and database right, 2013. © Rachel E. Swallow

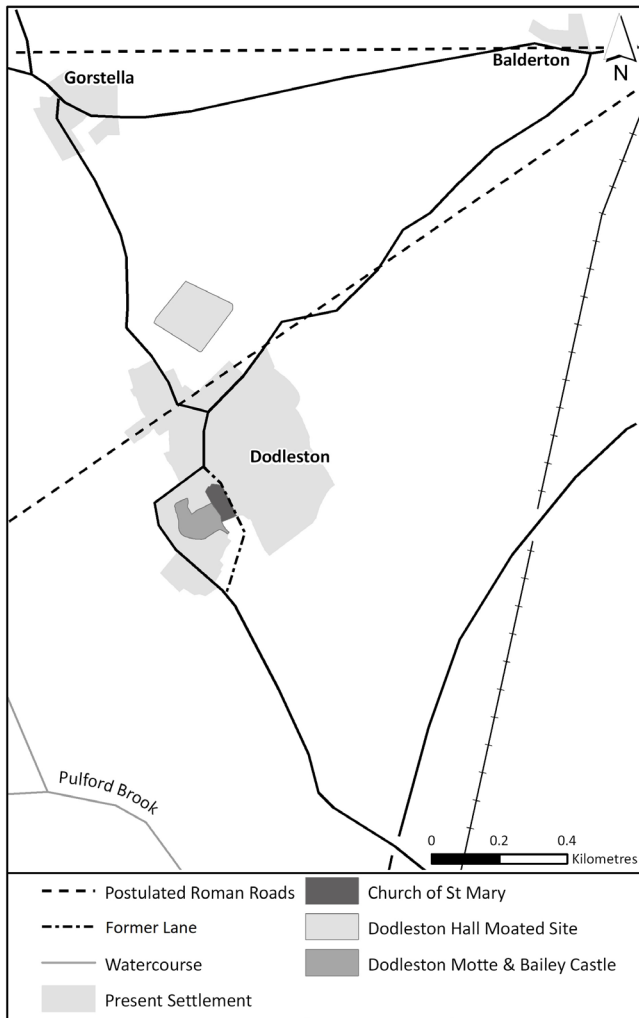(*c.* 1350–1415). There is a record of devastation west of the River Dee following Welsh risings in August 1403, when Dodleston was reportedly destroyed (Ormerod 1819, vol. 2: 857).

While existing historical evidence for Dodleston Castle is therefore somewhat limited, other evidence tells us about its foundation, form and position within this Anglo-Welsh borderlands landscape. Following close study of both the 1995 archaeological survey and my site visits, it is notable that the earthworks within which Dodleston Castle are sited form yet another, but larger, ring. Furthermore, two fields encircling the castle earthworks are named 'The Ring' on the nineteenth-century Tithe Map and Apportionment held at Chester, Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (CALS) (CALS, EDT 140/1 and /2, *c.* 1842; Figure 5). What seems to be a concentric outer enceinte of closes has since been built over to a great extent, although respected by the curve of the by-road today (Clark 1889: 201; MacKenzie 1896: 170; King 1983, vol. 1: 67; Hartwell *et al.* 2011: 335; Figure 6). That field called 'The Ring' to the west of the castle site is now the site of houses (see Figure 7), and the church of St Mary's is encapsulated to the east (Figures 5 and 6). The surrounding road probably once circled the whole of the ringwork, indicated by the presence of a holloway to the east of St Mary's church, now a footfpath, which runs towards the south-east of the castle site (Figure 6). 'The Ring' at Dodleston is a new observation, and could represent any one, or indeed all, of three features in the Welsh borderlands landscape. These will be considered briefly in turn.

Figure 7: View from the east of the south-west corner of the bailey earthworks at Dodleston Castle, with modern houses in the background, these having encroached upon the original line/earthworks of 'The Ring' (author's photograph)

First, fields called 'Ring' in the neighbouring county Lancashire, for instance, possibly refer to prehistoric circular enclosures, especially to stone circles (Field 1993: 214). This field-name is not unique in Cheshire. Also, within Atiscros Hundred, parallels could be drawn with Maen Achwyfan, Welsh for 'Cwyfan's stone', that is, the Irish St Kevin, which demonstrates influence from Ireland in this northern Anglo-Welsh border area. The stone is an in-situ Anglo-Scandinavian carved stone on the boundary of church lands, set within a circular enclosure, amidst Bronze Age barrows (Griffiths 2006; Edwards 2007: 366–371). Potential contextual evidence for a ritual or burial landscape in the liminal area of Dodleston supports this theory of an early enclosure. For instance, Gorstella, a hamlet within Dodleston, means a mound at gorse hill (Dodgson 1972: 159; see Figure 6), and in 1240, there is documentary mention of a *Hoga de kynarton* 'the mound of Kinnerton' within Dodleston parish; both would have been on the tidal estuary of the River Dee at this date (Dodgson 1972: 160). This observation is significant because crop-mark evidence of late prehistoric or Romano-British oval- or circular-ditched burial enclosures (and, therefore, indicative of former mounds) has been identified at three other similar topographical locations just to the east of the River Dee in medieval Cheshire, all lying on the slope of a low sandstone ridge overlooking the River Dee estuary: Puddington Lane, Burton, Wirral
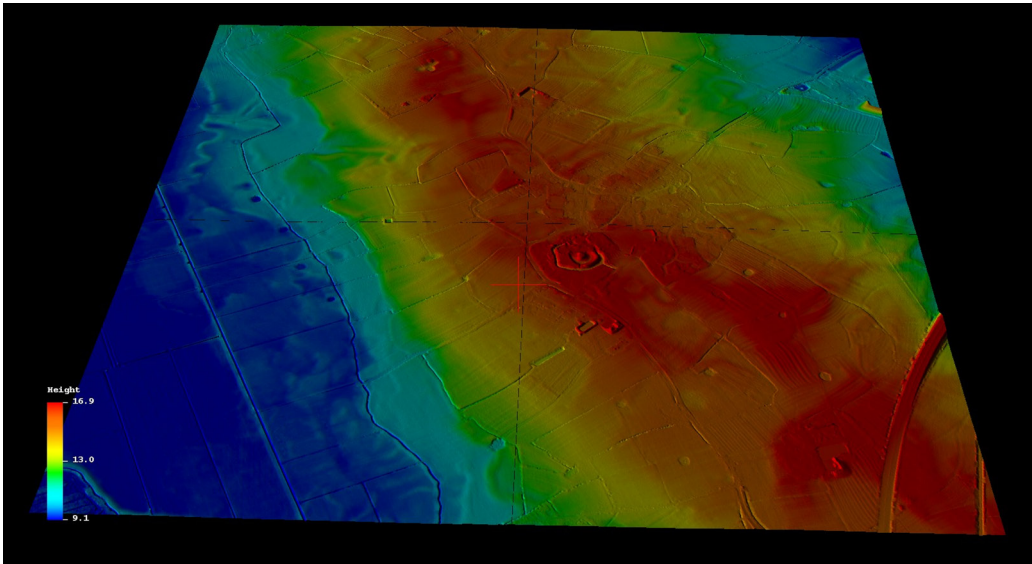
Figure 8: Dodleston Castle on bluff of land (earthworks to centre), with north at the top of the image. Environment Agency LiDAR DTM Height Exaggeration 2.0. Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government License v3.0. © Rachel E. Swallow

(Gregory and Adams 2019: 1); Mill Hill Road, Irby, Wirral (Philpott and Adams 2010), and at Farndon in Cheshire (Swallow forthcoming). At all three locations, just as at Dodleston, the sites were well placed to take advantage of the Irish Sea Region's communications corridor, with the pattern of long-term land use and settlement indicating that the burial enclosures formed part of a landscape more widely and extensively used for settlement and other activities (Philpott nd.; Gregory and Adams 2019: 61).

While there appears to be no further evidence to suggest that the toponymic-evidenced mounds at Dodleston were in fact representative of a prehistoric-to-Romano-British ritual or burial landscape, it is perhaps significant that a likely ceremonial palstave axe was found in about 2009 in Higher Kinnerton that dates from the Middle Bronze Age (1500–1150 BC) (Reavill 2009). However, Dodleston, in comparison to Maen Achwyfan, is missing a carved stone, the absence of which cannot provide evidence of one never having existed, of course.

Second, it is noted that circular and oval churchyards are known in both Wales and elsewhere in Cheshire. 'The Ring' at Dodleston, therefore, could refer to an early British or Irish curvilinear churchyard site. The curvilinear nature of 'The Ring', which sits on the ridge of compact clay to the west of the River Dee, indicates a probable pre-Anglo-Norman religious use of the site, and is akin to a Welsh or British *llan*-type church siting (Tait 1920–23, vol. 1: 122; Harris and Thacker 1987: 240; Figure 8). A *llan* was an enclosure in early medieval Wales, and indeed, Ireland, for a churchyard, church or monastery (Petts 2009: 123), but the word *llan* could also be used to describe an enclosed cemetery, not necessarily with an associated church structure (Petts 2009: 124).

The curvilinear nature of 'The Ring' is notably similar to that in west Cheshire, recently re-interpreted by this author, within the Anglo-Saxon royal vill of Farndon and its later medieval parish and Aldford Castle (Swallow forthcoming; Figure 4: Aldford Castle at no. 1). About 11 km to the south-east of Dodleston, Farndon's settlement pattern appears to date to the early medieval period: the circular churchyard wall surrounding St Chad's, which is in turn surrounded by a circular outer enclosure (delineated in part by the High Street), is all that remains of what appears to have been an important Anglo-Saxon minster site (Shaw and Clark 2003: 1). The dedication to St Chad is itself indicative of a site of early origin (Harris and Thacker 1987: 265, 269, 271). However, Farndon's concentric plan has been noted to be unique (Shaw and Clark 2003: 1): its closest parallels, it is argued, are 'Celtic' (or early Welsh/Irish) monastic sites and forms which grew from such centres of the wider administrative landscape (Shaw and Clark 2003: 1, referring to Irish archaeology, in Bradley 1990, fig. 2). This additional potential of an Irish link is perhaps indicative of the cross-period influence of Irish Sea Region cultures on the communication corridor of the Welsh borderlands, and this is an often-overlooked influence on the form and placing of the area's monuments (see Swallow forthcoming, for an attempt to redress this oversight).

Comparison with the 'Ring' at Dodleston, however, throws the previously interpreted uniqueness of a concentric plan at Farndon into doubt. The two circular features noted at Farndon certainly have a strong correlation with those newly noted at Dodleston: a ringwork castle, built within an outer 'Ring'. It could well be that the inner circular feature interpreted as a ringwork castle at Dodleston (Swallow 2014) denotes a primary pre-Anglo-Norman build, such as that suggested, for example, for the likely late-Anglo-Saxon ringwork of Sulgrave Castle, Castle Hill, Northamptonshire (e.g. Davison 1968).

Third, it may well be that Dodleston had been an Anglo-Saxon assembly site. This possibility is proposed in the light of the re-interpretation of the earthworks by this author, and has not been pointed to for any reason previously. The majority of tenth-century-dated administrative units of hundreds are named after their assembly sites in Cheshire, and Domesday Book is testament to this. Within this context, could it have been that Dodleston was the assembly site for Dudestan Hundred at the likely tenth-century introduction of the hundredal territorial units in the west of medieval Cheshire?

Dodleston is recorded in Domesday Book as being in Atiscros Hundred, rather than the similarly named Dudestan Hundred, as already noted. The spelling and pronunciation of the place-name of Dodleston at 1086 (*Dodestune*) coincides phonetically to some extent with the 'lost' Old English hundredal name, Dudestan, this latter perhaps deriving from *Dud(d)* (personal name) + *stān* ('stone') according to Dodgson (1972: 1). Despite this observation, Dodgson also states Dudestan Hundred to be 'meeting-place unknown' (Dodgson 1972: 1). The similar-sounding place-names of *Dodestune* and *Dudestan*, both at 1086, are thought to be no more than coincidence, however: the place-name of Dodleston is considered to have been formed of two elements *Dodles-tune* (see above), and this fact

alone would seem to rule out any direct association with the hundred place-name of *Dud(e)-stān* (Chris Lewis, pers. comm. April 2021).

That said, historical context would indicate that it is possible that Dodleston once belonged to Dudestan Hundred, and was divorced from the rest of that hundred, when King Edward granted Gruffudd ap Llywelyn, king of Gwynedd (1039–1064) all of Cheshire west of the River Dee in 1055–1056, as described in Domesday Book (Harris and Thacker 1987: 263). This land had in all likelihood belonged previously to Powys in Wales, before it was seized by the Mercians and held by the Bishop of Lichfield (Morgan 1978: 263a, 264b, 264a, 264b and 264b). Therefore, despite Cheshire later claiming back these lands from Gruffudd in 1064, the earlier transfer of Dodleston to Gruffudd's Atiscros Hundred was still evident – and unchanged – in Domesday Book's depiction of 1086. Dodleston appears to have lost any hundredal identity it might have once had, over about fifteen years or so of border fluctuation.

Archaeologically, too, it is proposed that Dodleston is a contender for a hundredal meeting place, due to its likely former placing within Dudestan Hundred. There is, in fact, no single archaeological signature for an Anglo-Saxon assembly site (Pantos 2004: 157; Baker 2014), although Meaney (1997) describes three categories of Anglo-Saxon hundredal meeting places. The first category is a 'natural meeting place, which includes fords, cross-roads and gaps for crossing ditches or dykes, and bridges' (Meaney 1997: 204; and see Figure 8 for Dodleston Castle's topographical location on a bluff in the landscape). All these features are present within Dodleston's immediate landscape, as I have already outlined.

The second category was for assembly places at naturally occurring landmarks, which included stones (Meaney 1997), possibly like the one at Maen Achwyfan, mentioned above. Notably, Dudestan Hundred means *Dud(d)* or Duda and *-stān* (meaning 'stone'), although, as has been seen, the *-tun(e)* in Dodleston means 'farm' or 'settlement'. Nevertheless, perhaps Dodleston had once possessed a standing stone within the Ring?

The third category of Anglo-Saxon assembly site is manmade structures, such as barrows, where similarities between hundredal meeting-places and pagan shrines existed, both in terms of location and their features (Meaney 1997). Dodleston's prehistoric landscape context of mounds has already been mentioned.

Indeed, Dodleston has a number of features of an assembly site: natural accessibility (Meaney 1997: 204; Pantos 2004: 157); liminality to territorial units (Gelling 1978: 209–214; Pantos 2003: 41 and 45) – these being Chester itself, Wilvestan, Exestan, Dudestan and Atiscros hundreds (Figure 3), notably all within the diocese of Lichfield at 1086 — and Dodleston also has visibility and views (Anderson 1934; Pantos 2002). As a crucial place of judicial, commercial and elite power in this border landscape, the location of Dodleston as a potential Anglo-Saxon assembly place just inside the major territorial boundaries of hundreds, indicates that it may have played a regional — and provincial,

Figure 9: Dodleston Castle motte-and-bailey earthworks, viewed from the west (author's photograph)

within the Irish Sea Region — role, rather than purely a local one (see also Pantos 2003: 47; 2004: 174). This is also important when taking into consideration Dodleston's proximity to a fluctuating border with Wales.

Therefore, given the contextual archaeological and wider landscape evidence, it is probable that the Ring dictated the form of the later Anglo-Norman castle. I suggest that Dodleston was initially a ringwork castle (and possible late eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon structure) built within the earlier outer earthworks of the Ring feature. Dodleston's original ringwork castle form makes it unique within both west Cheshire and what is now north-east Wales — with the notable exception of the Mercian and later Anglo-Norman earls' head manor at Hawarden, also situated to the west of the River Dee in the Anglo-Welsh borderlands area (Swallow 2016: 300, 309, 335); both Anglo-Norman castles were probably built upon prehistoric ringwork sites of significance.

While the conversion of a ringwork to a motte-and-bailey castle (the earthworks of the latter visible in Figure 9) was not unusual in England, the question now arises as to why Dodleston Castle's so-called bailey was rectilinear. The later-added raised corners of the sub-rectangle clearly protrude into the ditch of The Ring, indicating that the rectilinear build post-dates the Ring, so narrowing the ditch and weakening

its defensibility, particularly to the west (Figure 7). This so-called 'unusual' bailey appears to be unique within Cheshire to the east of the River Dee, although the form is concentrated in number to the west of the river in the Welsh borderlands, as I have shown (Swallow 2016). It therefore seems logical to not only look to England, but also to Wales for any comparison.

Beyond my own work (Swallow 2016), there does not appear to be any other study on rectilinear castle baileys in general. It is generally known, however, that prehistoric earthwork enclosures and stone-built Roman forts were reused in a military context for the defended settlements and fortifications of burhs during the Anglo-Saxon period (Reynolds 1999: 90). It has also been suggested that certain earthworks of this rectilinear type in Wales should be seen as royal centres of the tenth and eleventh centuries, which mimicked Mercian burhs (Musson and Spurgeon 1988; Laing 2006: 262). In fact, the primary builds of the rectilinear earthworks later used as Anglo-Norman castle baileys could have been Roman (as suggested recently, for example, for Tomen-y-Mur in Ardudwy, Gwynedd: Taylor 2019; and in the Welsh borderlands, for Longtown Castle in Herefordshire: Cook and Kidd 2020), and/or Welsh *llysoedd* (as, for example, at Hen Blas/Llys Edwin, Coleshill, notably also in Atiscros Hundred: Aberg 1985; Swallow 2016: 304, 331), as well as Anglo-Norman and beyond. It is significant that the majority of the rectilinear enclosures were in fact situated very close to the Anglo-Welsh border (Edwards 1997: 62), as are the rectilinear-bailey earthworks of Dodleston Castle.

While Manley (1991: 98) notes that such straight-sided enclosures were all located in Wales to the west of Atiscros Hundred, what does not appear to have been considered prior to my own work (Swallow 2016) is that these enclosures also existed within Atiscros Hundred in Cheshire, and, more specifically, predominantly on or to the east of the Mercian dykes. The subsequent reuse of rectilinear earthworks on the Anglo-Welsh border might have skewed the formal identification of an original rectilinear enclosure, and in turn, resulted in a skewed distribution pattern of rectilinear enclosures previously interpreted, probably incorrectly, as being concentrated to the west of the dykes in Wales (Swallow 2016).

By extending the temporal and spatial consideration of rectilinear earthworks being created and reused as castle baileys, there is a further historical and archaeological argument to be addressed: the potential existence of a castle at Dodleston could be pushed back from the first mention of 1277 to at least the 1140s, when we consider the influence on the medieval county of Cheshire of Madog ap Maredudd (d. 1160), *rex Powissensiu(m)*, the Powysian king (Pryce 2005: nos 480, 680). From the 1140s, Madog had made peace with both King Henry II and Ranulf II (de Gernon), fourth earl of Chester (1099–1153) (Crouch 1994; White 2004). This relationship probably ensured that Madog retained the lands he had gained in the Cheshire hundreds of Atiscros and Exestan on behalf of Powys, both situated to the west of the River Dee (Davies 1987: 4; Maund 2002: 103). It was under Madog that Powys attained its greatest extent, according to Madog's court poet, Gwalchmai ap Meilyr, describing his realm as extending from the summit of Pumlumon to the gates of Chester, and from

the forested borders of Meirionnydd to the church of Bangor-is-Coed (Stephenson 2008a; 2008b; 2015a: 9; 2016: 23–24). Around the year 1300, the author of Breuddwyd Rhonabwy described the Powysian kingdom in the reign of Madog as having extended from Gwanan in the furthest uplands of Arwystli to Porffordd (Richards 1948: 1; Stephenson 2016: 23–24), the latter (Pulford) being just under 3km to the south-east of Dodleston.

The Middle Welsh prose tale *The Dream of Rhonabwy* was written around the year 1300 (Pryce 2005: 37; Stephenson 2016: 306–310), and it is generally accepted that the *Didlystwn* (or *Dillystwn trefan*) mentioned within the tale, of which Madog is described as being undisputed lord, was the Dudleston in the detached northern part of Oswestry in Shropshire (Richards 1948: 2, note 28). There is an obvious difference in the transcribed spelling of Dudleston in *The Dream of Rhonabwy* and Dodleston in Cheshire, although it is notable that Dodleston in Cheshire was spelled 'Dudleston' a few decades after the prose tale is thought to have been written around 1300 (Dodgson 1972: 156–157).

A coincidence of place-names alone cannot point to Dodleston in Cheshire having been within Madog's then recently acquired and extended Powysian territory, however, which did include the neighbouring castles of Erddig in Wrexham (Pipe Roll 1884: 6 Hen II, 26), Bromfield (also known as The Rofft) (Pratt 1992: 32), and Overton (Ormerod 1819, vol. 2: 848). While there are no extant earthworks for Overton to be examined, it is noted that the form of the rectilinear baileys of both Erddig and The Roft point very strongly to a prehistoric hillfort or promontory fort origin (Swallow 2016). The contemporary twelfth-century poet, Gwalchmai ap Meilyr, however, certainly describes Madog as holding Powys to the gates of Chester (Lloyd 1939, vol. 2: 493; Caerwyn Williams and Lynch 1994: 73–76; Pryce 2005: 37; Stephenson 2008a; 2008b: 182), as mentioned above, which – while fully acknowledging the argument that the full extent of the boundaries of Powys had been augmented by Gwalchmai 'with only a little poetic license' (Davies 1982: 94, 99–102; Stephenson 2008a: 182; citation: Stephenson 2016: 39) – would nevertheless have firmly placed Dodleston in Cheshire within Madog's newly gained territory.

The argument for an inter-cultural and cross-period influence on the form of Dodleston Castle in Cheshire is clearly tentative. However, archaeological evidence certainly strengthens this possibility. Could it be significant, therefore, that the earthworks of Madog's royal seat at Mathrafal (excavated/surveyed in 1989: Arnold and Huggett 1995; Figure 10), 10 km west of Welshpool, Powys, can also be associated with similar phases of build as at Dodleston, albeit at dissimilar times, but with both sites reusing an earlier oval ditched enclosure? Certainly, Arnold and Huggett (1995) demonstrated that the earthwork mound at Mathrafal could be directly associated with the outer oval enclosure, where the former was also superseded by a rectilinear enclosure, just as at Dodleston. Mathrafal's sub-rectangular bailey is approximately 100 m square, compared to Dodleston's of approximately 125m square — and on the east edge for both, a motte of approximately the same height (4.7m against Dodleston's 3m). The construction of Mathrafal's rectilinear enclosure has been
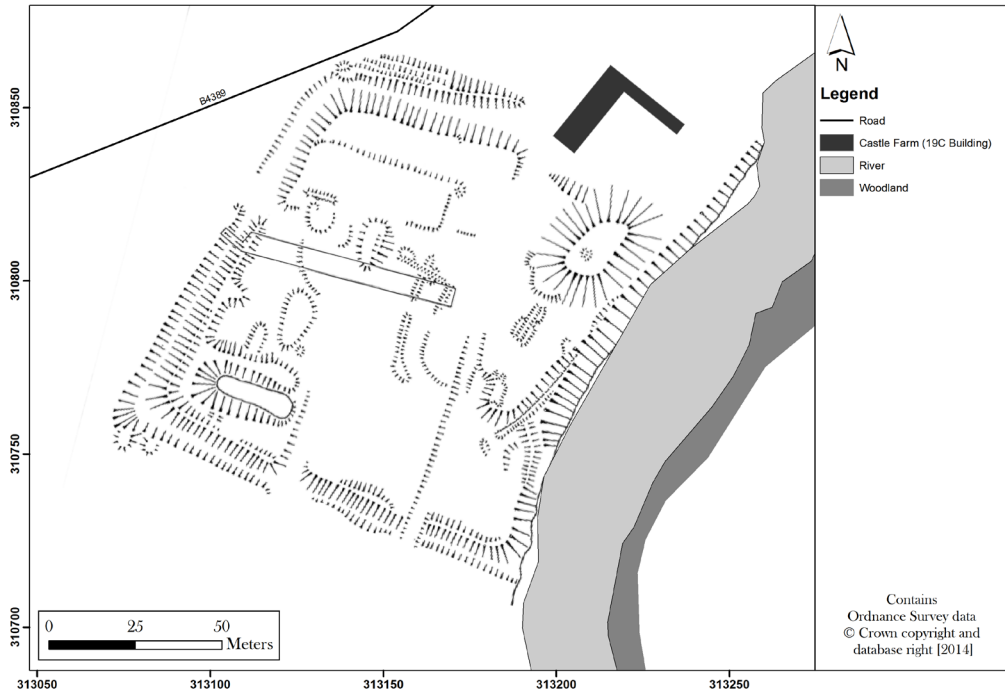
Figure 10: Mathrafal, after Arnold and Huggett 1995. Drawn by G. Duckers. © Rachel E. Swallow

dated to about 1200, which most likely post-dates Madog's death in 1160, and could well be connected with the re-building of Mathrafal carried out within a dozen years of that date, by Robert de Vieuxpont (Thomas 1955: 194–195); it is also highly probable that Mathrafal was built to create a (generally rectilinear-shaped) Welsh manorial/*llys* or Welsh court site after the levelling of the earlier bailey defences (Arnold and Huggett 1995).

It is also perhaps notable that the churches associated with Dodleston and Mathrafal castles were both dedicated to St Mary. Mathrafal is linked to the neighbouring church or *clas* of Meifod, which is described as almost certainly an early foundation. The church contains a cross-slab that was originally interpreted to date to the late ninth or tenth century (Arnold and Huggett 1995: 63; Edwards 2007: 443–446, 467–468), and more recently to the late eleventh or early twelfth century (Stephenson 2015b; Stephenson 2016: 54, 264); it would certainly have been in existence during Madog's lifetime. The church at Meifod was originally dedicated to Gwyddfarch and Tysilio, with Madog's (re-)building creating an improved church with an additional dedication to Mary, or an additional church with a Marian dedication, which Madog consecrated in 1156 (Stephenson 2015b). This clearly indicates the royal importance of neighbouring Mathrafal court to Madog at this time. Madog was buried at the church in 1160 (Stephenson 2016: 58), and it is said that it was the burial-place of kings (Stephenson 2016: 223, n. 45). The link between the outer rings of the two sites of Mathrafal and Dodleston castles, therefore, and with their churches dedicated

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to St Mary, at the very least points to inter-cultural and cross-period influences of the form and placing of elite buildings along the northern Anglo-Welsh border.

In this article, I have proposed the new classification — and so a new interpretation — for the initial build of Dodleston Castle in Cheshire: it is a ringwork castle probably built within a possible early medieval-founded assembly site within either Dudestan, or Atiscros, Hundred. We lost the eleventh-century hundredal meeting place of Dudestan, I argue, because of the political shifts of territory in the landscape prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in about 1070. Dodleston may well have assumed a place of continued cross-cultural secular, ritual and religious significance within fluctuating borderland territory, evidenced in the palimpsest of its earthworks today. I have also noted that Dodleston Castle's sub-rectangular bailey is similar to castle earthworks along the northern Anglo-Welsh border, which likely reused sites of former significance and memory within a cultural zone of movement of trade centred on the River Dee, Chester and the Irish Sea Region. Place-name evidence is tenuous, in terms of corroborating this new interpretation. However, archaeological and landscape evidence at both Dodleston and Mathrafal castles is undoubtedly testament to a marriage of cultures and shifting borders in the early medieval northern Anglo-Welsh borderlands east of the three dykes of Whitford, Wat's and Offa's. The shift in interpretation presented here indicates the value, I believe, of ongoing interdisciplinary and cross-period research raising many interesting avenues of enquiry along the entire context of the early medieval Anglo-Welsh border; a cross-period research methodology is vital to examine the wider geopolitical and spatial context of a castle, to better understand its form, placing and purpose.

Acknowledgements

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